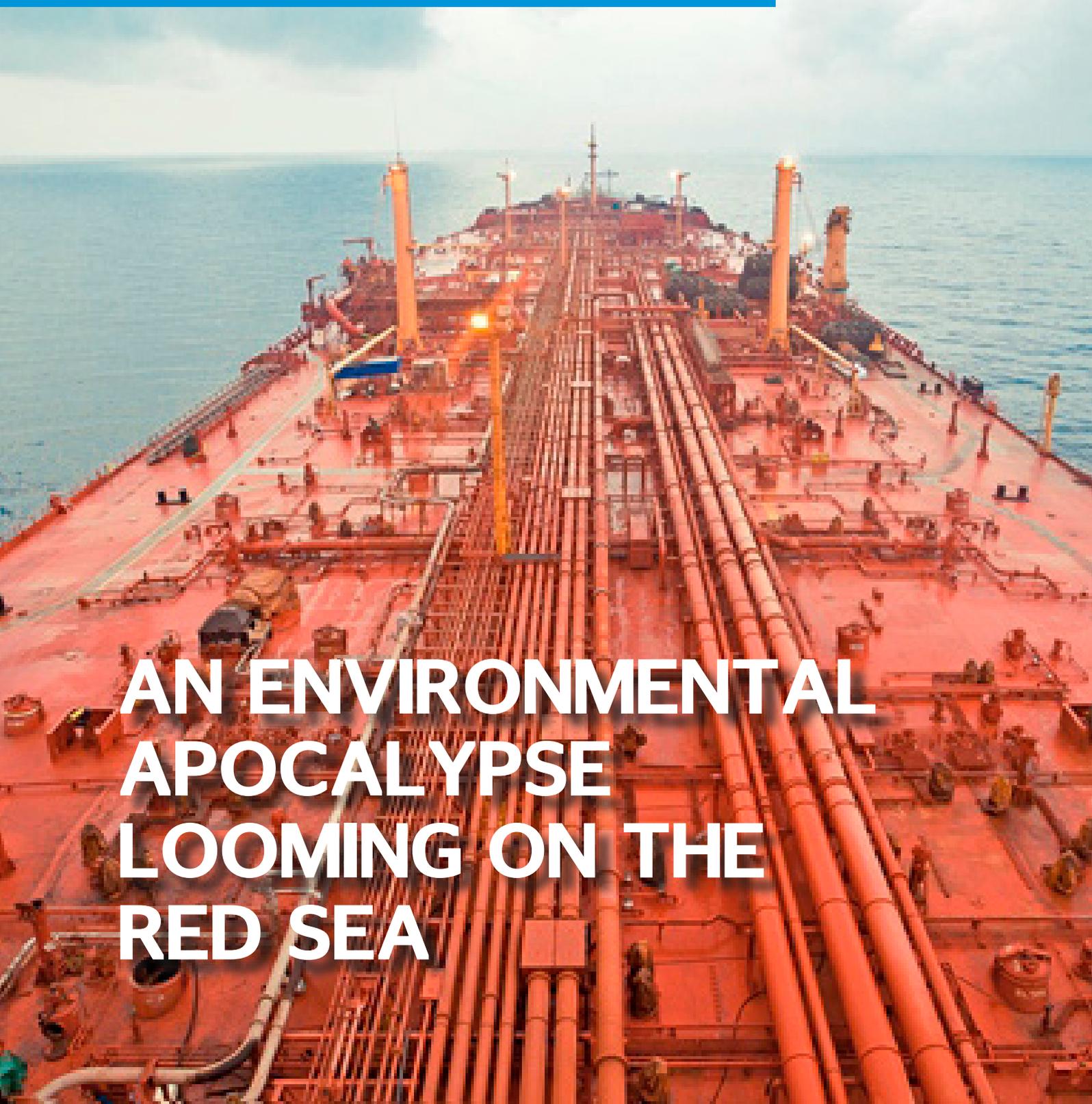


# The Yemen Review

MAY 2019



**AN ENVIRONMENTAL  
APOCALYPSE  
LOOMING ON THE  
RED SEA**



## The Yemen Review

**The Yemen Review** Launched in June 2016, *The Yemen Review* – formerly known as *Yemen at the UN* – is a monthly publication produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. It aims to identify and assess current diplomatic, economic, political, military, security, humanitarian and human rights developments related to Yemen.

In producing *The Yemen Review*, Sana'a Center staff throughout Yemen and around the world gather information, conduct research, hold private meetings with local, regional, and international stakeholders, and analyze the domestic and international context surrounding developments in and regarding Yemen.

This monthly series is designed to provide readers with a contextualized insight into the country's most important ongoing issues.

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#### COVER PHOTO:

*A view from the deck of the FSO SAFER oil terminal moored offshore of Ras Issa port // Photo Credit: SAFER*

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#### The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

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*FSO SAFER oil terminal offshore of Ras Issa port // Photo Credit: SAFER*

# The Sana'a Center Editorial

## A Houthi Masterclass in Dystopia

The international educational non-profit organization AMIDEAST opened an office in Sana'a in 1981, before the Yemen Republic was even a country (the unification of North and South Yemen occurred in 1990). Since then tens of thousands of Yemenis have passed through the institution, receiving education, training, accredited testing and exchange opportunities that allowed them to proceed to further education at universities around the world. They brought this education back to Yemen. AMIDEAST alumni have gone on to become ministers in the government, high-level bureaucrats and leaders in the private sector, academia and civil society. In an impoverished country starving for minds able to create opportunities for economic and social development, the impact of AMIDEAST in fostering Yemen's intelligentsia has been significant.

Even under the massive challenges posed by the ongoing conflict, AMIDEAST had kept its doors open to Yemenis. However, on May 30 this year, AMIDEAST announced that the Houthi authorities had forced its Sana'a office to close, without any justification. In doing so the Houthi authorities closed a gate through which potential agents of socio-economic progress could develop. Indeed, closing AMIDEAST was closing arguably the most significant window through which Yemenis with potential have been able to access the world of opportunity.

For paranoid ideologues, the intellectual advancement of individuals within a society is the ultimate threat to the cohesion of a totalitarian dogma. Put directly: how could the head of the armed Houthi movement, Abdelmalik al-Houthi, retain his veneer of absolute authority if those under his fist were able to articulate better ideas than he? Rather than being seen as an opportunity to advance collective good, these free thinkers are seen as a menace to entrenched Houthi interests. The greatest threat to Abdelmalik Al-Houthi is not the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, or the Yemeni government; rather, it is the possibility that those within his ranks will one day see that there is more to life than war, and that there is so much more meaningful possibility to life than martyrdom.

The Houthi authorities' campaign to send Yemen back to the dark ages of thought did not begin with closing AMIDEAST. Since overtaking Sana'a in 2014 the Houthi leadership has aggressively pursued a campaign to restructure the minds of the population under its control. Religious zealots now occupy most ministries in the government, in particular the Ministry of Education, headed by Abdelmalik's older brother, Yahya al-Houthi. A UN-sanctioned arms dealer is also a member of the cabinet. Of late, the primary school curriculum has been reworked to expand religious studies that in reality do not study religion at all – rather, they teach that there is one interpretation of the divine, the Houthi interpretation, and all others are heretical. Educational advancement for Houthi leaders has meant taking children from orphanages, giving them guns and sending them to the frontlines to learn how to kill or be killed. At the same time Houthi authorities have blocked vaccination campaigns for hundreds of thousands of children and, during the holy month of Ramadan, looted aid from the mouths of the hungry.

The mixing of men and women at cafes and universities has been banned, while religious-based female militias – known as Zainabiat – now pass as women's liberation. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan and the so-called 'Islamic State' group, or Daesh, Houthi forces have bombed the homes of those who have opposed them and proudly posted the videos on YouTube. They have imposed martial law and systematically arrested or otherwise censored imams, civil society leaders, journalists and activists, and sentenced members of religious minorities to death in kangaroo courts. Houthi forces have planted millions of landmines in civilian areas across the country. Indeed, a Houthi leader once gloated to a prominent human rights activist that domestic landmine production was a market that the Houthis have mastered; such should indicate the Houthi ideal for technological advancement. And the trump card in their hands are the millions of people who live under their sway, who are better understood as hostages rather than citizens.

Yemeni institutions have long been riddled with corruption. Among the new elements that the Houthi authorities are introducing, however, is mass indoctrination. The armed Houthi movement is a militia that is better understood as an ideologically driven mafia, one that has through the course of the conflict rapidly learned how to manipulate the international community and garnered its own ambitions for statehood. The reconfiguration of education is among the primary means through which the Houthis are laying the foundations for their dystopia.<sup>[1]</sup>

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[1] 'Dystopia', a noun meaning an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one. The opposite of utopia.

# Developments in Yemen

## An Environmental Apocalypse Looming on the Red Sea

Throughout April and May there has been rising concern that an oil terminal offshore of Ras Issa port, which has fallen into disuse with more than 1 million barrels of crude oil onboard, will unleash an environmental disaster in the Red Sea.

The Floating Storage and Offloading (FSO) terminal, owned by Yemen's national oil company SAFER Exploration and Production Operation Company – more commonly known as SAFER – is a converted single-hulled oil tanker, built in Japan in 1976, with the capacity to hold some 3 million barrels of oil. Yemen first acquired the vessel in 1986 and subsequently SAFER permanently moored it some four nautical miles offshore of Ras Issa port, attached it to 430-kilometer-long pipeline, and installed equipment allowing for the transfer of crude oil to other tanker vessels. FSO SAFER subsequently became Yemen's primary export point for light crude, which originated from more than 400 SAFER wells in Marib governorate's Block 18.

Initially envisioned as a temporary measure to facilitate Yemen's oil exports, in the decades since FSO SAFER went into operations the planned construction of a land-based export terminal at Ras Issa did not materialize. Following the escalation of the ongoing conflict in March 2015, the Marib – Ras Issa pipeline ceased operations and exports from FSO SAFER halted.

The UN estimates that some 1.12 million barrels of oil remained onboard, while a former SAFER official who spoke with the Sana'a Center said the amount ranges from 1.2 million to 1.3 million barrels. In either case, it is more than four times the amount of oil released in the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, widely regarded as one of the worst man-made environmental disasters in history. The Red Sea – which supports a high level of marine biodiversity as well as fishing and tourism industries in eight bordering countries – is a far smaller and more contained body of water than the North Pacific where the Exxon Valdez disaster occurred, meaning an oil spill of a comparable quantity would have a far more concentrated impact on the areas it reached.

Following the halt in exports from FSO SAFER in 2015, staff were withdrawn and regular maintenance ended. Published estimates indicated that the aging vessel had previously required some US\$10 million in annual maintenance. The onboard generators subsequently ceased functioning due to a lack of diesel, meaning they were no longer able to pump inert gas into the holding tanks. Thus, for four years, highly flammable and explosive gasses emitted from the crude oil have likely been building up in those tanks.

In August 2018 the UN Office for Project Services issued a tender for a technical assessment of FSO SAFER to appraise its condition, and to determine what steps would be necessary to repressurize the tanks with inert gas and remove the crude oil. The tender was awarded the same month, but the assessment has yet to be carried out.

### ***Warring Parties' Brinkmanship and Preemptive Accusations***

Since April 2019 there has been a rush of public statements and recriminations issued regarding the potential environmental disaster.

On April 9, Houthi media reported that the Houthi authorities' Minister of Oil and Minerals, Ahmed Abdullah Daris, had made "several appeals" to the UN to allow the crude oil onboard FSO SAFER to be exported to reduce the risk of disaster. The minister said that, regarding the UN, "We hold them fully responsible for any oil spill."

On April 15, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, briefed the UN Security Council on FSO SAFER, saying "without maintenance, we fear that it will rupture or even explode, unleashing an environmental disaster in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes." He added that his office had been working with "all parties" – but specifically with funding from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi – and that he hoped the technical assessment would be carried out soon. (In early May the company which won the UN tender said it would begin the assessment when the Hudaydah area was secure enough to send in its personnel.)

On April 21, senior Houthi leader Mohammed Ali al-Houthi said FSO SAFER had been disconnected from the Ras Issa-Marib pipeline. He then accused the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE of preventing the sale of the oil onboard FSO SAFER since 2015.<sup>[2]</sup> The crude oil onboard is estimated to be worth US\$80 million. Al-Houthi added that the aforementioned states would be responsible for any environmental catastrophe related to the vessel.<sup>[3]</sup> He followed this statement with another on April 30, when he urged the United Nations to develop a fuel export mechanism for Yemen that would include the oil onboard FSO SAFER.<sup>[4]</sup> In exchange for this mechanism, he said, the Houthi authorities would do their part to meet local fuel needs and deposit fuel revenues from domestic sales in both the central bank branches in Sana'a and Aden for the payment of public sector employee salaries.

At a press conference in Riyadh on April 29, coalition spokesperson Colonel Turki al-Maliki blamed the Houthis for risking environmental disaster by refusing to allow FSO SAFER to be offloaded. An official from SAFER told al-Mushahid media that removing the oil from FSO SAFER was a "very complicated issue" due to political differences between the warring parties in Yemen's conflict.

[2] Mohammed Ali al-Houthi (@Moh\_Alhouthi), April 21, 2019 [https://twitter.com/Moh\\_Alhouthi/status/1120092336208404482](https://twitter.com/Moh_Alhouthi/status/1120092336208404482). Accessed May 28, 2019.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mohammed Ali al-Houthi (@Moh\_Alhouthi), April 30, 2019 [https://twitter.com/Moh\\_Alhouthi/status/1123309142305845249](https://twitter.com/Moh_Alhouthi/status/1123309142305845249). Accessed May 28, 2019.

In separate meetings in the first week of May, representatives from both the Yemeni government and the Houthi leadership met with UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen Lise Grande, at which they both blamed the other side for blocking the unloading of the FSO SAFER and called on the UN to intervene.

For the necessary maintenance work to be carried out conflicting parties will need to arrive at a settlement over what to do with the oil onboard. Sana'a Center interviews through May with various stakeholders indicated that powerful commercial interests in Yemen are also maneuvering to secure a portion of any oil sales. Although SAFER is responsible for the oil production and owns the vessel FSO SAFER, the Government of Yemen's Ministry of Oil and Minerals by law owns any oil and gas produced at SAFER fields in Marib.

Despite the imminent potential for environmental disaster, a solution among the many actors directly and indirectly involved would still appear to be some way off. Economic and political interests overshadow the looming environmental catastrophe. An unwillingness among different actors to agree on how to divide up the potential crude oil sale revenues stems from an inherent distrust and unwillingness to concede any ground to perceived adversaries, while each party is also attempting to leverage the prospect of an environmental catastrophe over their opponents.

## Hudaydah and the Stockholm Agreement

### *Houthi Troops Stage Contentious Withdrawal from Hudaydah Ports*

In May, controversy surrounded the withdrawal of Houthi forces from three Red Sea ports in and around Hudaydah City. Yemen's warring parties had agreed in December 2018 to withdraw troops from the city and the ports of Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa as part of the Stockholm Agreement — the UN-mediated deal between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement.<sup>[5]</sup> However, implementation of the deal stalled amid wrangling over the details of the mutual redeployment of forces and the composition of local security forces to replace withdrawing troops.

On May 10, General Michael Lollesgaard, chair of the UN Redeployment Coordination Committee, announced during a press conference in Hudaydah that the UN had accepted the Houthi leadership's offer to unilaterally withdraw its fighters from all Hudaydah ports.<sup>[6]</sup> The decision followed an agreement reached in April between the warring parties on a phase one plan for troop withdrawals — which entailed coalition and Houthi forces pulling back several kilometers from the current frontlines (for more information, see *The Yemen Review: April 2019*).

[5] "Full Text of the Stockholm Agreement," Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, December 13, 2018, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/full-text-stockholm-agreement>. Accessed May 23, 2019.

[6] "Note to correspondents: Statement from UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement," UN Secretary General, May 10, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2019-05-10/note-correspondents-statement-un-mission-support-the-hudaydah-agreement-scroll-down-for-arabic-version>. Accessed June 1, 2019.

The withdrawal of Houthi forces and their replacement with Houthi-administered Coast Guard personnel took place between May 11 and 14 and was confirmed by the United Nations Mission in Support of the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) monitors on the ground.<sup>[7]</sup> On May 12, General Lollesgaard welcomed the handing over of port security to the Coast Guard and characterized the withdrawal as the first part of the broader phase one redeployment plan for Hudaydah. UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths reiterated that UN inspectors had verified the Houthi forces' withdrawal from the three ports during a May 15 briefing to the UN Security Council.<sup>[8]</sup> According to international diplomatic sources who spoke with the Sana'a Center, in conversations between Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi and the Special Envoy since the summer of 2018, the former had, on several occasions, stated that the armed Houthi movement was willing to remove its troops from the ports and submit to UN supervision of port operations. However, al-Houthi had insisted that Houthi-appointed personnel would remain in control of port operations.

The UN's confirmation of the Houthi forces' withdrawal in May sparked a fierce reaction from the Yemeni government, which accused the Houthi movement of engaging in a "theatrical play" in Hudaydah. Among Yemeni government officials and their supporters, the move was reminiscent of the Houthi leadership's announcement on December 29, 2018, shortly after the Stockholm Agreement was reached, that their forces had withdrawn from Hudaydah port. In reality, however, it was a staged media event, following which Yemeni government officials accused the Houthi leaders of simply moving their fighters and loyalists into positions in port management and the Coast Guard. In a letter to the UNSC on May 13, the Yemeni mission at the UN argued that the most recent unilateral Houthi withdrawal was not genuine and violated past agreements, including UNSC Resolution 2451 and 2452, which established the mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.<sup>[9]</sup>

The Yemeni government said it would not engage in discussion about future steps until it had the right to verify the unilateral withdrawal through the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), the UN-chaired body set up to monitor and implement the Stockholm Agreement. In particular, it sought to check the list of Coast Guard members responsible for security at the ports.<sup>[10]</sup> The government has accused the Houthi movement of having fighters don coast guard and police uniforms to maintain their control over the ports.<sup>[11]</sup>

[7] "Statement by the Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee," United Nations. May 14, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2019-05-14/note-correspondents-statement-the-chair-of-the-redeployment-coordination-committee-scroll-down-for-arabic> Accessed May 24, 2019.

[8] "Briefing of Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, to the Security Council," United Nations, May 15, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/briefing-martin-griffiths-un-special-envoy-yemen-security-council-1> . Accessed May 24, 2019.

[9] "The Position of the Yemeni Government on the withdrawal of the Houthis from the ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Issa," Letter to the President of the Security Council from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations, May 13, 2019. <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2019/386>. Accessed June 5, 2019.

[10] "The Position of the Yemeni Government on the withdrawal of the Houthis from the ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Issa," Letter to the President of the Security Council from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations, May 13, 2019.

[11] Mina Aldroubi, "Yemen Parliament snubs UN over Hodeidah Deal," May 22, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemen-parliament-snubs-un-over-hodeidah-deal-1.864830>. Accessed May 24, 2019.

During a briefing to the press on May 15, head of the UNMHA General Michael Lolloesgaard outlined the UN's rationale for accepting the Houthi movement's offer to withdraw from the ports.<sup>[12]</sup> The general said the UN made the decision because the top priority and urgency was facilitating port operations, and after months of negotiating with little progress, the UN could not wait for both parties to agree on how to implement the phase one withdrawal. This, while also trying to meet the May 15 deadline established by the "Quad" – a multilateral group consisting of the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – in April for the implementation to begin.<sup>[13]</sup>

Responding to the Yemeni government's criticism over the lack of joint verification, Lolloesgaard contended that there was never a plan to engage in a full vetting of Coast Guard personnel during phase one. This would have been impossible to carry out without a broader agreement on the composition criteria for local forces that would assume security control from withdrawing troops, he said. The general acknowledged that Houthi partisans may be members of the Coast Guard, saying "I knew, everyone knew, also the government knew, that there might be non-Coast Guard Houthis among the guys going around in Coast Guard uniforms."<sup>[14]</sup>

### ***Tensions Inflamed Between the Hadi Government and the Special Envoy***

With disagreement over the verification of the Houthi withdrawal persisting, the Yemeni government began to directly criticize the UN Special Envoy. In a series of tweets on May 17, head government representative to the RCC Major General Saghir bin Aziz characterized the Houthi withdrawal as the group allowing the UN conditional access to the Red Sea ports. He went on to accuse Griffiths of protecting the Houthi movement and "trying to impose them on the Yemeni people and legitimize their presence."<sup>[15]</sup> On May 22, Yemen's parliament sent a letter to Prime Minister Maen Abdelmalek Saeed saying the Special Envoy was no longer a neutral party and "not welcome" by the legislature.<sup>[16]</sup> The body also urged the government to not engage in any further negotiations with the UN until Griffiths demonstrates a commitment to upholding UN Security Council resolutions related to Yemen, in particular UNSC Resolution 2216. Speaker of Parliament Sultan Barakani did not sign the letter, which is normally the endorsement parliamentary statements should receive to be considered official.

[12] "Press briefing by Lieutenant General Michael Lolloesgaard, Head of the UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA)," United Nations, May 15, 2019, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/press-briefing-by-lieutenant-general-michael-lolloesgaard-head-of-the-un-mission-to-support-the-hudaydah-agreement-unmha/6037265939001/>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ali Rabih, "Yemen's Legitimacy Accuses Houthis, UN Envoy Office of Thwarting Jordan Meetings," Asharq al-Awsat, May 17, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1726706/yemens-legitimacy-accuses-houthis-un-envoy-office-thwarting-jordan-meetings>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

[16] Mina Aldroubi, "Yemen Parliament snubs UN over Hodeidah Deal," May 22, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemen-parliament-snubs-un-over-hodeidah-deal-1.864830>. Accessed May 24, 2019.

On May 22, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi wrote to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres rebuking Griffiths' conduct and threatening to cease cooperation with the Special Envoy. In the letter, Hadi accused Griffiths of dealing with the Houthi movement as a de-facto government, overstepping his mandate by adopting a political framework for negotiations outside the scope of the agreed upon resolutions, and ignoring parts of the Stockholm Agreement related to the exchange of prisoners and lifting the siege on the city of Taiz. The letter also criticized what it called Griffiths' "weak understanding of the nature of Yemen's ongoing conflict, especially the ideological, intellectual and political elements of the Houthi militia." Hadi asked the UN Secretary-General to review Griffiths' alleged transgressions and respond accordingly, warning that the Yemeni government would no longer tolerate Griffiths' continued appointment as Special Envoy unless the alleged violations ceased.

On May 24, a spokesperson for Guterres said the UN Secretary-General maintained full confidence in his Special Envoy to Yemen. Guterres then offered to open a discussion between the UN and Hadi regarding the issues raised in the letter. The Secretary-General assigned the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Rosemary Dicarolo to meet with the Yemeni government, a senior Yemeni government official told the Sana'a Center. The crux of the Yemeni government's complaint, the official added, was twofold: that Griffiths was exceeding his mandate; and that the Houthi movement sought to hand the administration of Hudaydah's ports to the UN, a move rejected by the Yemeni government as a breach of Yemen's sovereignty.

Griffiths, meanwhile, asked the Permanent 5 (P5) members of the Security Council during closed-door consultations on May 15 to pressure the Hadi government to tone down its public antagonism toward the UN Special Envoy's office. According to Sana'a Center sources, the UN envoy criticized the Yemeni government for its approach, which he said was not constructive, and for its delay in implementing phase one of the pullback agreement. Several P5 ambassadors to Yemen met with Hadi in May in Riyadh to express their support for Griffiths in an effort to reduce tensions, diplomatic sources told the Sana'a Center.

Griffiths sought a statement of support from the P5, according to Sana'a Center sources, but was unable to gain buy-in from China. The UN Special Envoy then approached the 15-member Security Council, where Kuwait sought to include the perspective of the Saudi-led military coalition in the statement. The US attempted to add text on Iran to the statement, prompting Russia to request its own inclusions. By month's end a draft text had not been finalized.

Despite the rising tensions in May, it is unlikely that Griffiths will leave his post in the near term: changing a UN envoy is not a swift process, while politically the UN cannot be seen to be capitulating to the demands of any one side.

## ***UN to Support Port Management, Operations in Hudaydah***

In his May 15 briefing to the Security Council, the Special Envoy said the UN was ready to play a “leading role” supporting the management and operation of the ports by the Red Sea Ports Corporation, following the Houthi withdrawal.<sup>[17]</sup> The UN would also seek to enhance monitoring by the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM), which inspects all ships entering Hudaydah port, he said.

Further, Griffiths announced that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would begin public work schemes on May 18 to upgrade the efficiency of Hudaydah port. The projects — which are expected to employ 4,000 people — include plans to install navigation lights, repair watchtowers and perimeter fences, upgrade the port’s berths and de-mine the facility’s perimeter.<sup>[18]</sup>

## ***UN-led Amman Talks Fail to Resolve Impasse on Hudaydah Ports’ Revenue***

On May 14-16, representatives from Yemen’s divided central bank met in Amman for UN-mediated talks to discuss how to handle the revenues from Hudaydah, Saleef and Ras Issa ports, Yemen’s busiest for commercial and humanitarian shipments. The Stockholm Agreement stipulates that revenues from the ports should be deposited in the Central Bank of Yemen’s (CBY) Hudaydah branch, and used to help pay civil servant salaries in Hudaydah and elsewhere in the country. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants, the majority of whom are living in Houthi-controlled areas, have not been paid a regular salary in almost three years.

In an indication of the highly charged political semantics surrounding the talks, members of the Aden CBY delegation told the Sana’a Center that the talks were not, in fact, a meeting of central bank delegations. Rather, they describe the talks as a meeting of central bank officials from Aden and Houthi representatives, given that the Yemeni government recognizes the legitimacy of only the Aden-based central bank.

The talks ended with no agreement aside from a commitment to meet again.

(For a full analysis, see the Sana’a Center’s recent publication: ‘An Unending Fast: What the Failure of the Amman Meetings Means for Yemen’)

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[17] “Briefing of Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, to the Security Council,” United Nations, May 15, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/briefing-martin-griffiths-un-special-envoy-yemen-security-council-1>. Accessed May 24, 2019.

[18] Ibid.



*The Souk al-Milh (the Salt Market) in Sana'a's Old City on May 8, 2019 // Photo Credit: Asem Alposi*

## Frontlines and Security

### ***Houthis Attack Saudi Pipeline, Increase Cross-border Actions***

From mid-May there was an increase in claimed Houthi attacks on targets in Saudi Arabia. On May 14, the Houthi-run al-Masirah news outlet reported that Houthi forces had launched an attack on the Saudi ARAMCO East-West pipeline, targeting two pumping stations using seven drones.<sup>[19]</sup> Later that day, Saudi Energy Minister Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al-Falih said that armed drones had targeted the oil facility, causing a fire and minimal damage.<sup>[20]</sup> He added that the attack not only targeted Saudi Arabia but “the safety of the world’s energy supply and the global economy.” The price of the benchmark Brent crude oil increased in price more than US\$1 per barrel on the global market, to US\$71, by day’s end.<sup>[21]</sup>

[19] “The implementation of a major military operation against Saudi targets,” تنفيذ عملية عسكرية كبرى ضد أهداف سعودية، Al-Masirah, May 14, 2019, [https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=39684&cat\\_id=3&fbclid=IwAR0Gj2TG-x\\_gCib2AFiwDxjS0iMb6CKALMuJcFA0D8eywAm8ISpkpx9eNsY](https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=39684&cat_id=3&fbclid=IwAR0Gj2TG-x_gCib2AFiwDxjS0iMb6CKALMuJcFA0D8eywAm8ISpkpx9eNsY). Accessed May 31, 2019.

[20] “Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources announced that two pumping stations for the East-West pipeline were targeted by a terrorist attack,” وزير الطاقة والصناعة والثروة المعدنية يعلن استهداف محطتي ضخ لخط أنابيب، عام / وزير الطاقة والصناعة والثروة المعدنية يعلن استهداف محطتي ضخ لخط أنابيب، ويؤكد أن هذه الأعمال التخريبية تستهدف إمدادات النفط للعالم، Saudi Press Agency, May 14, 2019. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1923805> Accessed May 31, 2019.

[21] “Saudi Arabia says its oil pipeline was hit by drones,” The Associated Press, May 15, 2019. <https://www.apnews>.

The 1,200 km-long East-West pipeline traverses Saudi Arabia from the eastern oil fields to the Red Sea port city of Yanbu on the western coast. The pipeline can transport almost 5 million barrels of oil per day and offers a means to bypass the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has repeatedly threatened to close to shipping in the event of a war. The attack took place on a section of the pipeline that lies some 800 kilometers from the Saudi-Yemen border; this is far beyond the combat range of any known Houthi drone technology to date.

In a tweet on May 16, Prince Khalid Bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's deputy defense minister — who, since his appointment in February has been increasing his engagement on the Yemen file — said that Iran ordered the Houthi movement to carry out the attack.<sup>[22]</sup> Iran's foreign ministry and the Houthi leadership denied the claims.<sup>[23][24]</sup> Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdel Salam said that the attack marked a “new phase of economic deterrence” in response to the coalition's intervention in Yemen.<sup>[25]</sup> In an interview, Houthi leader Mohammed Ali al-Houthi said that his forces had stepped up cross-border attacks after the Saudi-led military coalition spurned “peace initiatives” by the movement.<sup>[26]</sup>

A spate of further attacks against Saudi Arabia followed. On May 20, Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted two missiles directed at Mecca and Jeddah, though the Houthis denied targeting Mecca.<sup>[27][28]</sup> Between May 20 and May 23, the Houthis claimed three drone attacks on Najran Airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia.<sup>[29]</sup> The Houthis said that the attacks were aimed at military facilities, while Riyadh said that civilian infrastructure was the target. On May 26, Saudi state media said that the Saudi Royal Air Force had intercepted an aircraft carrying explosives near its southern border with Yemen.<sup>[30]</sup> Images accompanying the report showed the wreckage of a drone, which Riyadh said was targeting Jizan airport in the southwest of the country.

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com/63d729241e0645539dad32f57de7bc95. Accessed May 31, 2019.

[22] Khalid bin Salman Twitter post, May 16, 2019. <https://twitter.com/kbsalsaud/status/1128948695230287872>. Accessed May 31, 2019.

[23] “Iran denies ties to Houthi drone attack on Saudi oil installations,” Reuters, May 17, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-iran-denies/iran-denies-ties-to-houthi-drone-attack-on-saudi-oil-installations-idUSKCN1SN1S9>. Accessed May 31, 2019.

[24] “Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of ordering drone attack on oil pipeline,” Reuters, May 16, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-iran/saudi-arabia-accuses-iran-of-ordering-drone-attack-on-oil-pipeline-idUSKCN1SM0WJ>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[25] “Abdulsalam: Targeting Aramco a New Phase of Economic Deterrence,” Al-Masirah, May 15, 2019. [http://english.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=6914&cat\\_id=1](http://english.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=6914&cat_id=1). Accessed May 31, 2019

[26] “Houthi leader says drone attacks a response to spurned Yemen peace moves,” Reuters, May 26, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-houthis/houthi-leader-says-drone-attacks-a-response-to-spurned-yemen-peace-moves-idUSKCN1SW0S1>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[27] “Saudi Arabia says it intercepted Houthi missiles in Mecca province,” Reuters, May 20, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-security-houthi/saudi-arabia-says-it-intercepted-houthi-missiles-in-mecca-province-idUSKCN1SQ23D>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[28] Yahea Sarea Facebook post, May 20, 2019, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=603297266819214&id=100014168372521](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=603297266819214&id=100014168372521).

[29] “Yemen's Houthis say they attacked Saudi's Najran airport by drone,” Reuters, May 23, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-saudi-drone/yemens-houthis-say-they-attacked-saudis-najran-airport-by-drone-idUSKCN1ST1HJ>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[30] Saudi Press Agency Twitter post, May 26, 2019. <https://twitter.com/spagov/status/1132673414064427009>. Accessed May 31, 2019

The immediate military impact of these attacks appeared limited. In the case of the pipeline attack, even with a temporary shutdown Saudi oil deliveries were unaffected.<sup>[31]</sup> It did, however, expose the vulnerability of economic targets that are difficult to defend against unconventional attacks. For the Houthis, the attacks also showed off their growing drone capabilities and increasing ability to retaliate against, and impose costs on, a conventionally superior adversary that has, after more than four years of a relentless bombing campaign, already deployed most of its capacity for battlefield escalation. The pipeline attacks also demonstrated a clear avenue – that being energy prices – by which the implications of the Yemen War could be globalized.

The increased frequency of Houthi cross-border attacks coincides with an escalation in tensions between Iran and the United States. What was previously a largely economic confrontation took a decisive turn in early May when the US announced that it would deploy the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to the Persian Gulf. Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan said the deployment was in response to a “credible threat” from Iran, though critics of the move have questioned the intelligence behind the assessment. The series of Houthi attacks began days after four ships – including two Saudi oil tankers – were sabotaged near the Emirati port of Fujairah, with what oil shipment industry bodies believe were waterborne improvised explosive devices.<sup>[32]</sup> Concerns have centered on regional waterways – key arterials for oil shipments from Middle East crude producers. Prior to the Fujairah attack, the US Maritime Administration updated its advisory to say there was an increased likelihood that Iran or its proxy forces would threaten US commercial or military vessels in the region – including the Bab-el-Mandeb strait off Yemen’s coast.<sup>[33]</sup>

### ***Riyadh Calls Emergency Mecca Summit of Arab Leaders***

On May 19, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud called for an emergency summit of Arab leaders to discuss the tanker and pumping station attacks, which the Saudi Press Agency described as a threat to “regional and international peace and security and for the supply and stability of world oil markets.”<sup>[34]</sup> Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was also invited to the event, staged on May 30. The invitation was notable, given that since June 5, 2017, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have led a host of Arab nations in severing diplomatic relations with Doha and imposing a land, sea and air embargo on Qatar.

[31] “Sabotage incident targeted Saudi Aramco facility,” Saudi Aramco, May 14, 2019, <https://www.saudiaramco.com/en/news-media/news/2019/sabotage-incident-targeted-saudi-aramco-facility>. Accessed June 2, 2019.

[32] “INTERTANKO/OCIMF maritime security update on Fujairah attacks,” Oil Companies International Marine Forum, May 31, 2019, <https://www.ocimf.org/news/press-releases/intertankooocimf-maritime-security-update-on-fujairah-attacks.aspx>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[33] “MSCI Advisory: 2019-006-Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Red Sea-Threats to U.S. Interests from Iran,” United States Maritime Administration, May 11, 2019. <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/content/2019-006-persian-gulf-strait-hormuz-gulf-oman-arabian-sea-gulf-aden-bab-el-mandeb-and-red>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[34] “Saudi King calls Gulf, Arab summits in Mecca on May 30”, Al Arabiya English Sunday, 19 May 2019, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/05/19/Saudi-King-calls-emergency-meet-of-Gulf-Arab-leaders.html>. Accessed June 5, 2019.

At the summit King Salman told attendees that Iran was in “outrageous defiance” of UN peace treaties.<sup>[35]</sup> In a communique at the end of the meeting, the six Gulf Cooperation Council states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – voiced support for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in responding to the attacks, though without specifying what that should entail. The Iraqi delegation warned against a war with Iran, while days after the meeting Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani questioned the wisdom of a hardline “Washington” stance toward Iran.<sup>[36]</sup>

## ***Saudi-Led Military Coalition Airstrikes Hit Frontlines Across Yemen***

Coalition airstrikes in May were concentrated on active frontlines, targeting Houthi positions in northwest Al-Dhalea, western Marib, northern Hajjah and northern Sa’ada governorates, along with the capital, Sana’a.<sup>[37][38][39][40]</sup>

Coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Maliki said a series of airstrikes in Sana’a during May targeted Houthi drone capacity.<sup>[41]</sup> Strikes on May 16 were concentrated on Daylami Air Base, which adjoins Sana’a Airport to the north of the city. The coalition said that these were “legitimate military targets” and referred to the attack two days prior on Saudi oil pumping stations.<sup>[42]</sup> However, airstrikes also hit a residential building, resulting in the death of at least five children and injuries to 16 others, according to UN reports.<sup>[43]</sup>

[35] Marwa Rashad, Aziz El Yaakoubi, “Saudi Arabia says firm stand needed to deter Iran, Iraq demurs”, Reuters, May 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-summit/saudi-arabia-says-firm-arab-stand-needed-to-deter-iran-idUSKCN1T00OC>. Accessed June 5, 2019.

[36] “Qatar expresses reservations over Mecca summit outcome”, Al Jazeera English, June 3, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/qatar-expresses-reservations-mecca-summit-outcome-190602192326096.html>. Accessed June 5, 2019.

[37] “Coalition bombing militia positions north of Al-Dhalea,” التحالف يقصف مواقع الميليشيات شمال الضالع, Yafa News, May 28, 2019. <http://yafa-news.net/archives/390362>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[38] “Marib .. مقاتلات التحالف تستهدف تجمعات حوثية,” مآرب.. مقاتلات التحالف تستهدف تجمعات حوثية, في صرواح

[39] “Coalition fighters target a Houthi training camp in Hajjah,” مقاتلات التحالف تستهدف معسكر تدريبي للحوثيين في حجة, Barakish Net, May 14, 2019. <http://www.barakish.net/news02.aspx?cat=12&sub=23&id=679849>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[40] “Coalition targets Houthi strongholds in Sa’ada” #مقاتلات #التحالف تستهدف معازل #الحوثي في #صعدة, Aden Lang, May 8, 2019. <https://adnlnq.info/news/117500/>

[41] “Alliance talks about the implementation of a qualitative operation in Sana’a,” التحالف يتحدث عن تنفيذ عملية نوعية «بصنعاء», Mareb Press, May 2, 2019. [https://marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=150703](https://marebpress.net/news_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=150703). Accessed May 31, 2019

[42] “Alliance starts specific targeting operations of Houthi military sites,” Al-Bayan, May 17, 2019. <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2019-05-17-1.3562358>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[43] “Deadly Yemen airstrikes that claim children’s lives in capital Sana’a, strongly condemned by UN,” UN News, May 17, 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1038651>. Accessed May 31, 2019

## *Heavy fighting Over Strategic Town in al-Dhalea*

Houthi forces continued to push into al-Dhalea governorate, central Yemen, on several axes during May – though at a slower pace than the previous month. The town of Qa’atabah, within the district of the same name, located in the center of the governorate, was the main site of contestation. In the first week of May, Houthi forces approached from positions to the west and northwest, and approached the Sanah area to the south of Qa’atabah town. Simultaneously, they pushed toward the north of the town in an attempt to sever the main highway running north to the frontline in the Murays area. Houthi forces to the north of Qa’atabah proceeded to outflank anti-Houthi forces and fighting reached the northeast of the town.<sup>[44]</sup> In mid-May, anti-Houthi forces, backed by coalition airstrikes, pushed Houthi forces out of the town and away from the highway to the north. The second half of the month saw anti-Houthi forces move toward Houthi positions to the west of Qa’atabah, repelling attempted counterattacks.

The town of Qa’atabah lies on the intersection of two main roads: one running east-west to Ibb governorate and the other connecting Sana’a and Aden. There were no reliable estimates regarding casualties, however the intensity of the fighting and level of physical destruction had observers believing there were many dozens of casualties among both warring parties and civilians. Fighting has also periodically cut off the north-south road, increasing journey times between Aden and Sana’a. Use of heavy weapons caused extensive damage in the north of the town where the hostilities were concentrated. Murays area in northern Qa’atabah district and al-Azariq district, western al-Dhalea, also continued to see heavy clashes though little frontline movement.

Several anti-Houthi forces were fighting in al-Dhalea; southern groups backed by the UAE have a strong presence – chiefly the governorate’s Security Belt forces and the Giants Brigades – along with Yemeni army brigades, the Presidential Protection Brigades, the National Resistance Forces – led by Tariq Saleh, the nephew of the late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh – local units and tribal forces. Following the deployment of the National Resistance Forces from the west coast to al-Dhalea, Sana’a Center sources indicated that Tariq Saleh’s forces were seeking to open a new frontline in al-Hasha district, which the Houthis took control of in April.

The diversity of anti-Houthi actors active in al-Dhalea has spurred tension between the groups, which escalated into violence on May 8. A statement from the Presidential Protection Brigades said that a battalion belonging to the 33rd Armored Brigade (under the command of al-Dhalea Governor Ali Muqbel) rejected the arrival of one of their units in Qa’atabah, compelling them to withdraw back toward Aden – at which point they were stopped by Security Belt forces and engaged in clashes which they said resulted in an unspecified number of deaths.<sup>[45]</sup> Distrust has pervaded the anti-Houthi camp in al-Dhalea since claims by UAE-backed southern separatist groups in

[44] “Confrontations are the most violent in Qa’atabah north of Al-Dalea, the loss of civilian casualties and the mass exodus of the population,” *مواجهات هي الأعنف في قعطبة شمال الضالع وسقوط ضحايا مدنيين ونزوح جماعي للسكان*, Al-Masdar, May 11, 2019. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/167483>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[45] “Forces loyal to Yemeni President: We were prevented from fighting the Houthis in the south,” *قوات موالية للرئيس*, *اليمني*: تم منعنا من قتال الحوثيين جنوباً Arabi 21, May 8, 2019. <https://m.arabi21.com/story/1179388>. Accessed May 31, 2019

April that forces aligned with the pro-government Islah party deliberately withdrew from areas in the north of the governorate to leave the way open for a Houthi advance.<sup>[46]</sup>

In the face of the Houthi push southward, on May 18 the president of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), Aidarous al-Zubaidi, announced the creation of a “joint operations room” comprising all southern separatist forces.<sup>[47]</sup> He said that this would involve a unified command and control, as well as greater direct coordination with the Saudi-led military coalition. Along with the threat of the Houthi advance into historically southern territory – and the perceived incapacity of divided anti-Houthi forces to prevent it – al-Zubaidi’s announcement was also a timely political move. As the STC is pushing for a seat at the table in UN-backed talks, the creation of a unified and formalized parallel military force could be used as leverage in strengthening the case for southern independence. Indeed, al-Zubaidi’s rationale went beyond the fight against the Houthis; he used his speech to reiterate demands for UAE-backed forces to take over security in the Hadramawt Valley, where military divisions allied to President Hadi and Vice President Ali Mohsen dominate. In April, the city of Sayoun in the Hadramawt Valley also hosted the Hadi government’s first parliamentary session since the outbreak of the war, following a deal between the coalition to choose an alternative location to Aden, where UAE-backed forces dominate.

### *New Anti-Houthi Offensive Begins in Taiz*

On May 24, anti-Houthi forces in Taiz launched a new offensive to take control of the entire governorate.<sup>[48]</sup> The campaign is being led by Maj. Gen. Samir Al-Sabri, commander of the Taiz Axis – an umbrella group encompassing an array of anti-Houthi groups. Hostilities have since been concentrated in the north, northeast and west of Taiz City, which has been under semi-besiegement since the early months of the war.

Anti-Houthi forces retook most of the governorate’s Red Sea coastline and some areas south of Taiz City in early 2017, but frontlines have since been largely static. Houthi forces are currently in control of most of the north of the governorate, as well as some central areas. Taiz is of great strategic and symbolic importance to both sides as a population center, industrial hub and a link between the north and south of the country. The governorate has seen some of the highest levels of violence during the conflict and with that, some of the highest levels of destruction and humanitarian need.

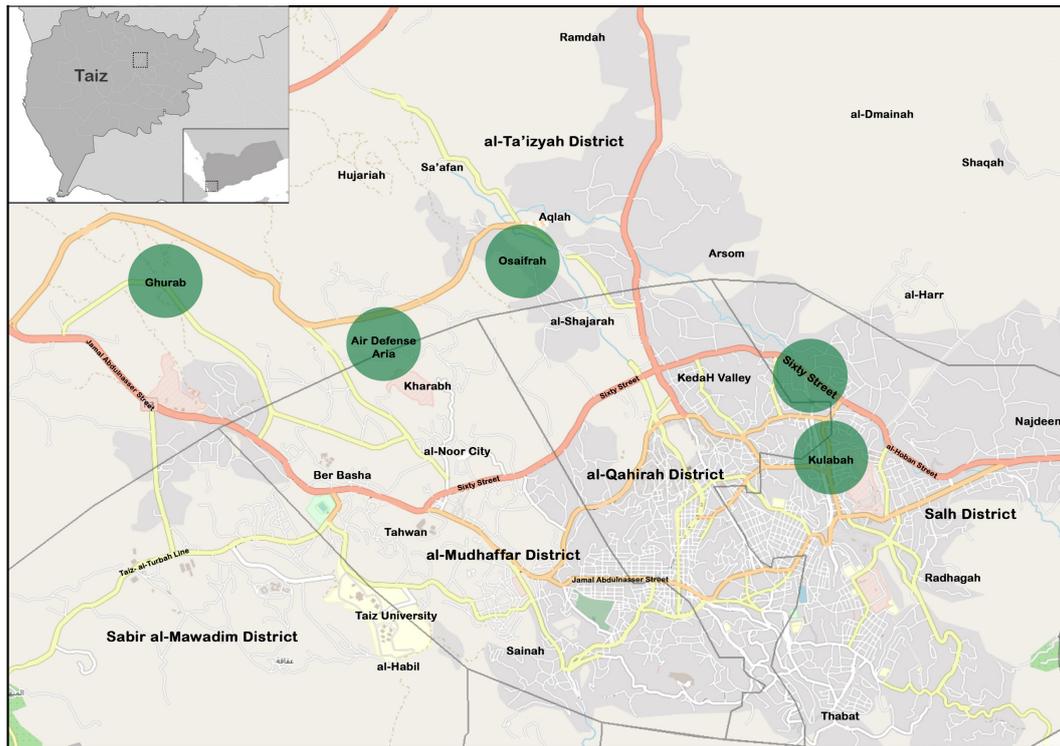
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[46] “BG Al-Awlaki: Security Belt forces foil Houthi advance toward Al-Dalea,” Aden Press, April 6, 2019. <http://en.adenpress.news/news/2901>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[47] “Expanded meeting of the leaders of the southern resistance: Text of the speech of Aidrous Al- Zubaidi in the meeting,” Al Baud 4, May 19, 2019. <http://albaud4.net/news/5907>. Accessed May 31, 2019

[48] “Taiz Commander confirms continuing military operations for liberating the province,” Yemen National Military Website (YNMW), May 26, 2019. <http://en.26sepnews.net/2019/05/26/taiz-commander-confirms-continuing-military-operations-for-liberating-the-province/>. Accessed May 31, 2019

### Areas of Clashes Between Houthi Forces and Yemeni Army in Taiz City in May, 2019



#### Legend

- Areas of Clashes between Houthi Forces and Yemeni Army
- Main road
- Sub road
- Dirt road
- District boundaries

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## AQAP vs Daesh Rivalry Continues

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the so-called ‘Islamic State’ group, or Daesh, continued to clash in al-Bayda governorate throughout the month of May. Both groups claimed multiple attacks against the other.

On May 21, AQAP released a video entitled “Prisoners of the Khawarij in Yemen,” which features a onetime Daesh fighter detailing his experience as a Daesh prisoner. The video is interspersed with segments showing what appeared to be a seven-cell cement brick prison, which AQAP claimed was built and run by Daesh. The video concluded with AQAP blowing up the prison to chants of “Allahu Akbar.”

May also saw the release of another AQAP video, the seventh in the group’s running series – “God Testifies that They are Liars” – designed to highlight what it called Daesh’s “hypocrisy” and attacks against civilians and non-combatants in Yemen.

Multiple Yemeni news sites reported that a US drone strike hit a vehicle in the Wadi ‘Abiydah region of Marib governorate on May 6, killing at least four people. The US military has not yet acknowledged the reported strike. A few days after the reported strike, however, AQAP announced that one of its members had been “martyred” in a US drone attack, but provided few details.

On June 1, Yemeni media quoted a military source as saying that AQAP carried out an attack on a military checkpoint in Hadramawt manned by soldiers from the Yemeni

Army's 23rd Brigade. The attack killed one soldier and wounded two others, and followed the arrest of two suspected AQAP members.

### *Yemeni Forces Arrest Leading AQAP Figure*

On May 19, Yemeni government forces arrested Bilal al-Wafi, known as Abu Waleed, in a raid in western Taiz City. Al-Wafi is a prime suspect in the killing of International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) staff member Hanna Lahoud in April 2018. Lahoud was a Lebanese national who headed the ICRC's program to support detainees in Yemen. In October 2018, the US Treasury placed al-Wafi on its list of Specially Designated Nationals associated with terrorism.

## Humanitarian Issues and Human Rights

### *In Focus: The Muhamasheen, the Most Disenfranchised Community in Yemen*

No community in Yemen has suffered the consequences of the current war as harshly as the Muhamasheen (Marginalized), a Yemeni underclass of up to 3.5 million people that has experienced centuries of discrimination, exploitation and poverty.<sup>[49]</sup>

Discrimination against Yemen's Muhamasheen (sing. Muhamash) manifests in multiple ways, blending elements of both racism and a caste system. The minority group mostly resides in slums on the outskirts of cities, often without electricity, clean water or secure shelters.

The war has greatly magnified the Muhamasheen community's poverty, displacement and food insecurity, while prejudice against the group has hindered their access to humanitarian aid and made it harder for those who have been displaced by fighting to find safe shelter. Although humanitarian agencies often feature the Muhamasheen in fundraising and publicity photographs documenting the Yemeni crisis, humanitarian aid to the community is far less consistent than for other groups, and in some areas the Muhamasheen have been systematically excluded from assistance.

The widespread economic collapse and loss of livelihoods driven by the conflict has created competition for the low-paid jobs which were once reserved for the Muhamasheen. Prior to the conflict the government's Cleaning and Improvement Fund, which is responsible for waste management, was primarily staffed by Muhamasheen. However, garbage collectors were among the public sector workers who lost their income due to the conflict. UN agencies and other donors have stepped in to finance the Cleaning and Improvement Fund, creating livelihoods opportunities,

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[49] "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues," United Nations Human Rights Council Thirty-First Session, January 28, 2016. Available at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/56](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/56). Accessed June 4, 2019

but some Muhamasheen told the Sana'a Center that they have not benefited from these jobs, which have been taken instead by internally displaced people (IDPs) and others in need from outside the Muhamasheen community.

For several months, the Sana'a Center has been conducting interviews with Muhamasheen from across Yemen about how the conflict has affected them. In Bajel district, northeast of Hudaydah City, an aid worker for an international humanitarian organization told the Sana'a Center that the Muhamasheen were rarely included on beneficiary lists. He supervises a cash-for-work project with the Cleaning and Improvement Fund which does not include any Muhamasheen beneficiaries, even though the community is disproportionately unemployed and lacking access to basic necessities in the district. The Muhamasheen's lack of social or political power means they also lack representatives to lobby local community leaders for their inclusion, he said. Meanwhile, a supervisor for the Cleaning and Improvement Fund in Bajel said he was punished and nearly fired by his manager when he included Muhamasheen on a list of proposed beneficiaries to an international organization. His manager was under pressure from community leaders, district officials and local Houthi authorities, who insisted on vetting the list of names proposed as beneficiaries, he said.

A Muhamash who did secure work with the Cleaning and Improvement Fund in Bajel said he tried to advocate for more people from his neighborhood, al-Dhalam, to be given work through the program. Al-Dhalam is populated by Muhamasheen, most of whom live in tents without sanitation or water. He asked a local committee member, who identifies local beneficiaries for international humanitarian organizations, to include Muhamasheen from al-Dhalam as workers on the cleaning project and as beneficiaries of shelter and sanitation projects; the committee member refused and told him "these people are like cows." While some Muhamasheen in the area do receive sporadic monthly food baskets, the aid is inconsistent and rations are often shared with families who have not been able to register, he added.

A teacher in al-Mahaniah in Bajel district told the Sana'a Center that many Muhamasheen had fled to the area to escape frontlines; they moved into existing Muhamasheen communities, which already lacked proper sanitation, contributing to increased cases of cholera.

To read the full Sana'a Center report on how the conflict has impacted Muhamasheen across Yemen, see: *The Historic and Systematic Marginalization of Yemen's Muhamasheen Community*.

### ***UN Threatens to Suspend Food Aid Over Houthi Interference***

The World Food Programme (WFP) said on May 20 that it would implement a phased suspension of its aid operations in Houthi-controlled areas unless it is given access and freedom to select beneficiaries.<sup>[50]</sup> Houthi leaders have denied humanitarian

[50] "World Food Programme to consider suspension of aid in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen" Reliefweb, May 20, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/world-food-programme-consider-suspension-aid-houthi-controlled-areas-yemen>. Accessed May 28, 2019.

workers access to populations in need, blocked aid convoys and interfered with food distribution, the WFP said. The UN agency said it has also faced “repeated obstacles” to the independent selection of food aid recipients and the roll out of a biometric registration system. The WFP’s statement followed a report by CNN on May 20 accusing Houthi authorities of manipulating humanitarian aid.

The WFP said on December 31, 2018, that it had uncovered evidence that humanitarian supplies were being diverted in Houthi-controlled Sana’a and other parts of the country, after an AP investigation revealed that various factions and militias were blocking food aid, diverting it to frontline fighters and selling it for profit.<sup>[51]</sup> In May, the WFP said recent talks with Houthi leaders had not produced tangible results, and that despite positive commitments by some Houthi leaders, others had “broken assurances” on stopping food diversions and allowing biometric registration. The suspension of food aid is a last resort, the WFP said; the agency aims to feed 12 million Yemenis in 2019.

### ***Lowcock: Fighting, Restrictions Continue to Impede Humanitarian Response***

On May 15, the UN Humanitarian Chief Mark Lowcock told the UNSC that ongoing violence remained an impediment to aid operations, forcing humanitarian agencies and traders to seek alternative routes via back roads, mountain passes, and insecure territory.<sup>[52]</sup> Briefing the council, Lowcock also cited restrictions on the movement of goods and staff, the majority of which were reported in Houthi-controlled areas. In February and March, more than 900,000 people experienced delays or interruptions in aid assistance.

A cholera outbreak that has affected 300,000 people this year and the specter of famine, with 10 million Yemenis still reliant on emergency food assistance for survival, were the most immediate humanitarian challenges facing Yemen, Lowcock said.

In early May, a UN mission made the second visit to the Red Sea Mills in Hudaydah since September 2018. The UN team traveled from Aden to Hudaydah on May 5 through territory controlled by the internationally recognized Yemeni government, Lowcock said. Technicians are assessing damage, repairing equipment and processing any grain that can be salvaged, he added, an operation that was expected to take several weeks. The silos were hit by gunfire on May 10, WFP spokesperson Herve Verhoosel said, but the incident caused no casualties and the perpetrator was not known.<sup>[53]</sup> In September 2018, the mills held 51,000 tons of grain, enough to feed 3.7

[51] “‘Stealing’ food from hungry Yemenis ‘must stop immediately’, says UN agency,” UN News, December 31, 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1029542>. Accessed May 31, 2019; Maggie Michael, “AP Investigation: Food aid stolen as Yemen starves,” The Associated Press, December 31, 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/bcf4e7595b554029bcd372cb129c49ab>. Accessed May 31, 2019.

[52] “Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, May 15, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-18> Accessed May 27, 2019.

[53] “Key Yemen grain silos come under fire: UN” France 24, May 10, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190510-key-yemen-grain-silos-come-under-fire-un>. Accessed May 28, 2019

million people for a month, but an inspection by the WFP in March found that some of the grain was infested by insects.<sup>[54]</sup>

On the issue of funding, Lowcock announced that the UN had received 20 percent of the required resources, up from 6 percent in April. The UN humanitarian chief thanked Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular for the funding they had provided in the last month, which came from a pledge announced in November 2018. Lowcock later traveled to Riyadh on May 23 to discuss the joint US\$1 billion commitment the countries made in Geneva in February.

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore also briefed the UNSC on May 15 on the critical situation facing children in Yemen.<sup>[55]</sup> She told the council that eight children were killed, injured or recruited to fight every day, and that a child dies from preventable causes every 10 minutes in Yemen. As a result of the dire food crisis, 360,000 children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition and half the children under five years old in Yemen — 2.5 million — have experienced irreversible stunting. Fore also noted that the UN had recorded the recruitment and use of over 3,000 children since the war began by all parties to the conflict.<sup>[56]</sup>

## Political Developments in Brief

- **April 29:** The Governor of Socotra Ramzi Mahrous rejected the formation of any security organizations outside of the Yemeni state and local authorities. This was a direct rebuke of the UAE's recent attempts to establish in the Socotra archipelago its own proxy security forces, similar to the UAE-backed Security Belt forces in Aden, the Hadrami Elite Forces in Hadramawt and the Shabwani Elite Forces in Shabwa. The governor reiterated this position again toward the end of May, following the arrival of UAE-trained security forces and equipment to Socotra.
- **May 5:** In a rare rebuke of Saudi Arabia, the Government of Yemen Minister of Interior Ahmed al-Misri criticized Riyadh's moves to assert its authority in the eastern Yemeni governorate of Mahra, bordering Oman. "The Yemeni government wanted our allies in the coalition to march with us north, not east," he said in a public statement, adding that the Yemeni government's partnership with the Saudi-led military coalition is meant to be against the armed Houthi movement, not for the management of "liberated" areas.

[54] "Infested Yemen food aid needs fumigation to feed millions: WFP," France 24, March 20, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190320-infested-yemen-food-aid-needs-fumigation-feed-millions-wfp>. Accessed May 31, 2019.

[55] "UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore addresses the UN Security Council on Yemen in New York," UNICEF, May 15, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-addresses-un-security-council-yemen-new>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

[56] "UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore addresses the UN Security Council on Yemen in New York," UNICEF, May 15, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-executive-director-henrietta-fore-addresses-un-security-council-yemen-new>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

- **May 5:** Media reports emerged that Houthi leader Abdelmalik al-Houthi had appointed his uncle, Abdel-Kareem al-Houthi, as interior minister in Sana'a. Abdel-Kareem is one of the most powerful Houthi figures through his leadership of the movement's executive office and his close ties with Tehran. He replaced Abdulhakim al-Maori, who died in April in a hospital in Beirut, Lebanon, where he was receiving treatment for a chronic illness, according to media reports.
- **May 17:** Saudi Arabia released Mohammed Abdullah bin Keddah, the former governor of al-Mahra, from house arrest and allowed him to return to the eastern Yemeni governorate following tribal protests in al-Mahra against his detainment.

## Economic Developments in Brief

- **Throughout May** the Houthi-run Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) continued to oversee an ongoing demonstration outside the UN compound in Sana'a. The YPC announced the beginning of the protest on March 24 to denounce fuel importation constraints associated with the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) and the Yemeni government's Decree 75, which went into effect in the last quarter of 2018 and imposed new requirements for traders to be allowed to import fuel.
- **May 6:** Butchers in Sana'a went on strike after the Houthi authorities imposed an 8,000 Yemeni rial (YR) tax on calves and a YR 4,000 tax on goats. This came after having already imposed a tax of YR 3,000 per calf and YR 1,000 per goat entering the Sana'a market. The tax increase came during Ramadan, typically a period of higher food consumption. The strike ended three days after the Houthi authorities repealed the taxation.
- **May 11:** Government of Yemen Minister of Oil and Minerals Aws al-Oud announced that the government is focused on completing a number of energy projects, particularly the construction of a pipeline that will connect Block 18 in Marib governorate to west Aayad in Shabwa governorate before being sent to Nashima port, which is located near Belhaf.<sup>[57]</sup> The planned pipeline is viewed as a means of enabling the Government of Yemen to export oil from Marib via Shabwa, with the Marib-Ras Issa pipeline offline and Ras Issa under Houthi control. Al-Oud said the project would be completed in the next five-to-six months, although it is unclear what security measures are in place to ensure the safe transportation of crude oil from Marib to Shabwa.
- **May 14:** The Houthi-controlled Ministry of Education in Sana'a criticized UNICEF for cutting the cash distributions to teachers without consulting the

[57] "Al-Oud Talks About Group of Projects to Implemented this Year to Develop Oil Sector," Saba Net, May 11, 2019, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/49471>. Accessed May 28, 2019.

ministry. UNICEF in March started paying teachers US\$50 monthly, in local currency, to encourage them to continue working in the absence of regular salaries. Sana'a Center sources indicated that UNICEF had uncovered that Houthi authorities in the education ministry had been diverting large amounts of the aid intended for teachers.

- **May 15:** Aden Refinery Company (ARC) announced a new tender for the provision of fuel for electricity power generation in Aden on May 15.<sup>[58]</sup> The terms and conditions stipulated that applicants must be able to deliver 40 tons of diesel and 30 tons of mazut with all applications to be submitted within six-days of the announcement of calls for applications.

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[58] "Aden Refinery Announces Public Tender to Buy Fuel for Power Stations," Saba Net, May 15, 2019, <https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/49618>. Accessed May 28, 2019.



Shoppers fill the streets in Aden's Crater Market on May 24, 2019 // Photo Credit: Tarek Mostafa

## International Developments

### In the United States

#### *Amid Escalation with Iran, Trump Administration Expedites Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE*

On May 24, the Trump administration used an emergency powers provision to push through weapons sales worth billions of dollars to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, citing the threat posed by Iran and its regional proxy forces. A memorandum justifying the move focused primarily on the Houthis, their alleged links with Iran, and cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia.<sup>[59]</sup> In a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the move a “one-time event” intended to “deter Iranian aggression.”<sup>[60]</sup> Congress can introduce legislation to block or modify foreign arms sales up until the point of delivery. However, a provision in the Arms Export Control Act allows the executive

[59] “Memorandum Of Justification For Emergency Arms Transfers And Authorizations To The Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates, And The Hashemite Kingdom Of Jordan To Deter Iranian Malign Influence,” [https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/files/live/sites/almonitor/files/documents/2019/memorandum\\_justification\\_emergency\\_arms\\_transfers\\_saudi\\_uae\\_jordan.pdf](https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/files/live/sites/almonitor/files/documents/2019/memorandum_justification_emergency_arms_transfers_saudi_uae_jordan.pdf). Accessed May 27, 2019.

[60] “Emergency Notification of Arms Sales to Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia,” U.S. Department of State, May 24, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/emergency-notification-of-arms-sales-to-jordan-the-united-arab-emirates-and-saudi-arabia/>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

branch to waive the required review period if an “emergency exists” which requires the timely sanctioning of sales “in the national security interests of the United States.”<sup>[61]</sup>

Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said that the administration had failed to clearly identify an emergency threat or explain how the weapons would combat this threat.<sup>[62]</sup> He added that bipartisan efforts were underway to counter the administration’s move. There were also voices of dissent within Trump’s party; Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said that he opposed the arms sales, citing the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.<sup>[63]</sup>

The White House announcement came amid escalating tensions between the US and Iran and followed a spate of Houthi cross-border attacks against targets in Saudi Arabia, which Riyadh claimed were ordered by Iran (see ‘Houthis Attack Saudi Pipeline’). Pompeo said the waiver would allow the completion of 22 pending sales to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan – worth an estimated \$8.1 billion in total. This includes \$2 billion worth of proposed sales of precision-guided missiles to Saudi Arabia held up for over a year by Senator Menendez. Menendez maintains that the Trump administration has not provided adequate information to allay bipartisan concerns about whether the weapons would be used to kill Yemeni civilians, or that they would be used as an effective means to counter Iran’s role in Yemen.

### ***Senate Upholds Veto on Resolution Demanding End to Coalition Military Support***

On May 2, the US Senate upheld President Donald Trump’s veto of a bipartisan resolution to end military assistance to the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen.<sup>[64]</sup> The 53 to 45 vote failed to reach the two-thirds majority needed to override a presidential veto. While one of the resolution’s sponsors called on the House of Representatives leadership to pursue a lawsuit at the Supreme Court, the court’s conservative majority would make chances of success slim (for more information on the presidential veto, see: *The Yemen Review*, April 2019).

[61] See Section 36. “Arms Export Control Act,” <https://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/Arms%20Export%20Control%20Act.pdf>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

[62] “Menendez on Trump Admin’s Decision to Flout Congress’ Role in Approving Arm Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE,” May 24, 2019, <https://www.menendez.senate.gov/news-and-events/press/menendez-on-trump-admins-decision-to-flout-congress-role-in-approving-arm-sales-to-saudi-arabia-uae>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

[63] Chris Mills Rodrigo, “Graham: ‘I’ve got a real problem’ with arms sales to Saudi Arabia,” *The Hill*, May 26, 2019.

[64] Patricia Zengerle, “Senate upholds veto of Yemen resolution in victory for Trump Saudi policy,” Reuters, May 2, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-saudi-yemen/senate-upholds-veto-of-yemen-resolution-in-victory-for-trump-saudi-policy-idUSKCN1S81UU>. Accessed May 30, 2019; “S.J.Res.7 – A joint resolution to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/7>. Accessed May 27, 2019.

## *Washington Appoints New Ambassador to Yemen*

On May 18, the new US Ambassador to Yemen Christopher Henzel arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to take up his duties. US embassy staff to Yemen are currently based both in Riyadh and Amman. Henzel was previously the chargé d'affaires at the US embassy in Riyadh. He replaced Matthew Tueller, who had served as the ambassador to Yemen since May 2014 and who will now be the new US ambassador to Iraq.

## **In Europe**

### *France Calls for End of Yemen War, Cracks Down on Journalists Over Yemen Leaks*

On May 28, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian labeled the Yemen conflict a “dirty war” and called on Saudi Arabia and the UAE to end it. He added that “we must be extremely vigilant with arms sales to these two countries,” which Le Drian said France was being.

Meanwhile, French journalists were facing possible jail sentences in May after refusing to answer questions from French anti-terror police over their April report on the widespread use of French-made weapons in the war in Yemen.<sup>[65]</sup> The journalists published classified military documents on the website Disclose which contradicted the French government narrative that French arms were only being used by the Saudi-led military coalition for “defensive” purposes (for more information, see The Yemen Review: April 2019).

On May 15 and 16, France’s domestic intelligence service the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) summoned the cofounders of Disclose, Geoffrey Livolsi and Mathias Destal, and Radio France reporter Benoit Collomba, to a hearing to discuss the leaks, but the journalists refused to reveal information about their sources or work. After opening an investigation into the incident on national security grounds last month, the DGSI accused the journalists of handling classified documents without authorization and “compromising the secrecy of national defense,” which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Human rights groups have condemned the French government’s actions as “an unacceptable attack on press freedom and the protection of journalists’ sources.”<sup>[66]</sup>

[65] Ryan Gallagher, “France takes unprecedented action against journalists who published secret government document,” The Intercept, May 17, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/05/17/france-takes-unprecedented-action-against-reporters-who-published-secret-government-document/>. Accessed May 29, 2019; “Made In France,” Disclose, April 15, 2019, <https://made-in-france.disclose.ngo/en/chapter/yemen-papers>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

[66] “Yemen inquiry poses direct threat to press freedoms,” AFP, May 15, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/4918664.html>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

## ***Belgian Foreign Minister Calls to Suspend Saudi Arms Sales***

Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said in May that Brussels must move to suspend arms exports to Saudi Arabia after an investigation claimed that the Saudi military used Belgian-made weapons and technology in operations in Yemen.<sup>[67]</sup> The investigation, led by NGO #BelgianArms, included two videos from 2016 and 2017 which it said showed Saudi national guards troops bombarding Houthi positions with tanks equipped with cannons and munitions produced by Belgian arms producer Mecar. The investigation also said that FN F2000 assault rifles were being used in Yemen, made by Belgian firearms manufacturer FN-Herstal.<sup>[68]</sup> In February, Amnesty International also documented the use of FN-Herstal manufactured Minimi machine guns by the Emirati-backed Giants Brigade during the 2018 offensive in Hudaydah governorate.<sup>[69]</sup>

The Belgian constitution vests authority to grant arm export licenses to the producer region. Belgium's Walloon regional government has previously said that weapons sold to Saudi Arabia were intended only for domestic use. Wallonia had placed an embargo on new export licenses to Saudi Arabia following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in October 2018. However, #BelgianArms reported that Belgian-made weapons were still being exported to Riyadh under licenses granted before the embargo, with at least three weapon shipments sent from Antwerp to Saudi Arabia since the decision.

## ***Italian Union Workers Protest Yemen War***

On May 20, union workers in the Italian city of Genoa refused to load generators onto a Saudi ship that was also transporting arms in protest against the conflict in Yemen. Italian union leaders expressed concern that the generators could be used for military purposes and said they would not “be complicit in what is happening in Yemen.”<sup>[70]</sup> Earlier in May the Saudi vessel had picked up weapons in Antwerp, Belgium, before docking in Le Havre, France where protesters prevented the loading of further arms. The ship's final destination was Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

[67] “Foreign Minister calls for an end to Belgian weapon exports to Yemen,” VRT NWS, May 10, 2019, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2019/05/10/foreign-ministers-calls-for-an-end-to-belgian-weapon-exports-to/>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

[68] “Proof that Belgian arms sold to Saudi Arabia are being used in Yemen,” Brussels Times, May 8, 2019. <https://www.brusselstimes.com/all-news/business/56362/proof-that-belgian-arms-sold-to-saudi-arabia-are-being-used-in-yemen/>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

[69] “#Belgianarms needs a parliamentary inquiry,” Amnesty International, May 8, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.be/infos/actualites/belgianarms?lang=fr>. Accessed May 29, 2019.

[70] “Italian unions refuse to load Saudi ship in protest over Yemen war,” Reuters, May 20, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-security-italy-arms/italy-unions-refuse-to-load-saudi-ship-in-protest-over-yemen-war-idUKKCN1SQ18B>. Accessed May 28, 2019.

## ***Acknowledgments***

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