



The Yemen Review

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Govt Agrees Financial Aid as Houthis Target Oil Sector

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The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

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Cover Photo:

A child stands in the window of a destroyed house in the October 6th neighborhood of Taiz city on November 8, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al Basha

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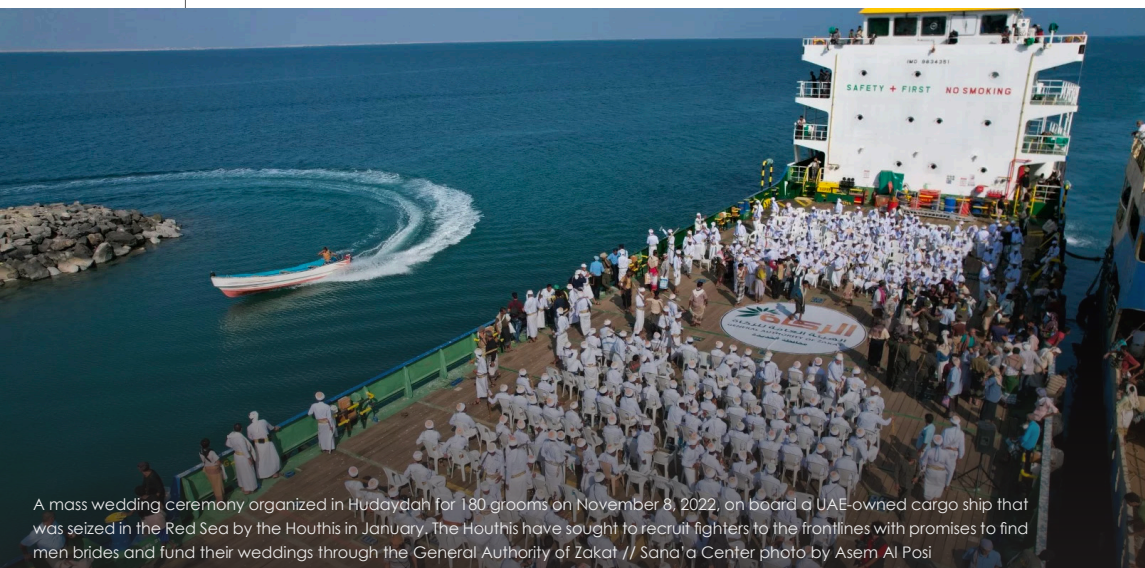
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Summary

Hopes faded that the expired truce would be revived in November, as Houthi authorities dug in their heels over maximalist demands that caused the talks' collapse and then upped the ante with a series of drone and missile attacks on southern ports. The attacks crippled oil and gas revenues, though International Monetary Fund, Saudi, and Emirati support has given the government the lifeline it needs for now. Following the international financial agreements, the government-run Central Bank of Yemen in Aden moved to increase its oversight of banking data. Though there has been no return to full-scale war, intense if low-level clashes were seen in Taiz, Lahj, and Hudaydah.

Reports persisted of back-channel Houthi-Saudi talks, but they appear to have stalled for now over Houthi demands for salary payments. The talks could become problematic for the government if they go beyond the question of the truce and extend to a unilateral settlement, which would be contrary to its interests. Divisions continued to wrack the Presidential Leadership Council, whose head Rashad al-Alimi was the sole member to spend significant time in Aden when he returned in early December after a regional tour that included Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE.

The STC-Islah dispute, which has been at the heart of PLC wrangling, eased up slightly under UAE and Saudi pressure as their priority shifts to preventing a fiscal collapse after the Houthi strikes on oil facilities. This led to Alimi removing a key Islah military official in Hadramawt governorate, where STC-led protests were threatening to descend into violent clashes. The PLC's Tareq Saleh strengthened his position as the scion of the Saleh family, leading government-backed celebrations to mark the death of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2017. The opening of Al-Mokha airport raises the importance of his UAE-backed National Resistance forces, which guard a critical section of the Red Sea coast.



A mass wedding ceremony organized in Hudaydah for 180 grooms on November 8, 2022, on board a UAE-owned cargo ship that was seized in the Red Sea by the Houthis in January. The Houthis have sought to recruit fighters to the frontlines with promises to find men brides and fund their weddings through the General Authority of Zakat // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Al Posi

Politics & Diplomacy

Govt Pushes Ahead with Terrorism Designation as Port Attacks Continue

When the UN-backed truce expired on October 2, there was hope that it might be quickly reinstated, with negotiated agreements on outstanding issues such as the payment of public sector salaries and the reopening of roads. But efforts to restore the truce stalled in November. Despite multiple visits with regional officials by UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and US Special Envoy Tim Lenderking, the former reported no progress during a brief report to the UN Security Council on November 22.

Both the Houthis and the internationally recognized government have instead pursued escalatory measures. Houthi attacks on government-controlled oil terminals paralyzed exports for a second straight month, an attempt to pressure the government into paying civil servant and military salaries in Houthi-held areas. The government responded by designating the Houthi movement a terrorist group, but there are fears that resulting measures could cause further harm to Yemen's economic stability, while doing little to push the Houthis to the table.

Within the government, internal strife continued between members of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) for much of November, although tensions appeared to ease as various factions united around sanctioning the Houthi leadership. After months of barely contained conflict, relations between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and Islah showed some improvement given the prospect of a return to full-scale fighting with the Houthis. Still, November was characterized by heightened tensions in Aden, where the STC exercises security control, and most PLC members were absent from the interim capital for much of the month. PLC President Rashad al-Alimi embarked on a regional tour, attending the Arab League summit

in Algeria, the COP27 UN climate summit in Egypt, and the UAE's Commemoration Day in Abu Dhabi. STC President and PLC member Aiderous al-Zubaidi was reportedly kept in the UAE at the behest of his Emirati backers to reduce tensions in Aden. Despite this, political maneuvering continued, particularly in Hadramawt, where STC-aligned leaders continued to mobilize public demonstrations demanding the removal of the Islah-aligned military commanders of the 1st Military Region in Seyoun.

Tareq Saleh, a PLC member and commander of the National Resistance forces on Yemen's West Coast, appeared to strengthen his military and political clout when the first humanitarian flight landed at a new, UAE-financed airport in the port city of Al-Mokha. Saleh's UAE-backed National Resistance forces control the coastal strip where Al-Mokha is located, near the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The new airport's strategic significance will be in facilitating the activities of Saleh and his forces, who until now have been obliged to use distant airstrips and rely on UAE helicopters for movement and resupply.

November also saw the signing of the much-awaited US\$1 billion agreement between the government and the Arab Monetary Fund, financed by Saudi Arabia. The agreement is part of the US\$2 billion in financial support that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi committed to the government in April this year, the release of which was purportedly delayed pending the implementation of governance and institutional reforms. The value of the new Yemeni rial, which circulates in government-held areas, was briefly buoyed by the announcement.

The Houthis continue to institutionalize their political and sectarian ideology as they further tighten their rule. Authorities in Sana'a arranged for the implementation of a newly published "Code of Conduct and Work Ethics for Public Work," which includes a requirement to recognize the group's divine right to rule. New guidelines were also issued by the Education Department in Sana'a, banning female students from using mobile phones, playing music, and talking or laughing loudly during school excursions. Unrest over Houthi land seizures continued in various parts of northern Yemen, with protests reported in Sana'a city and tribal clashes in Al-Jawf.

Developments in Government-Held Territory

Government Continues International Engagement as Truce Talks Stall

International diplomacy continued in November with little progress on the reinstatement of the truce that expired in early October. On November 2, US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking concluded a trip to the UAE and Saudi Arabia for talks focused on renewing and expanding the UN-mediated truce. On November 8, both Lenderking and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met separately in Washington with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi to discuss the peace process in Yemen, among other topics. On November 7, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grunberg concluded a visit to Riyadh, where he held meetings with Saudi ambassador to Yemen Mohammed al-Jaber and other international diplomats focused on renewing the truce and pushing forward the political process. Grundberg reported no breakthroughs in [an uncharacteristically brief monthly address](#) to the UN Security Council on November 22.

Senior government officials spent much of November abroad engaged in talks. PLC head Rashad al-Alimi attended the Arab League summit in Algiers on November 1-2 before traveling to Egypt for the opening of the COP27 climate summit. In late November, Alimi attended Martyr's Day in Abu-Dhabi. Also known as Commemoration Day, the event has taken on added importance in the Emirates since the UAE's intervention in Yemen in March 2015; 45 Emirati soldiers have lost their lives in the conflict. Alimi visited Amman in late November, where he met Jordan's King Abdullah. Also present during the visit were PLC members Abdullah al-Alimi and Tareq Saleh; the latter is known to have close ties with the Jordanian monarch dating back to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's years in office.

Other government officials attended the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Manama Dialogue in Bahrain from November 18-20. Yemen's military chief of staff and commander of joint operations, Lt. General Saghir Hammoud bin Aziz, met with US, French, and other military leaders on the sidelines of the annual regional security conference. They discussed cooperation on various issues, including securing freedom of navigation, in light of a Houthi anti-ship missile test on the eve of the conference. Sources close to Bin Aziz said French military officials expressed a willingness to explore support for a new military operation on the West Coast as part of a strategy to force Sana'a back to the negotiating table, reinstate the truce, and end attacks on the energy sector – though the Sana'a Center has not been able to independently confirm this information. Foreign Minister Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak also participated in the Manama Dialogue, underscoring the Houthi menace to maritime security through the use of drones and naval mines, and claimed that Iranian support has turned the Houthis into an international threat.

Government Pushes Ahead with Terrorism Designation as Port Attacks Continue

After strikes on the Nushayma and Al-Dabba oil terminals in October, Houthi drone attacks against government oil ports continued in November, delaying the potential restoration of exports and intensifying the government's financial woes. On November 9, a Houthi drone carrying explosives targeted an oil tanker at the port of Qana in Shabwa, with the air defense forces of the 2nd Marine Brigade reportedly shooting the drone down just before it struck the ship. Egyptian and Sudanese crew members were injured in the attack, and the vessel sustained minor damage. This was followed by an attack on the Al-Dabba terminal on November 21, which prevented a Panamanian-flagged tanker from taking on oil. The Houthis have warned oil companies to cease operations in Yemen, accusing them of stealing the country's natural resources. The port attacks are almost certainly intended to extract financial concessions and intensify pressure on the government to restart public sector salary payments to hundreds of thousands of employees in Houthi-controlled areas.

In response to the attacks, the government pushed ahead with efforts to sanction Houthi-affiliated individuals and entities operating under its de facto jurisdiction, following its designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group in October. Earlier in the month, senior officials told the Sana'a Center that the government had asked Interpol to issue warrants for Houthi officials and owners of companies affiliated with the movement, and called upon regional and international allies to pressure for the same. Houthi officials routinely travel abroad to Oman and Jordan, and sometimes further afield. As of late November, the government's plan was to focus on Houthi officials and other figures present in Egypt, Jordan, and European countries and request those governments to extradite them or prevent them from traveling internationally.

Government officials have clarified that they will only prohibit interactions with companies established in Houthi-run areas after the Houthis dissolved the parliament in Sana'a in February 2015. So far, individuals from Houthi-affiliated oil firms form the majority of names on the sanctions list being prepared by the government, in addition to a number of businessmen.

It is not clear what the government's endgame is in pursuing this strategy. In private conversations, senior officials have said they understand that with the designation and sanctions they are responding to Houthi brinkmanship with a major escalation of their own. They acknowledge that is unlikely to push the Houthi side back into the truce and will probably provoke further attacks on energy installations. There is also a risk of a return to full-blown frontline fighting. The government is beefing up security at its ports, including with drone defense systems, and is working with insurance companies to persuade tankers to return and export oil despite the Houthi threat.

The proposed sanctions are also unlikely to be effective in squeezing the Houthi economy. Houthi authorities will likely be able to circumvent the measures by opening new private sector companies to replace sanctioned ones. As in Syria, UN agencies might seek to block sanctions against companies deemed to be performing key humanitarian functions. In terms of international buy-in, the United States and Saudi Arabia are perhaps more ready than at any point since 2015 to reach terms with the Houthi-run government in Sana'a and bring the conflict to an end.

Discord Among PLC Members Continues, Tareq Saleh Consolidates Position

Relations among the members of the PLC remain tense following the August 2022 clashes in Shabwa between Islah-affiliated forces and UAE-backed groups. The discord worsened on November 6, when STC lead negotiator Nasser al-Khobaji leveled a series of accusations against the PLC and the cabinet in an interview broadcast on the STC's television channel. Khobaji accused Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed of preventing anti-corruption bodies from doing their work, demanded that PLC member Sultan al-Aradah be removed as Marib Governor, argued Marib's hydrocarbon revenues should be deposited with the central bank in Aden, and requested that the forces of the 1st and 2nd Military Regions based in Wadi Hadramawt and Al-Mahra be moved to the frontlines. **In comments made shortly before the interview was aired**, Khobaji appeared to threaten the PLC, suggesting that the STC could seize control of southern areas and that Alimi "might not return to Aden." He also accused Interior Minister Ibrahim Haydan of protecting Islah elements in Shabwa and Hadramawt. A leader of the STC's hardline wing without close connections with the UAE, it was not clear how far Khobaji's comments reflected the STC's position. Later in the month, STC head Aiderous al-Zubaidi denied that there was a systematic campaign to denigrate the government and distanced himself from the views expressed by Khobaji, saying they were not representative of the STC.

PLC member Tareq Saleh appears to be strengthening his military and political clout. The opening of the Al-Mokha airport on the Red Sea coast in Taiz governorate, which is gradually coming into operation with the intent for eventual commercial use, will benefit him strategically. A plane belonging to humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders was the **first to land there** on November 24 after a **three-kilometer landing strip** was completed last year; a second phase of construction is now underway on a passenger hall and air traffic control tower. The government has said it is developing the airport as an alternative to the Houthi-held airport in Taiz city, but there are greater ramifications in the new airport's role in facilitating the activities of Saleh and his forces.

New Saudi-Backed Paramilitary Force Angers STC

STC agitation against Alimi continued in his absence, notably over the Nation's Shield forces that Saudi Arabia established and placed under his control. [Pro-STC media](#) depicted the new force, which has started moving equipment into Aden, as a direct threat to its own paramilitary presence in the city and elsewhere in the south. Maeen al-Maqrahi, an STC-affiliated officer in the 1st Support and Backup Brigade, rallied checkpoint personnel to detain members of the recently-formed National Shield forces, whom he characterized as "northerners." National Shield forces, formerly known as the Al-Yemen Al-Saeed forces, in fact consist mostly of Al-Subaiha tribesmen from Lahj, led by Salafist commander Bashir al-Madrabi. The STC has monopolized control of security in the interim capital since August 2019 and is likely mobilizing historical concerns of northern dominance to justify its continued supremacy. In response to the detentions, the Al-Subaiha tribe issued a statement calling Maqrahi's actions an insult and provocation.

Hadramawt: American Delegation in Mukalla and Mobilization of Hadrami Tribes

Hadramawt Governor Mabkhout bin Madi hosted multiple American delegations in Mukalla in November, meeting with a US civil-military affairs delegation to discuss security coordination on November 1, and US Ambassador to Yemen Steven Fagin on November 8. In parallel, Bin Madi continued his bureaucratic shakeup of governorate operations with a series of appointments and administrative orders, including the appointment of Abdelrahman Aizah Salmeen Belfas as general manager of the Yemen Petroleum Company's (YPC) Hadramawt coastal branch. Bin Madi also appointed leaders from the popular movement known as the Hadrami Uprising, Sheikh Hassan Saeed al-Jabri and Sheikh Saleh Mohsen bin Hariz al-Marri, as Directors-General of the Sah and Al-Qatn districts respectively.

Tribal politicking over the continued presence of the Islah-aligned 1st Military Region in Wadi Hadramawt and Hadramawt's position in ongoing intra-PLC tensions continued in November. In early November, a meeting of Hadrami tribes headed by Abdullah Saleh al-Kathiri, a major tribal leader in Wadi Hadramawt, called on the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior to recruit 30,000 locals and task them with handling security in the governorate, a longstanding demand by the STC-aligned 2nd Hadrami Uprising to replace 1st Military Region forces. Another Al-Kathir tribal gathering issued a statement in support of Governor Mabkhout bin Madi's recent demands that security control of the Al-Wadea border crossing with Saudi Arabia – currently under the control of Islah-aligned military units – be handed over to the UAE-backed Hadrami Elite forces. However, not all members of the al-Kathiri tribe support Sheikh Abdullah. Other sheikhs now allege he has become closer to Jabri and the STC and is prioritizing his own interests. According to a statement issued by his critics, the representation of the Al-Kathiri tribe must not be confined to Sheikh Abdullah Al-Kathiri and his council.

In early November, the Arbitration of Hadramawt Tribes held an expanded consultative meeting in Mukalla aimed at strengthening social cohesion and advancing Hadrami interests. The main demands of the meeting included protecting the governorate's sovereignty and right to self-determination, the replacement of non-Hadrami forces with Hadramis, including 40,000 Hadrami Elite forces, creating a unified Hadrami leadership, and formation of a high-level negotiating team. A statement issued after the meeting warned all parties and companies against exploiting and removing oil and natural resources from Hadramawt. In the run-up to the meeting, some of the co-founders of the Arbitration of Hadramawt Tribes issued a statement declining to participate in the meeting, which had been called by Amro Bin Habrish. In mid-to-

late November, members of the Hamoum tribe, of which Amro bin Habrish and PLC member Faraj al-Bahsani are both members, visited the STC-aligned Barsheed camp and showed their support for the southern tribes. The visit stood in contrast to previous statements by the tribe, which has rejected the marginalization of its leaders by outside forces and has not supported STC-orchestrated protests in Wadi Hadramawt.

Smuggling in Al-Mahra

On November 15, Major General Mohsen Ali Nasser Marsa, commander of the Al-Ghaydah Military Axis, visited the naval command center at the port of Nishtun. Marsa stressed the need to combat smuggling operations, protect ports, and increase maritime security. The visit followed a November 8 announcement by US Central Command forces of a seizure of a dhow in the Gulf of Oman smuggling explosive material from Iran to Yemen. On November 18, Marsa visited Al-Mahra's nearby Shihn border crossing with Oman to discuss the development and coordination of security and military units focused on combating smuggling.

Developments in Houthi-controlled Territory

Houthi-Saudi Backchannel Talks Continue

Despite Houthi attacks on southern oil facilities in October and November, Houthi-Saudi talks are reportedly still taking place, although the status of the negotiations remains shrouded in mystery. Currently, the Saudi invitation for Houthi President Mahdi al-Mashat to visit Riyadh still stands. Publicly, the Houthis are sticking to their demands for an end to the restrictions on ports and the full payment of public sector salaries, including military personnel, before any formal talks are considered. In the short term, Saudi Arabia is likely to maintain contact with the hope of dissuading the Houthis from carrying out drone or missile strikes on Saudi Arabia or the UAE, particularly during this period of heightened global attention with the World Cup in Qatar. In the long term, Riyadh could take a clearer stance on the Houthi leadership's demands, which would either mean making further concessions to secure a deal or more firmly rejecting Houthi brinksmanship. In an uncharacteristically vocal stance, senior Omani officials countered criticism of the Houthis during the COP27 climate summit in Egypt, defending them as legitimate Yemeni actors with a sincere desire for peace. Such comments are highly unusual for Omanis, more so given that Sultan Haitham appointed a new team to handle the Yemen file over the summer, raising Houthi fears that the hitherto neutral sultanate was turning against them.

Houthi Officials Delete World Cup Tweets Congratulating Saudi Arabia

Mixed Houthi policy toward Riyadh was on full display when the Saudi football team notched a shock 2-1 win against Argentina at the World Cup in Qatar on November 22, setting off celebrations across the Arabian Peninsula. Although there was no official statement of congratulation from the Sana'a authorities, several Houthi officials surprised observers with [messages of support on Twitter](#). After outraged responses from Houthi supporters, the three officials – Houthi political bureau member and Information Ministry spokesperson Daifallah al-Shami; Chairman of the Houthi Committee for Prisoners' Affairs Abdelqader al-Mortada; and Deputy Foreign Minister al-Ezzi – all [deleted their tweets](#). Houthi authorities arranged for the public to follow the World Cup for free through [large public screens](#) provided by Qatar's Red Crescent, in cooperation with the Qatari foreign ministry and the Qatari media group beIN Sports.

Houthi Dictate New Guidelines for the Civil Service

On November 7, the Houthi-run Saba News Agency published a new set of guidelines for civil servants working in Houthi-controlled areas. The “Code of Conduct and Work Ethics for Public Work,” a 36-page document issued by the Ministry of Civil Service, contains numerous religious references that reinforce the group’s sectarian and political agenda. Public employees must sign a document vowing to abide by the code of conduct, which includes recognizing and respecting the Houthis’ divine right to rule as descendants of the Prophet, participating in “general mobilization” activities in support of the war effort, and attending “cultural courses and educational programs” for ideological indoctrination. Following the code’s publication, various Houthi-run state institutions and local authorities throughout Houthi-held areas were reported to have held meetings to discuss the guidelines’ implementation. The education office in Sana’a has also issued a new set of regulations to be observed by female students during school excursions. According to the guidelines, schools must ensure that field trips are segregated, that female supervisors are assigned to school buses, that girls adhere to modest attire in keeping with religious values, and that they refrain from bringing their mobile phones or “playing music, speaking or laughing loudly” on school buses.

Pushback Against Houthi Land Seizures

November also saw more attempts to seize land by the Houthis in Sana’a. On November 4, residents in the Sawan neighborhood of Al-Hamdi city in Shaoub district held a sit-in to protest the seizure of local land by Houthi authorities. Houthi supervisor Abu Haider Jahaf ordered lands to be seized on the pretext that they are state-owned religious endowments (known as waqf), despite residents holding ownership documents. On November 7, Houthi gunmen raided homes belonging to Marib businessman Abdullah Nasser al-Kharraz in Sana’a, expelling residents and looting the properties. Facebook activists condemned the seizures and criticized pro-Houthi Maribi tribesmen in Sana’a for not denouncing the group.

Fighting broke out in Al-Jawf governorate between Houthi and local tribal forces after Houthi authorities seized multiple tracts of land from the Hamdan tribe in Al-Hazm district. The Hamdan tribe gave a one-hour deadline for Houthi Ministry of Interior forces to evacuate the lands on November 2, which police ignored, instead sending additional reinforcements. This prompted clashes, which ended with the tribesmen retaking the land. The same day, a meeting of the Dahm tribes, including representatives from the Hamdan, Dhou Hussein, Bani Nouf, Al-Mahabib, Al-Muslim, Al-Ashraf, and Faqman tribes agreed to form an alliance against parties violating tribal lands. The Hamdan tribe and Houthi authorities subsequently negotiated a truce, although locals speculated a November 18 attack by unknown gunmen on the Al-Aslat security checkpoint was intended to cause tension between the two parties.

FSO Safer

After months of fundraising and an ostensible UN-Houthi agreement to salvage the vessel, the saga surrounding the derelict tanker FSO Safer saw multiple developments in November. On November 1, Minister of Information Muammar al-Eryani accused the Houthis of preventing a UN technical team from visiting the FSO Safer to evaluate and maintain the vessel. On November 11, the Minister of Water and Environment, Tawfiq al-Sharjabi, met the Ambassador of Sustainable Development at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, René van Hell, on the sidelines of the COP27 climate conference to discuss the issue. During talks with the Sana’a Center at COP27,

Sharjabi expressed the government's reservations about the plan to transfer oil from the FSO Safer to a new tanker, arguing instead that the oil should be removed from the area entirely, as its continued presence would still provide the Houthis the means for blackmail. However, in a November 21 interview with the newspaper Asharq al-Awsat, head of the government-aligned Maritime Affairs Authority Mohammed Mubarak bin Aifan stressed the need to first unload the oil from the decaying tanker and then agree on its ultimate destination. On November 18, the UN announced the operation to unload the FSO Safer would begin in early 2023.

Other Political Developments in Brief

November 6: The union of the General Authority of Civil Aviation and Meteorology issued a statement condemning the construction of buildings at Sana'a airport that do not adhere to International Civil Aviation Organization standards and warning that failure to follow international security and safety procedures may result in the suspension of flights. The union urged Houthi authorities to stop construction and remove all structures that do not comply. Local media reported that Houthi authorities threatened union employees following the statement's release. There are currently three flights a week between Sana'a and Amman.

November 18: Fouad Rashid, head of the Supreme Council of the Revolutionary Hiram, issued a decision dismissing five high-profile members from the movement in response to their holding a special meeting at which they themselves tried to dismiss him from the leadership of the group. Rashid accused STC leaders and employees of the office of STC-aligned Aden Governor Ahmed Lamlas of supporting the five in an attempt to co-opt the group.



Military Police launch a security campaign in the Zaid Al-Mushki neighborhood, in the east of Taiz city, on November 17, 2022// Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al Basha

Military & Security

Frontlines Remain Relatively Calm Despite Houthi Drone Attacks Against Southern Ports

Although there were no major ground offensives in November, military tensions have increased amid continuing Houthi drone attacks on government oil ports and reports of increased Houthi and anti-Houthi reinforcements arriving at various frontlines. While the truce largely continues to hold, in that no major ground offensives have materialized, intense clashes were reported along fronts in Taiz, Lahj, and Hudaydah. There was also growing concern among the Saudi-led coalition leadership that the Houthis were preparing for a major attack. Houthi reinforcements to southern Marib have prompted the deployment of several Giants Brigades battalions to the Marib-Shabwa border area, and intensified Houthi attacks along the Taiz-Lahj border have prompted the creation of a government-STC joint operations room in Lahj.

Behind the frontlines, insecurity and internecine conflict continue to play out in government-held areas. In Marib, tribal clashes were reported in Marib al-Wadi district, which was also the site of multiple assassinations of pro-government commanders. In Taiz, attacks linked to militia leader Ghazwan al-Mikhlafti were reported, and the seizure of a weapons shipment by bandits in neighboring Lahj governorate prompted a joint government-STC security campaign. In Abyan, STC-led counterterrorism operations against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continued, with multiple suspected AQAP IED attacks reported against STC and government forces.



In addition to ground fighting, Houthi forces carried out multiple drone attacks on government-held coastal positions. In addition to the November 9 attack on Qan port in Shabwa and November 21 attack on Al-Dabba oil terminal in Hadramawt, Houthi forces launched a drone attack on a government-aligned Yemeni coast guard headquarters in Hayma in Hudaydah on November 10. On November 17, Houthi forces reportedly tested an anti-ship missile, which was launched from Nehm in the east of Sana'a into the Red Sea.

Marib

Coalition concern about a potential Houthi offensive grew in November. Amid the increased deployment of Houthi reinforcements to fronts in southern Marib and northeastern Al-Bayda governorates, several UAE-backed Giants Brigades battalions were deployed opposite Houthi forces in southern Marib's Harib district. On November 17, Houthi forces attacked government army positions near the eastern Al-Balaq mountains, with clashes continuing for three days and no advances made by either side.

Several tribal clashes were reported in Marib governorate's Marib al-Wadi district, which has seen an uptick in tribal unrest in recent months. On November 3, clashes broke out between the 5th Presidential Protection Brigade forces led by Brigadier General Saeed bin Saleh bin Ma'ili, of the local Ma'ili tribe, and Damashqa tribesmen in the Al-Arqaen area of Marib al-Wadi district following the brigade's establishment of a military encampment in the area. Tribal sheikh Mohammed Mohsen bin Jalal attempted to mediate a halt to the fighting, but was killed along with two escorts when traveling between the parties. A second tribal mediation attempt led by Sheikh Khaled Ghaleb al-Ajda and Sheikh Mardi bin Kaalan succeeded in halting the fighting for eight days on November 4, allowing negotiations to continue. The PLC instructed the Ministry of Defense and the Army General Staff to form a committee to mediate with the tribal sheikhs and

remove any new military sites on Damashqa tribal lands. The fighting closed the international road linking the governorates of Marib and Hadramawt for 20 hours and destroyed power transmission lines from the Marib power station, leading to a multi-day blackout in Marib city.

On November 19, tribal mediation led by Sheikh Ali bin Hassan bin Rabih and Sheikh Ali bin Hassan bin Gharib led to the demarcation of a border between the Damashqa and Ma'ili tribes in the Al-Araqueen area of Marib al-Wadi district, according to members of the mediation committee. The border is based on a ruling issued by Bin Gharib in 2017, which was rejected by the Ma'ili tribe at the time. Separately, on November 9, tensions stemming from a blood feud escalated into clashes between the Al-Hatik and Aqar tribes in the Kara area in southeastern Marib al-Wadi district.

November saw the killing of at least two government commanders in Marib. On November 2, Nasreddin Nasr al-Khadhafi, a prominent lieutenant colonel in the government's 102nd Brigade, was shot and killed near the Arsh Bilqis junction in southern Marib al-Wadi district while returning to the frontlines in the south of the governorate. A gunman from the Al-Ghazil subtribe was identified as the killer. On November 8, Ministry of Defense adviser Brigadier General Mohammed al-Jaradi and his escort were assassinated in Marib. Details about the assassination are still unclear; the victims' bodies were found near Al-Shuhada cemetery in Marib al-Wadi district. The Ministry of Defense issued a statement of condolence and described the incident as a terrorist operation. A member of the Jaradi family said the assassination was a premeditated act, hinting that he might have been killed by security or military forces in Marib.

On November 7, an explosion at an arms depot in the Command Center of the 3rd Military Region briefly caused panic in Marib city. The explosion sent missiles and munitions flying in the air, and a number landed in crowded residential areas. The incident caused the death of four civilians – two men, a boy, and a girl – and injured five others, including a woman and a child.

Taiz

Clashes between Houthi and government forces continued along various fronts in Taiz governorate. Early in the month, Houthi and pro-government forces clashed on the Al-Hatoub front in Jabal Habashi district, where Houthi forces have erected new barricades and fortifications in the Milat area threatening government forces stationed close to the Al-Dhabab road connecting Taiz and Aden. During the same period, four civilians were injured in mortar shelling in Al-Salou District and Houthi drone attacks were reported on government military sites along the Shaqab front in Sabr al-Mawadim district. Between November 18-19, Houthi forces fired artillery and mortar shells on government forces along several fronts, including in the Kalaba neighborhood in western Taiz city, the Al-Kadha area of the Al-Ma'afer district in southern Taiz, and Jabal Han, to the west of Taiz city in Sabr al-Mawadim district.

In addition to the Houthi-government fighting, conflict among pro-government forces continued behind the frontlines. On October 31, the director of the transportation office in Taiz, Aref Noman, survived an assassination attempt by soldiers of the 1st Battalion of the 170th Air Defense Brigade, led by Abu Dhar Abdullah Hassan. Noman had refused to grant Hassan a license to collect tolls at a checkpoint on the Al-Turbah Al-Misrakh road in place of transportation office employees, who are legally authorized to do so. Noman has been accused of receiving bribes from Hassan in exchange for promises to hand him control of checkpoints. On November 2, Taiz security forces arrested Hassan after he was shot in the leg while trying to evade capture.

On November 17, armed clashes erupted between security forces and armed gunmen in the Al-Rawdah and Zayd al-Mushki neighborhoods of Taiz city, where local warlord Ghazwan al-Mikhlaifi holds influence. According to eyewitnesses and a local official, a violent explosion heard during the confrontations was the result of a rocket-propelled grenade targeting security forces loyal to Captain Issa Kamel, nicknamed Al-Arz, who works as an advisor to the commander of the 170th Air Defense Brigade in Al-Rawdah. Ghazwan is the leader of a notorious Islah-affiliated armed group known for seizing land and extorting merchants in the city. Ghazwan and his brother, who was killed by security forces on October 24, are the nephews of the former commander of the 22nd Mechanized Brigade, Major General Sadiq Sarhan. On November 18, Ghazwan published a video on his Facebook page threatening to avenge his brother by killing Taiz security director Mansour al-Akhali. Ghazwan also threatened PLC member and National Resistance forces leader Tareq Saleh, who he described as Akhali's main supporter.

Lahj

Fighting between Houthi and anti-Houthi forces intensified in Lahj in November. Between November 4-7, Houthi and pro-STC 10th Saiqa Brigade forces clashed on the Habeel Hanash front, in the northwest of Al-Musaymir district, after Houthi reinforcements arrived to reinforce the Karesh, Hamala, and Habeel Hanash fronts. On November 10, Houthi forces forcibly evicted residents of the Thabra, Al-Dhulah, Bayt Hamim, and Al-Amlah areas in northeast Al-Qabaytah district, reportedly to establish new military positions. Heavy clashes between Houthi and Southern Resistance forces were subsequently reported along fronts in Al-Musaymir and Al-Qabaytah districts throughout mid-to-late November, with Houthi forces displacing several families after making advances along the Habil Hanash front on November 18. Clashes were also reported between November 10-12 in Lahj's Tur al-Bahah district and Hayfan district in neighboring Taiz governorate, with Houthi forces reportedly mobilizing forces in the area ahead of an attempt to advance further into Lahj.

On November 8, senior military and security leaders attended a meeting at the home of Governor Ahmed Abdullah Turki aimed at unifying and coordinating efforts in the governorate through a joint operations room. The meeting of pro-government and STC commanders was the first of its kind in Lahj since the STC's takeover of Aden in August 2019, according to local sources. Among the outcomes of the meeting were the coordination of security checkpoints in the governorate to ease the passage of traffic and the launch of Operation Arrows of the West, aimed at targeting the criminal gangs that block traffic and rob motorists.

A noted increase in banditry in Lahj governorate was observed in November. On November 1, gunmen from the Al-Hamidah tribe hijacked a truck transporting weapons from Aden to the Taiz Military Axis in Wadi Ma'baq in Al-Maqatirah district, although the shipment was later recovered. On November 10, one civilian was killed in clashes between security forces and local armed men in the Mabaq area in the east of Al-Maqatirah district that closed the road linking Taiz and Aden for two days. On November 11, pro-government and STC forces launched the joint campaign Operation Arrows of the West. Following a day of fighting, the Joint Forces announced the arrest of eight suspects. Several people were killed and wounded in the fighting and others fled. On November 16, dozens of residents of the Al-Wahat area, in the southwest of Tuban district in southern Lahj, organized a demonstration to protest recent armed clashes by tribal groups. Activists taking part in the demonstration protested the use of violence in residential neighborhoods that are supposed to be safe for civilians.

Al-Bayda

Military activity was reported along various fronts in Houthi-held Al-Bayda governorate in November, especially along the governorate's northeast and southern borders. On November 8, eyewitnesses reported that Houthi military reinforcements had deployed to the Aqbat al-Qantha front in Al-Bayda's northeastern Naaman district, which borders government-held Bayhan and Ain districts in neighboring Shabwa. Houthi forces also built new fortifications and secondary roads into the mountain range overlooking Bayhan.

Between November 15-19, clashes were reported between Southern Resistance and Giants Brigade forces on one side and Houthi forces on the other in the Al-Hadd–Yafa front along Al-Bayda's border with Lahj governorate. Houthi drones were seen flying over the front during the fighting.

Al-Dhalea

Clashes between Houthi and anti-Houthi forces continued in Al-Dhalea governorate in November, mostly consisting of shelling and drone attacks along the Bab Ghalaq, Al-Fakher, and Batar Hajar fronts.

Hudaydah

Fighting between Houthi and Joint Forces in Hudaydah governorate remained concentrated in the south, with consistent shelling exchanges and clashes reported in Hays district. Throughout the month, Houthi forces continued construction on a nine-kilometer rock barrier extending from the Red Sea coast at Al-Ghuwairaq to the Jabaliya area north of Al-Tuhayta city. Houthi sources said the barrier is littered with landmines disguised as rocks.

Hudaydah governorate remained a notable area of Houthi drone activity in late October and November, with at least five separate drone attacks reported. On October 30, Houthi forces conducted two separate drone attacks in southern Hudayah: a strike near a Joint Forces military site near Jabal Debas in northeast Hays district that killed a civilian, and an attack targeting a Joint Forces military site east of Al-Khawkhah city that killed two National Resistance forces fighters. On November 10, three Houthi drones targeted a Coast Guard command center at the port of Al-Hayma in southern Hudaydah, causing a munitions stockpile to explode and injuring five Coast Guard personnel. On November 12, a Houthi drone targeted a Joint Forces military truck near a poultry farm in the Abu Zahr area in northern Al-Khawkhah city, the first drone strike inside the city since January 2022. On November 14-15, two Houthi drones targeted Joint Forces positions in the Al-Roun area of Hays district, killing at least two Joint Forces fighters.

Abyan

Intermittent fighting between Houthi and Southern Resistance forces was reported in Abyan in November, with most activity along the Aqbat al-Tharah front on the border between Al-Bayda's Mukayras district and Abyan's Lawdar district. Clashes and shelling exchanges were reported between the two sides throughout the month, with no major advances by either side. On November 8-9, Houthi forces deployed reinforcements to Abyan's Jayshan district and the mountainous areas of Al-Bayda governorate overlooking Abyan's Lawdar, Mudiya, and Jayshan districts, although it was unclear whether their intention was to distract Southern Resistance forces from nearby operations against AQAP or to prevent Al-Qaeda elements from fleeing into Houthi-controlled Al-Bayda. On November 9, STC military, security, and local authority leaders in Abyan held a meeting in response to the Houthi advance.

STC and government forces continued operations against AQAP elements in Al-Mahfad district, as part of Operation Arrows of the East. Security Belt forces deployed at the entrances to Al-Mahfad city on November 10, with additional reinforcements deployed there and along the road to the Jura Valley on November 18. Amid the ongoing campaign, multiple suspected AQAP IED attacks were reported against STC-aligned and government forces. An IED attack against Security Belt forces and 1st Brigade forces killed three soldiers in Wadi al-Khayala on November 4, while a roadside bomb targeting a convoy carrying two Security Belt commanders killed at least three STC-aligned fighters on November 17, although both commanders escaped unscathed. On November 19, three soldiers were killed and six wounded from the pro-government 103rd Infantry Brigade when their military vehicle hit a roadside bomb in the Omayran Valley in the east of Mudiya district.

Amid the pressure generated by ongoing counterterrorism campaigns in Abyan and Shabwa governorates, reports surfaced in November of an emerging conflict in the leadership of Al-Qaeda in Yemen between incumbent head Khalid Batarfi and Saad bin Atif al-Awlaki, a member of the group's Shura Council. The leadership dispute began last April when jihadi leaders in Shabwa complained that Batarfi was trying to isolate them, cutting off finances and payments to the families of dead fighters, and refusing to allow them to fight against the Houthis. Awlaki met with leaders in Shabwa in April and July and promised that their complaints would be heard by the group's leadership and that Batarfi would address their concerns. With an apparent lack of progress, Awlaki accused Batarfi of embarrassing him in front of his constituents and trying to diminish his influence, and promised to retaliate. The result has been significant fragmentation among the leadership, with some supporting Awlaki, such as Khabib al-Sudani, and others standing with Batarfi. Batarfi is Saudi, while Awlaki is one of the most senior Yemeni members of Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

Shabwa

Although not a major locus of fighting, Shabwa saw multiple military developments in November amid reports of Houthi reinforcements to border areas in northeastern Al-Bayda, with the Saudi-led coalition reportedly fearing another Houthi offensive. On November 3, Giants Brigade forces shot down a Houthi drone near the village of Shaab Mado in eastern Al-Saeed district, and on November 8 eyewitnesses said that a Houthi drone attacked a camp of the 6th Brigade of the Shabwa Defense forces on the Al-Qantha front in northwest Bayhan district. According to eyewitnesses, on November 9 military forces affiliated with the 3rd Battalion of the 22nd Infantry Brigade of the Giants Brigades passed through the city of Ataq. The forces, under the command of Haitham Qassem, redeployed from the Red Sea Coast in Taiz governorate to desert areas along the Shabwa-Marib border. On November 23, the Houthis employed drones to attack a pro-government military camp in the Al-Alam area, 80 miles from the Al-Abr crossing to Saudi Arabia. The attack killed two soldiers and injured two others. According to media sources, the governor denounced the attack in a call with the commander of the 1st Military Region.

On November 13, the Belabid tribes of the eastern districts of Shabwa held a sit-in to pressure Governor Awadh bin al-Wazir al-Awlaki, the PLC, and the Saudi-led coalition to remove Islah military encampments from the Areen area near Shabwa's northeastern border with Marib. The tribesmen, who hail from the Jordan, al-Talh, Dhar, and Arma districts, raised banners and chanted slogans demanding the removal of the Islah-affiliated camps, created in September after their forces were driven out of Ataq city. Prominent Belabid tribal figures said they consider the presence of such forces a threat because they are not subject to the directives of the military and security institutions in the governorate.

Maritime Security

Maritime security was of increasing concern in November with the deployment of various Houthi naval forces, in addition to ongoing drone and missile attacks on government-controlled oil ports. On November 1, Houthi patrol boats were spotted in the international shipping lanes off Al-Luhiyah district in northern Hudaydah. On November 17, government military spokesman Brigadier General Abdo Majali stated that Houthi forces had conducted an anti-ship missile test, firing from the xfNehm area northeast of Sana'a out into Yemen's territorial waters off Hudaydah's Red Sea coast. Majali said there was irrefutable evidence that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps had provided logistical support to the Houthis for the test, and called on the international community to help protect maritime trade and freedom of navigation. At the Manama Dialogue Conference in Bahrain from November 18-20, government military officials met with international military leaders to discuss various issues, including freedom of navigation in light of the missile test. At the conference, Foreign Minister Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak talked of a Houthi danger to maritime security, adding that Iran had turned the Houthis into an international threat.

On November 8, US Central Command forces in the Gulf of Oman intercepted a dhow smuggling explosive material from Iran to Yemen. The boat was carrying more than 360,000 lbs of fertilizer, used to make explosives such as landmines, and ammonium perchlorate, a component of ballistic missile fuel. The Yemeni crew was turned over to civilian authorities. On November 19, near the port of Al-Mokha, the coast guard captured a boat and nine sailors accused of working for a Houthi smuggling operation between Somalia and the port of Hudaydah. Around the same time, a number of Houthi drones were seen flying over Zuqar island, west of Houthi-controlled Al-Tuhayta city, which the coast guard uses as a training center. Local internet services and landline communications in Al-Tuhayta district were reportedly down during the events.



A convoy of fuel tankers on the road from the Marib refinery drive through northern Shabwa governorate on November 16, 2020
// Sana'a Center photo by Sam Tarling

The Economy & Finance

Oil Exports Remain Halted As Govt Agrees Terms for International Support

Oil production in government-held areas ground to an almost complete halt early in the month as Houthi drone attacks continued to strangle exports. With oil revenues representing the largest source of income for the government, any prolonged halt to its production and export would have dire effects on economic conditions, including an inability to pay salaries and depreciation of the rial in government-controlled areas.

The government successfully scrambled to find more regional and international financial support. On November 17, the International Monetary Fund agreed to provide US\$300 million to the Central Bank of Yemen in Aden's foreign exchange reserves, with US assistance in facilitating transfers through the Federal Reserve. Separate deals to receive long-awaited financial support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, promised after the formation of the PLC in April, were agreed on November 25 and 27.

Amid these developments, the value of the Yemeni rial in both government- and Houthi-held areas remained relatively stable, with some loss of value in the government rial. One notable trend was reduced subscriptions to the CBY-Aden's weekly currency auctions, ostensibly due to concerns over the continued suspension of oil exports and the anticipation of a new Saudi deposit. Compared to a 50 percent subscription the previous week, the November 1 auction was only 8 percent subscribed, although this appeared to recover later in the month with the November 22 auction 84 percent subscribed.

Govt Buoyed by International Financial Support

After months of negotiations, the government agreed to conditions to receive much-needed financial support from the International Monetary Fund on November 17. As part of the agreement with the IMF to release US\$300 million in Special Drawing Rights and hold the converted funds in the CBY-Aden's account at the US Federal Reserve, the CBY-Aden must certify that any bank participating in weekly FX auctions is compliant with Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) statutes. This requires banks to share their operations data with CBY-Aden. The government has called on banks to cooperate and comply with instructions released from the supervision sector, an institutional arm of the CBY-Aden responsible for regulating banks and monitoring their compliance with established laws and statutes.

On November 19, the CBY-Sana'a denounced the IMF support, accusing the IMF of "providing extrajudicial funds to finance military operations and the war on Yemen." The Houthis-controlled central bank said it had contacted the IMF three times this year to voice its opposition to the IMF allocating support for Yemen to the CBY-Aden. The CBY-Sana'a proposed three alternative courses of action. The first was to use a third party to manage the SDR and allocate it to finance commodity imports and to pay six months' worth of public sector salaries, a key sticking point in the truce negotiations. The second was to use the financial support to pay part of the public debt owed to banks operating in Yemen, which would allow them to pay a portion of their customer deposits, helping to address the prevailing liquidity crisis and alleviate downward pressures on the local currency. The third was to freeze the SDR until the monetary policy in Yemen is reunified. Should the IMF ignore these demands, the CBY-Sana'a said it reserved the right to legally prosecute the former for "the exploitation and destruction of the rights and capabilities of the Yemeni people."

On November 27, the government and the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) signed a US\$1 billion agreement, financed by Saudi Arabia, to supply the government with financial support from the end of this year until 2025. The agreement is part of the US\$2 billion in financial support that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi committed to the government in April this year, the release of which was purportedly delayed pending the implementation of governance and institutional reforms. The agreement came just two days after Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed announced that the United Arab Emirates had made 1.1 billion dirhams (nearly US\$300 million) available to the government-affiliated CBY-Aden.

The terms and conditions for the usage of the new AMF grant are more stringent than those for previous support. The government and the CBY-Aden had been pressed by foreign donors and international financial institutions for months to adopt broad institutional and governance reforms that would increase transparency and oversight as a condition of further support. From the start of 2018 to 2020, Saudi Arabia made a US\$2 billion deposit available to the CBY-Aden to replenish its foreign exchange reserves. This helped stabilize the exchange rate for new rials through import financing of five basic food commodities (wheat, rice, milk, cooking oil, and sugar). But the relatively lax terms of this support program – in particular the lack of transparency regarding how the CBY-Aden set a preferential exchange rate for its foreign currency sales – created an environment conducive to embezzlement and mismanagement, though UN accusations of such against the CBY-Aden and Yemeni importers were ultimately withdrawn. Among the CBY-Aden's reforms in the past year has been the use of the Refinitiv platform, which has a predetermined and transparent mechanism to set the exchange rate at currency auctions.

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed bin Abdullah al-Jadaan stated that the AMF-led program aims to support the government budget and banking sector and stimulate the private sector and economic development. While the financial support should help facilitate the government's efforts at currency stabilization and budget financing, comprehensive economic, financial, and monetary reforms will be exceedingly difficult to achieve in the country's deteriorating security and political environment.

Oil Production

Oil production in Yemen slowed a near-complete halt in late October and early November due to Houthi drone attacks on government oil ports. On October 31, Canada's Calvalley Petroleum announced it was suspending oil production at Block 9 in Hadramawt governorate, citing force majeure. This was followed by the state-owned Petromasila company's announcement on November 2 that it was suspending operations in three other oilfields. Oil revenues are by far the government's largest source of revenue and any prolonged halt to production will have dire implications on government finances. In an attempt to restore production, PLC member Faraj al-Bahsani visited Petromasila's headquarters on December 3, and vowed that the PLC would find ways to deter the attacks and enable the company to continue production. The meeting also discussed the possibility of expanding oil investments in the Masila fields, including setting up a refinery.

Rival CBYs Battle Over Data Oversight

In a November 8 memorandum, the CBY-Aden listed eight banks that had committed to sharing their data with the central bank and that are now subject to its supervision: the National Bank of Yemen; Cooperative and Agricultural Credit Bank (CAC Bank); Tadhamon International Islamic Bank; Al-Kuraimi Islamic Microfinance Bank; Arab Bank; Saba Islamic Bank; Aden Microfinance Bank; and Al-Qutibi Islamic Microfinance Bank. Twelve other Yemeni banks, which still largely carry out their operations from Sana'a, have been classified by CBY-Aden as non-compliant for refusing to share their operations data, and could be subject to punitive measures: the International Bank of Yemen; Islamic Bank of Yemen for Finance and investment; Qatar National Bank; Shamil Bank of Yemen and Bahrain; Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development; United Bank Limited; Yemen Commercial Bank; Yemen Gulf Bank; Yemen Kuwait Bank for Trade and Investment; Rafidan Bank; Housing Bank; and Al-Amal Microfinance Bank.

The Houthi-affiliated CBY-Sana'a has repeatedly warned banks against sharing their data with the CBY-Aden and threatened retaliatory measures against those who do so. On November 29, the Houthi-run Supreme Council for Management and Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs & International Cooperation issued a circular ordering CSOs, NGOs, and aid agencies to cut financial ties with the eight banks sharing data with CBY-Aden if they wished to continue implementing their programs. While these escalatory measures are part of the broader economic war, the banking sector has become the primary area of bargaining and contestation. The two branches of the CBY have intensified their battle for the unilateral regulation and control of foreign aid and hard currency held in Yemen's banks.

The Yemen Kuwait Bank and Yemen International Bank handle the largest portion of aid funding and act as the main financial service providers of humanitarian actors – both are headquartered in Sana'a. The CBY-Aden has requested unlimited access to all of their data and records, according to a senior banking official, but as of writing, both have refused to comply.

Currency

The value of new rial banknotes remained generally stable in government-held areas throughout November, although it experienced a 9 percent drop in value from an average of YR1,156 to the US dollar early in the month to YR1,176 by November 23. The value of old rial banknotes in Houthi-held areas held stable in a band between 560 and 565 per US dollar.

The CBY-Aden continued to support the exchange rate through its US\$30 million weekly currency auctions, although Yemeni banks dramatically reduced their subscriptions to the auctions in the three weeks following October 25. The auction on November 1 was the worst-performing of 2022, with only 8 percent of the available foreign currency sold. Later in the month, however, this appeared to improve, with 84 percent of the November 22 auction subscribed.

Banks appeared to be taking two countervailing market forces into consideration when subscribing to auctions. The first is that if Houthi drone strikes continue to prevent government oil sales, the CBY-Aden will lose its ability to finance its FX auctions, reducing the relative supply of FX in the market and putting substantial downward pressure on the value of new rials. However, recently arrived international financial support, resulting in continued regular access to FX, could buoy the value of new Yemeni rials moving forward. Given that the banking sector has reduced its FX purchases in the last three weeks, bankers are likely weighing the arrival of Saudi financial support as the dominant factor. Anticipating near-term gains in the value of new rials, bankers are holding on to them so as to be able to buy more FX later.

Telecommunications

Internet communications appeared to be functioning as normal again in Houthi-held territories in November after outages for certain applications in October. What appeared to be a block on online meeting platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet may have been a botched attempt to hack and monitor those platforms using the Sana'a-run Yemen Net. The state provider loses revenue through the use of internet apps instead of mobiles for international phone calls, and the apps are beyond the reach of state surveillance. The interference had completely stopped as of early November, with the online meeting platforms accessible without requiring the use of a VPN. Aden Net users had also been hit by a temporary outage, possibly linked to a company dispute with international providers. Users in Al-Mahra governorate were unaffected due to coverage from neighboring Oman.

On November 10, the Y-Telecom Company in Aden launched a trial version of its fourth-generation telecommunication services, which are slated to eventually cover all governorates under government control. Attending the inauguration was Minister of Communications and Information Technology Najib al-Awj. Y-Telecom was established as Yemen's fourth mobile operator in 2007. In March 2020, the company declared bankruptcy and its assets were sold to the Houthi-controlled General Holding Corporation for Real Estate Development and Investment for US\$35 million, well below market value. It then resumed operations in Houthi areas under the moniker Al-Hudhud Company for Telecom. In government-controlled areas, Saudi investor Saud bin Abdullah al-Bawardi led a group of other shareholders in re-establishing Y-Telecom in late 2020 in Aden, with operations restarting in late 2021.

The Sana'a Center Editorial

Yemen Needs Help to Avert Climate-Driven Catastrophe

The historic decision taken at the COP27 climate change conference to set up a “loss and damage” fund for those most vulnerable to the climate crisis is a massive win for developing nations, but Yemeni policy makers need to start preparing now to make sure Yemen receives its fair share. After wealthy countries conceded to putting the question of compensation on the table, the next battle will be over who pays into the fund and who is eligible for financial help. Participation in the negotiations in Sharm el-Sheikh was undertaken by a small Yemeni delegation, which was largely unable to make its voice heard. This will be a problem if the government does not prioritize the issue ahead of the climate summit in Dubai next year, when clamor for access to the fund will begin. UN estimates of developing countries’ total needs are daunting. Adapting to the climate crisis – from building sea walls to planting drought-resistant crops – could cost anything from **US\$140 to 340 billion a year by 2030**, and more by 2050 if climate change accelerates.

Attention is currently focused on limiting global warming to 1.5°C through emissions cuts from major polluters such as China and the United States. COP27 saw the approval of new projects to develop **early warning systems** to detect climate events and construct a satellite system to **monitor methane levels**. Affluent nations are predictably mostly concerned with the impact of extreme temperatures, flooding, storms, and rising sea levels at home – storms in America, drought in Europe, wildfires in Australia. The impact on a war-torn country like Yemen could easily fall by the wayside if its case is not sufficiently made, even within the context of a loss and damage fund. The government’s limited capacity and the volatile politics and violence of the civil war create a huge risk that the country could lose out on desperately needed assistance as it addresses more immediate threats.

The environmental problems facing Yemen are formidable. Yemen ranks 171 out of 182 countries on the **ND-GAIN index**, which assesses vulnerability and readiness to adapt to climate change. Most of Yemen’s 30 million people continue to live in rural settings that are highly vulnerable to erratic weather patterns, while the country contributes relatively little to global emissions. Models **forecast** a change in annual average rainfall of -7 to +69 percent by the year 2100, with temperatures expected to rise by 1.2-1.9°C by 2050 and 1.5-2.3°C by 2100. Cycles of flooding and drought could critically impact the country’s already fraught ability to feed itself and increase reliance on imports of basic food commodities. Yemen is already almost totally reliant on foreign **wheat and rice**.

Torrential rain is causing more and more havoc. Floods in 2008 caused 180 deaths, displaced 10,000 people, and caused infrastructure damage estimated at US\$1.64 billion dollars – 6 percent of GDP. Agricultural production dropped 15 percent. In 2015, Cyclone Chapala became the first recorded hurricane-force storm to strike land in Yemen, causing major flooding on the southern coast and forcing 18,750 people to flee inland, according to the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. At the same time, desertification of existing agriculture affects **3 to 5 percent of land** per year in some regions of the country and could persist or worsen. There are other looming challenges too: coastal erosion, resettlement of displaced communities, and the threat to low-lying coastal wetlands from rising sea levels.

Yemen is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world. Climate change is one of a number of reasons for the depletion of underground aquifers, alongside the **proliferation of qat**, unchecked population growth, and poor water management. Rising sea levels have caused seawater to leak into coastal aquifers, contaminating municipal water supplies and damaging agriculture. Falling groundwater levels since the 1970s have forced many farmers to abandon their lands in places such as **the Sa'ada basin**. Higher temperatures will increase water evaporation rates, and the extra rains brought by climate instability will not be enough to prevent the depletion of aquifers. In 2010, the World Bank estimated that groundwater reserves could be completely gone **as early as 2040** – a scenario that would require heavy reliance on desalination, which is expensive, problematic for agriculture, and is itself **environmentally problematic**.

A range of other problems follow from these crises. The unique ecosystem of Socotra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is under threat from **extreme storms** and **drought**. Heavy rainfall and flooding has damaged around 1,000 houses in the **Old City of Sana'a**, another World Heritage Site, and crippled services and **utilities**. Yemen's 3,000-year-old **beekeeping industry** has suffered as rising temperatures inhibit pollination, while falling water tables, desertification, and the war are forcing many apiarists to quit the ancient practice. Indeed, war complicates every aspect of managing climate change in Yemen, as environmental degradation in turn threatens to fuel further conflict at every level of society. **One study** by researchers at Sana'a University found that water was a factor in most rural conflicts. Dams, reservoirs, and water pipes have all been damaged during the fighting since 2015, leading to accusations of the **"weaponization of water"** by the warring parties.

Serious work is required to press these issues at COP28 and make Yemen's case to the international community. There is also a need to engage donors on the question of climate change and the fragile nature of Yemen's situation. The government must use its close relationship with the UAE, the host of the next climate summit, to ensure that negotiations over the loss and damage fund are hammered out in full and that Yemen features on its agenda. The government must be ready to respond to accusations of past **mismanagement** and questions about its ability to implement environmental initiatives in the midst of conflict. Ideally, a joint position could be worked out with Houthi authorities. If necessary, the government should point out that any future climate crises in Yemen are likely to spill over its borders through the displacement of populations. Worse, they could exacerbate or reignite the animosities and competition driving the current conflict. Helping Yemen mitigate the impact of climate change will contribute not only to national peace and stability, but also regional security, a fact that Yemen's neighbors and potential benefactors would do well to keep in mind.



An Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) soldier holds Iran's flag during a rally commemorating International Quds Day, also known as Jerusalem day, in downtown Tehran on April 29, 2022 // Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazl/NurPhoto

Commentary

How the Protests in Iran Will Affect Yemen

Thomas Juneau

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been rocked by major street protests since September. As these show no sign of slowing down, there are **growing questions** about the future of the regime. **Four broad scenarios** appear possible: the regime succeeds in quelling the demonstrations and the country returns to the pre-September status quo; the regime quells the protests but emerges as much more vulnerable than before; an internal coup d'état; or the fall of the regime.

The situation is fluid and could change fast; if anything, analysts have a poor history in forecasting the survival of authoritarian regimes, which suggests that predictions should be made with a dose of humility. That said, it seems that the most likely scenario in the short to medium term is the second one: the regime survives but not unscathed. It is difficult to imagine a return to the pre-September status quo: opposition to the regime has deepened and broadened, with protests reaching beyond the urban middle class and into poorer and traditionally more pro-regime neighborhoods and cities. Protesters are not demanding reform, as they had in past demonstrations; instead, they are now calling for the overthrow of the regime. At the same time, the system is not on the verge of collapse. Indicators that would suggest this outcome – the refusal of security forces to obey orders, large-scale defections at the upper echelons of the regime, generalized strikes – have not materialized so far.

What does the prospect of the survival of a weakened Islamic Republic mean for its foreign policy, both in general and specifically in Yemen?

In general, Iran's **approach to foreign policy** is premised on the notion of forward defense. The Islamic Republic builds relationships with non-state armed groups throughout the region and provides them with weapons, cash, technical assistance, and intelligence. Iran can then threaten, implicitly or explicitly, that its allies will target the United States and its regional partners – especially Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – should they attack Iran or its partners. When the UAE-backed Giants Brigade forces were accumulating military successes against the Houthis in early 2022, the Houthis responded with missile and drone strikes against the UAE, pressuring Abu Dhabi to order the Giants Brigades to halt their advance in southern Marib.

The intent, for Iran, is to project insecurity outwards; concretely, this means that Tehran's foreign policy is partly geared toward ensuring regime security. With the Islamic Republic increasingly vulnerable domestically, we can expect it to double down on its usual tactics in the coming weeks and months: faced with a perceived threat or provocation, its threshold for retaliation risks becoming lower, while the amount of force it employs could become stronger.

The effects of such a turn could be particularly impactful in Yemen. Ties between Iran and the Houthis predate the launch of the Saudi-led intervention, but it was really after 2015 that they expanded. In addition to small arms and ammunition, Iran now provides the Houthis with parts for more lethal systems including increasingly sophisticated drones and missiles, which can now reach the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This support has been a **very good investment for Iran**: for an annual sum perhaps in the low hundreds of millions of dollars, Iran has built a strong foothold in Yemen and **bogged down** its Saudi rival in a costly quagmire. Even though the precise dynamics of Houthi-Iran ties remain poorly understood, it does not appear that Tehran gives direct orders to its Yemeni partner; rather, the two sides consult extensively and, given that they share a similar view on regional politics, more often than not their interests align.

The foundations of the Iran-Houthi partnership will remain stable even as the Islamic Republic becomes increasingly vulnerable domestically. What will evolve is how these dynamics play out in practice. This could manifest itself in the Houthis' and Iran's approach to the truce. The Houthis benefitted from the truce, which lasted from April to October 2022. They likely had no intention to seriously negotiate, but instead used the respite to consolidate, regroup, and rest after losses in early 2022. During that time, they watched gleefully as anti-Houthi forces failed to form a more united front. The Houthis and Iran waited patiently, as they believed – rightly – that their position relative to that of the internationally-recognized government was bound to improve over time. From Iran's perspective, moreover, the continuation of the war means the continued bleeding of Saudi Arabia.

This broad Iranian calculus still stands. But as the Islamic Republic's domestic position becomes increasingly vulnerable, it will be even less willing to support any Houthi compromise in peace talks. It will increase its support for what are already **maximalist Houthi demands** and oppose concessions that would allow Saudi Arabia to cut its losses. In other words, Tehran will want to make sure that as long as it suffers domestically, so does Saudi Arabia. Iran may be even keener to encourage the Houthis to retaliate against Saudi Arabia and the UAE, should Tehran perceive that they are pushing too hard against the Islamic Republic. If its threshold to push back against regional rivals is lower, there is a greater likelihood that Iran will support action against Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to prevent them from benefiting from its troubles.

Another important question to ask concerns the Houthis' approach to Israel. By some estimates, Houthi drones and missiles cannot quite reach Israel yet; based on incomplete open-source information, their maximum range is **perhaps 1,500 km**, about 300 km short of reaching the southern tip of Israel. Given the combination of the Islamic Republic's domestic troubles and the Houthis' growing confidence to act outside Yemen's borders, the probability of Iran transferring the technology and parts necessary for the Houthis to increase their reach to the point of being able to reach Israel is likely increasing.

Overall, the internationally recognized government of Yemen does not have sufficient power to defeat the Houthis; there is no prospect of the group losing its tight control over Sana'a and northwest Yemen for the foreseeable future. Houthi-controlled Yemen, however, has no prospect of international recognition or economic growth; it is bound to remain a poor, de facto statelet under repressive Houthi rule. This status quo suits a vulnerable Iran: it keeps the Houthis dependent on its external patron, while Houthi territory remains a base from which Tehran can project power on the Arabian Peninsula. This was the calculus for the Islamic Republic before the protests escalated in September; as the regime's vulnerability grows, the Houthis will become an even more valuable asset in the regime's efforts to assure its survival and counter pressure from adversaries.

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Abdelaziz al-Maqaleh pictured at the Yemeni Studies and Research Center in the capital, Sana'a, in July 2021 // Photo credit: Fouad Al-Harazi

Commentary

Abdelaziz al-Maqaleh: The Passing of a Yemeni Cultural Icon

Tawfeek Al-Ganad

In solemn mass gatherings, Yemenis paid their respects to Abdelaziz al-Maqaleh, who passed away on November 28 at 85 years old. Al-Maqaleh, one of the most prominent Yemeni figures of the past century, was a critic, academic, writer, and Yemen's most beloved modern poet, known for bringing Yemen's voice to the world and that of the world to Yemen.

For two decades, Al-Maqaleh served as President of Sana'a University and headed the Yemeni Center for Research and Studies for more than 40 years. During his tenure, Sana'a University opened its doors to his friends, among whom were the Arab world's most prominent intellectuals and literary figures. Thanks to Al-Maqaleh, the very small window Yemen had onto the outside literary world was broadened, making way for ideas and developments that flowed in and out of the country. It was also thanks to him that the finest Arab poets had access to Sana'a salons and streets, taking back with them its distinctive flavor to the rest of the world.

Al-Maqaleh studied in Cairo in the 1970s, earning a Ph.D. from Ain-Shams University. He was later expelled from Egypt following a decision from President Anwar Sadat in response to **Al-Maqaleh's objection** to the Camp David Accords. He returned to Sana'a in 1978 and rumor has it he never spent a single night outside the city since, with the exception of a **trip to Aden** to take part in the declaration of Yemen's unification in May 1990.

To his beloved Sana'a, he dedicated many of his literary works. Sana'a was a constant renewable symbol in his poetry, as exemplified in his first book of poetry, *There Must be Sana'a* (1971) and later in his collection of poems *A Book of Sana'a* (1999). His most famous lyrical poem, sung by Yemen's composer and singer Ahmad Fathi, called *Sana'aniah*, is about a girl from Sana'a. In *Announcing My Hopelessness* (2018), Al-Maqaleh speaks to Sana'a as if bidding it farewell.

*Sana'a...
Our ancient home
Residing in our hearts
Oh, our wounded history
Inscribed on the windows
and stones
I fear for you from those close to you
And for no reason,
I fear for you from yourself.*

a fixture throughout the country's most pivotal historical moments. On September 26, 1962, he read the statement broadcasted on Radio Sana'a, announcing the nascent revolution that overthrew the Imamate. Only 25 years old at the time, and a young revolutionary, he had written a poem that continues to echo among Yemenis today, and that up until a few years ago – when the Houthi authorities banned it from the educational curriculum – was part of Yemeni eighth graders' curriculum.

*Bless the hands of those building a new dawn, lovers of dignity,
Who have given themselves to Allah on this difficult night,
Those who have sacrificed everything and brought down the Imamate.*

Still, his legacy and works live on. After news of his death, pictures of Al-Maqaleh flooded social media, along with his most famous quote from a poem written in the 1970's, *Silence is a Shame*:

*We will continue to tunnel through the wall,
And we will either make it through to the light,
Or die on the wall.*

Al-Maqaleh was an icon, and for the best part of half a century he mentored Yemen's greatest literary talent. Collections of poetry and bodies of work earned a stamp of approval if they had an introduction written by him. Al-Maqaleh was renowned for his discipline, to which he attributed his success. He had decades-long commitments to several Yemeni and Arab magazines and was known among literary circles to never miss a deadline. For decades, his weekly column in the *Al-Thawra* newspaper, published every Tuesday, was eagerly awaited by his readers, while his weekly Tuesday Salon was an invaluable opportunity for writers to gather.

Al-Maqaleh maintained good relations across all political spectrums, including with the ruling regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. In 2001, he was nominated cultural advisor and was known to have played an influential role in the appointment of ministers of education and culture as well as university presidents. A member of the Baath party when he was younger, and a penchant for political realism, meant he often managed to strike a balance in his political relationships, and kept good relations, even with members of the opposition.

Among religious extremists, however, he was shunned. To them, Al-Maqaleh symbolized the atheism typically attributed to modern poets. To this day his critics still cite one of his most controversial lines: "Allah has become silent ash, a terror in the hands of executioners, a field that sprouts prayer beads and turbans." Radical religious leaders waged a broad excommunication campaign against him in the 1980s, disregarding the fact that modern poetry relies on symbolism and that this line, taken from the collection of poems *Writing with the Sword of the Revolutionary Ali bin al-Fadhel* (1978), was taken out of context. Al-Maqaleh was ultimately a man of faith and one unlikely to denounce God. His faith was evident in earlier poems, such as in *A Letter on Allah* (1961), and also in later ones, most prominently in *Invocations from the Alphabet of the Soul Collection* (1998), which was read by all students at Yemeni universities as a part of their mandatory curriculum.

He was bold too when it came to ideas he believed in. He worked hard, for instance, on restoring the legacy of Ali bin al-Fadhel, a leader of the Qarmati movement (a sect of Ismailis) in the Middle Ages, who became a symbol of religious heresy, smeared by many traditionalists in Yemen, and whose perception Al-Maqaleh fought hard to correct.

Revolutionary subjects were more prominent in his earlier work, but over time Al-Maqaleh turned to more mysticism in his poetry, as seen in his collection of poems *Writing with the Sword of the Revolutionary Ali bin al-Fadhel*, *The Alphabet of the Soul* (1998), and *Near the Gardens of Tagore* (2018). But the effects of Yemen's war eventually found their way into his work. *War* (2017) provides the reader with a harrowing portrait of famine and the devastating effects of Yemen's conflict.

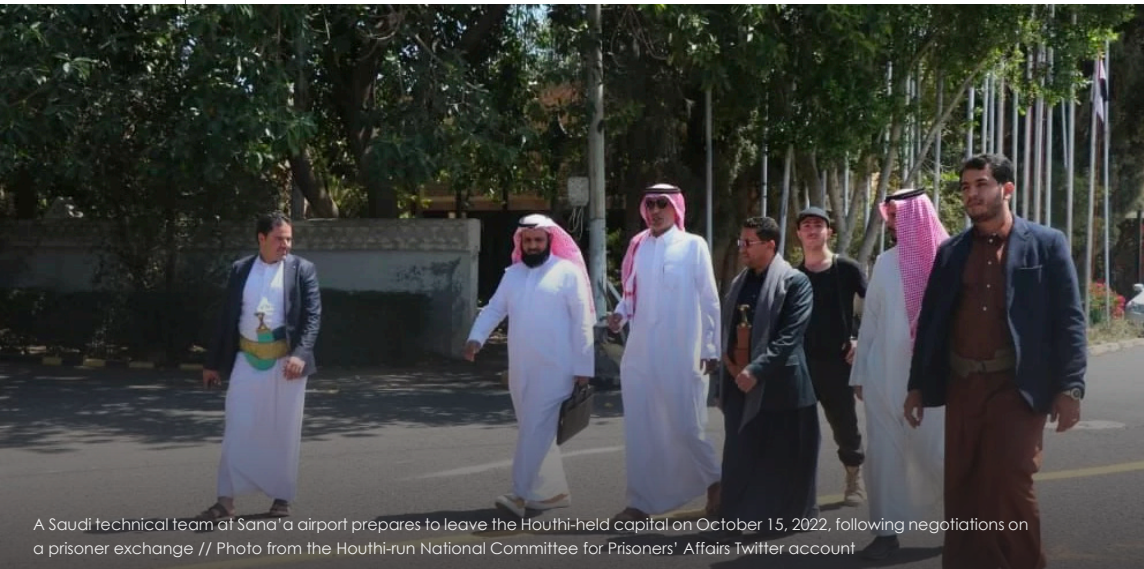
*Oh, you who are starving,
Rejoice!
You will not go hungry,
For those awash in war have called out to it,
And the streets and roads are filled
with shrapnel from their war songs
Cheer,
for you will not be hungry.
Eat the flesh of the cannons,
the fat of the tanks.
Do not fear death,
for death is a sweet song.
...
Await the blessings of war,
for war is coming.
Its tables are laden,
with things you have never seen,
heard of,
or read about
in any book.*

Al-Maqaleh was ultimately a pacifist and condemned the war and violence that characterized his last years in Yemen. In *A Lamentation* for 2016, he wrote his own obituary, offering a somber depiction of death in the throes of war:

*Cover me up
And wrap my coffin tight,
Write above my grave, Here lies one of the victims of wars
That he was disgusted by.
He told the leaders before they started it,
When war enters a village,
It destroys its kind people.*

Over the course of his acclaimed career, Al-Maqaleh produced 34 books on literature, literary criticism, history, and poetry, some of which have been translated into other languages. Dozens of books and studies have been written on his work, including master's and doctoral theses. He received numerous awards, including the Lotus Award, the Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture in collaboration with UNESCO, the Sultan Bin Ali al-Owais Cultural Award, the Shawqi Award, and a Knight Award of the first degree from the French Government. But more importantly, aside from recognition, Al-Maqaleh leaves behind the enduring love of his readers and an eternal legacy as one of the most important pillars of modern poetry in Yemen.

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A Saudi technical team at Sana'a airport prepares to leave the Houthi-held capital on October 15, 2022, following negotiations on a prisoner exchange // Photo from the Houthi-run National Committee for Prisoners' Affairs Twitter account

Commentary

Local Deadlock and Regional Understandings: Analyzing the Houthi-Saudi and Islah-UAE Talks

Hussam Radman

Early 2022 saw rekindled hopes for progress toward resolving the war in Yemen with the UN-sponsored truce between the internationally recognized government and the Houthi movement, and the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC). Both moves were considered potential precursors to formal talks between the warring parties, with the PLC specifically viewed as an example of power-sharing that could be expanded as a part of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

But the situation threatened to return to square one in the second half of 2022, as the internal contradictions within the PLC burst the fore following the August fighting in Shabwa between Southern Transitional Council (STC)- and Islah-affiliated forces. The fallout from the battle has led to increased political tension and protests in Hadramawt governorate involving the same parties as well as local actors, as well as heightened divisions among the PLC's members, causing most of them to spend their time outside the interim capital, Aden. On the other side, the Houthis refused to extend the truce in October, have carried out unprecedented attacks on oil export terminals in southeast Yemen in October and November, and appear to be preparing their ground forces for possible battles in Marib, Taiz, and Lahj.

Despite the bleak outlook, two tracks of ongoing talks – between [Saudi Arabia and the Houthi authorities](#), and, according to three sources who spoke with the Sana'a Center, the Islah party and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – have led some to hope that progress is around the corner. However, these contacts must be understood within the context of current local and regional political dynamics, and past efforts at dialogue between rival actors in the conflict in Yemen. Taking these realities into account indicates that there should be caution, rather than optimism, for the prospect of imminent breakthroughs.

Saudi-Houthi Talks Follow Usual Pattern

Talks between Riyadh and the Houthis are not in themselves a sign of a political breakthrough, since this is not the first time the two parties have come together during the war. Despite reports that Riyadh has offered to hold direct talks with Houthi President Mahdi al-Mashat, no real progress has yet been realized. In fact, there were more successful talks in 2016, during which the Houthis handed over maps of landmines planted on the border with Saudi Arabia. In 2019, prince Khalid bin Salman, after taking over the Yemeni file as Saudi deputy defense minister, began communicating with the Houthis in an attempt at deescalation in response to increased Houthi cross-border drone and missile attacks. In both instances, talks were no more than tactical maneuvers aimed at managing a temporary crisis without engaging in serious efforts to achieve any lasting resolution. Even the practical de-escalation measures that resulted from these talks quickly faded with new rounds of military escalation.

The recent talks have been unique in that they have been less secretive, with both sides keen to publicize some aspects of their exchanges while staying vague on details. This suits the Houthis quite well – rumors of talks with Riyadh have the potential to destabilize the relationship between Riyadh and its local allies while increasing their own political legitimacy by presenting itself on equal footing with their Saudi and Emirati opponents. Aware of the Saudi's overriding need for a truce that brings them security, the Houthis can raise their demands, including for financial benefits such as the inclusion of military personnel in the civil servant payroll and a share of oil export revenues without having to commit to a comprehensive settlement.

Riyadh, on the other hand, needs direct communication with the Houthis to compensate for the decline in the effectiveness of UN and Omani mediation efforts, as well as to limit the level of escalation of the ground in Yemen. The current tension between Riyadh and Washington [over oil policy](#) and the war in Ukraine, in which a major flare-up in the conflict in Yemen could present US critics of Saudi Arabia with another line of attack, also incentivizes Saudi Arabia to pursue deescalation.

Indeed, the international environment and local balance of power are no longer favorable to a large-scale military campaign by the Saudi-led coalition to pressure the Houthis. This makes it now more feasible for Saudi Arabia to go into talks with the Houthis on security arrangements such as halting ground operations in Yemen, stopping cross-border air attacks, and agreeing on a prisoner exchange. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has allowed news of the talks to leak to in part to embarrass the Houthis before their support base and observe if any internal contradictions appear within their power structures as a result.

The Saudi-Houthi talks must also be seen within the context of [the going Saudi-Iranian dialogue](#), despite [the increased hostility toward Saudi Arabia](#) displayed by some commanders in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps related to the ongoing protests in Iran. The informal

Saudi-Houthi channels of communication have operated in parallel with the Iraqi initiative for rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran that began after the attack on Saudi oil facilities in September 2019. Current talks are unlikely to lead the Houthi movement to distance itself from Tehran or forswear military options since they are taking place with significant Iranian coordination.

Indeed, the Houthi policy of escalation and de-escalation can be understood through the lens of Iranian foreign policy and its dual diplomatic and militaristic tracks, which include on the one hand de-escalating in Yemen, conducting a dialogue with Saudi Arabia, and discussing the return to the nuclear agreement with the West, and on the other using paramilitary proxies across the region to dominate and escalate when needed on the ground in order to pressure the international community. For their part, the Houthis have cleverly adapted to these Iranian dynamics: they are in talks with Saudi Arabia, but at the same time conducting strikes against ports on Yemen's southern coast. When the political balance of power in Iran shifts decisively in favor of one of the two approaches, the Houthis will also likely change their behavior accordingly.

Islah and the UAE Begin Dialogue

Exploratory talks are taking place on another track in Yemen for the same reasons. At the beginning of November 2022, the two members of the PLC affiliated with the Islamist Islah party, Abdullah al-Alimi and Sultan al-Aradah, traveled to Abu Dhabi where they met with several high-level officials to try and manage the tense relationship between the UAE and Islah. Previously, Al-Aradah had visited in 2015 as a personal friend of Mohammed bin Zayed, who was then de facto president before officially assuming the position earlier this year. In 2018, Mohammed al-Yadoumi, head of the Islah's Shura Council, and party secretary-general Abdelwahab al-Ansi, also had talks with Bin Zayed. Both the previous visits and current talks took place following Saudi pressure to deescalate infighting among the anti-Houthi camp and unify ranks to deal with pressing issues. In 2018, deescalation was necessary in preparation for battles on the West Coast, which involved operations spearheaded by UAE-backed forces to capture Hudaydah. Today, deescalation is needed to make sure that Hadramawt stays neutral in the conflict between Islah and Abu Dhabi's primary Yemeni ally, the STC.

Islah responded quickly to the chance to talk with the UAE after the balance of strategic power nominally government-held areas tipped toward UAE-backed groups – most notably, the Giants Brigades, the National Resistance forces, and the STC. Saudi Arabia and the UAE had also come to a basic understanding on curbing the influence of Islah due to its military failures in combating the Houthis and political failures when it was the primary party in government under former President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

Since losing in the Battle for Shabwa, Islah's leadership has adopted a defensive strategy that leans more toward deescalation in order to maintain what remains of their political and military influence within government structures. The party is maneuvering in the space available to it to repair its shaky alliance with Saudi Arabia and to avoid more confrontations with Abu Dhabi. The UAE has opened the door once again to a group it considers an arch-rival, agreeing with Riyadh on decreasing tensions between their local allies, even if temporarily. Both countries have also recently fulfilled large **financial pledges** to the government to prop up the PLC and withstand the economic impact of the Houthi port attacks.

The talks in Abu Dhabi could indeed lead to a temporary de-escalation for two reasons. Firstly, there is the political and security deadlock between Islah and the STC, since neither side has been able to score a major win in the Hadramawt Valley. Second, there is a Saudi-UAE understanding on the need to see normalized relations between Islah and the STC, albeit within a framework of reducing the influence of the former and increasing the influence of the latter within the government's new structures, such as the PLC. The December 6 PLC decree replacing the chief of staff and de facto leader of the 1st Military Region based in Seyoun, Yahya Abu Awja, can be seen in this light.

It remains improbable that the talks will produce profound change in the political dynamics on the government side. The relationship between Islah and Abu Dhabi and its local allies will continue to be one of competition and hostility, and the rounds of mutual escalation could continue in Hadramawt. If there is any easing up of direct Saudi pressure on both sides, then escalation will likely increase once more.

Deadlock Likely to Continue

In short, news of Saudi-Houthi dialogue and a UAE-Islah talk could lead to a conclusion that the two major supporters of the government are trying to settle their conflicts in Yemen quickly and unilaterally while bypassing their local allies – Riyadh talks to the Houthis, ignoring the PLC; the UAE talks to Islah, ignoring the STC. But when seen in their broader context, these dialogues conform to the traditional pattern of political maneuvering used by local and regional actors involved in Yemen throughout eight years of war. What these maneuvers in fact indicate is a state of significant deadlock rather than new pathways to resolving crises.

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A Yemeni football fan displays the flags of Yemen and Saudi Arabia at a watch event for the Saudi Arabia-Poland match at Al-Tadawn cafe in Taiz city on November 26, 2022. // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al Basha

Photo Essay

Yemen Experiences the Magic of the World Cup

The FIFA 2022 Men's World Cup began in Doha, Qatar, on November 20. Yemenis across the country came together to show their love for football and watch the first World Cup held in the Arab World.



A crowd gathers to watch the World Cup at the Al-Hafrah roundabout in Hudaydah city on November 26, 2022. Fans use a projector and a man's headscarf (Al-Shal) to view the match. // Sana'a Center photo by Ghader Murad



Football fans gather around a television set up street-side in Taiz city to watch the World Cup on November 26, 2022. // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al Basha



Fans gather in Al-Mansoura district in Aden for a World Cup watch party on November 21, 2022 // Sana'a Center photo by Akram Habtoor



Football fans gather around a television set up in Aden's Crater district for the Netherlands vs Senegal World Cup match on November 21, 2022. // Sana'a Center photo by Rajeh Al Aomary

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