

# The Yemen Review

SEPTEMBER 2019



## ARAMCO'S ASHOURA



## The Yemen Review

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

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

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

---

### COVER PHOTO:

*Following a Houthi directive, Ashoura commemorations were held in the Yemeni capital Sana'a on the Airport Road on September 10, as well as in other areas under the group's control. //Photo credit: Asem Alposi*

---

### The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

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



# CONTENTS

---

<b>The Sana'a Center Editorial</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Brinksmanship of a SAFER Disaster</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Saudi Aramco Attack Inflames Regional Tensions; Partial Cease-Fire Follows in Yemen</b>	<b>7</b>
• Attack on Saudi Oil Facility Halves Crude Output, Stokes Regional Tensions	7
• Tenuous Cease-Fire Takes Hold between Saudi Arabia and Houthis	10
• Houthi Authorities in Sana'a Release Hundreds of Prisoners	11
<b>Houthi Forces Flex Battlefield Prowess</b>	<b>12</b>
• Houthis Broadcast Images of Captured Soldiers, Military Equipment	12
• Renewed Clashes in Hudaydah	13
<b>STC, GoY Continue Power Struggle Over South Yemen</b>	<b>14</b>
• Negotiations Fail to Launch After Hadi Rejects Saudi Reconciliation Proposal	14
• STC and Government Forces Continue Skirmishes in the South	15
<b>Energy and Environment</b>	<b>17</b>
• Houthis Bar UN Inspectors from Red Sea Oil Terminal; Report Foresees Devastating Impacts Spill Could Have on Yemen	17
<b>Military and Security Developments</b>	<b>20</b>
• AQAP vs Daesh Redux and Al-Qaeda's Prisoner Exchange with the Houthis	20
• String of Unclaimed Bombings Hit Hadramawt	20
• Hadi Appoints New Foreign and Finance Ministers	22
• Political Developments in Brief:	22
<b>Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments</b>	<b>23</b>
• In Focus: A Yemeni Travel Odyssey – Unpredictable Airports and Risky Roads	23
• Other Military and Security Developments in Brief:	24
<b>Political Developments</b>	<b>24</b>
• Houthi Authorities Seize Assets of Government MPs, Add to Shura Council	24
• UNICEF: Fighting, Poverty, No Teacher Salaries Make for Rough Start to School Year	27
• UN Human Rights Council Renews Mandate for Experts to Continue Investigations	28
• Report: Coalition Shows Disregard for Civilians in Airstrike Policies	28
• Airstrikes on Mosque, House Kill at Least 22; Several Children Among Casualties	30
• Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments in Brief	30
<b>Economic Developments</b>	<b>31</b>
• Central Bank in Sana'a Suspends Operations for Six Money Transfer Networks	31
• Hadi Appoints Yet Another Central Bank Governor	32
• New Fuel Crisis Causes Price Spikes	32
• Hadramawt Temporarily Suspends Glencore Crude Exports, Secures GoY Payment	33
• Economic Developments in Brief	34
<b>At the United Nations</b>	<b>34</b>
• World Leaders Touch Upon Yemen Crisis at UN General Assembly	34
• UN Special Envoy Briefs the Security Council	35
• The UN Special Envoy's Shuttle Diplomacy	36
• Developments at the United Nations in Brief	36



# The Sana'a Center Editorial

## The Brinksmanship of a SAFER Disaster

It is sadly common for belligerents to show wanton disregard for the health and welfare of civilian populations during war. What makes the warring parties in Yemen exceptional in this regard is the sheer scale of devastation they are willing to visit upon their fellow Yemenis in the pursuit of relatively trivial gains.

As the Sana'a Center reported in May, there is a decrepit oil terminal moored in the Red Sea offshore of Hudaydah governorate loaded with more than a million barrels of crude aboard. Since the onboard ventilation system failed four years ago aboard the FSO SAFER – an oil tanker that has acted as a marine export terminal since the 1980s – highly explosive gases emitted from the oil have likely been building up in the holding tanks, effectively making the terminal a floating bomb. A limited-circulation international assessment made available to the Sana'a Center in September reported that a spill at the FSO SAFER terminal could be “potentially catastrophic ... with ecological, economic and human health impacts all highly likely to occur on a large scale.” Specifically, the report stated that within a week of a spill some 500,000 Yemenis could be affected, with food, fuel and water supplies compromised, the fishing industry crippled and pollutants spread down the coast; in the event of an explosion or fire, some 9 million Yemenis could be left breathing the toxic fumes.

The risk posed by FSO SAFER, however, has been fodder for brinkmanship between the armed Houthi movement and the internationally recognized Yemeni government, with the most important stumbling block being how to divide revenues from any potential sale of the oil once it is offloaded, estimated at some \$80 million. Approaching the terminal requires the Houthis' permission, as it is anchored off of their territory. The UN has been attempting to negotiate this permission in order to assess the vessel's condition and determine how to secure its cargo. In August, however, the Houthi leadership reneged on a commitment to allow the UN assessment to begin. Senior Houthi officials, speaking with the Sana'a Center in September, said they were willing to have the oil offloaded, but only on the precondition that an agreement were already in place regarding revenues from its sale.

The Houthis are apprehensive that if a UN assessment found there was an urgent need to remove the oil, they would be forced to allow the oil to be offloaded without a deal in place. There is, however, an avenue to resolve the situation and mitigate the risk: have the funds from the oil sale deposited in a bank account overseen by the UN, or another neutral third party. The UN-negotiated Hudaydah agreement laid out a model for using revenues from that port to pay Yemeni civil servants, many of whom haven't received a regular salary since 2016; a similar model could be used to channel funds generated from the sale of the FSO SAFER oil to pay the country's public employees.

This compromise should be acceptable to both the Houthis and the Yemeni government, if the appropriate diplomatic pressure is brought to bear. The Yemeni government has never been more dependent on Saudi Arabia, having been routed from its interim capital of Aden in an August coup; the Houthi leadership, meanwhile, entered into a tenuous cease-fire and de-escalation process with Riyadh in September, which is far more of a priority than the FSO SAFER. This places Saudi Arabia in a key position with both necessary parties to push for a deal on the oil terminal. Given Saudi Arabia's multi-billion dollar infrastructure investments along its Red Sea Coast, which would be impacted by any spill at FSO SAFER, it also has an incentive to see the situation defused. The UN and other international actors similarly have an incentive to encourage Riyadh in this direction and avert a possible environmental catastrophe.

## Saudi Aramco Attack Inflames Regional Tensions; Partial Cease-Fire Follows in Yemen

### *Attack on Saudi Oil Facility Halves Crude Output, Stokes Regional Tensions*

Attacks on two Saudi oil facilities in mid-September knocked more than 5 percent of the world's crude production offline, sending oil prices soaring and further stoking tension in the Gulf. The Houthis claimed to have carried out the operation on state-run oil giant Saudi Aramco, though Saudi Arabia, the United States, and European powers have blamed Iran for the attacks. While concerns of a resulting military conflict that could engulf Yemen had not materialized by month's end, the attacks are the most escalatory development in the Gulf since the ramp-up in tensions earlier this year.

On September 14, Saudi state media said that drones ignited fires at Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq processing plant and Khurais oilfield, both located in the kingdom's Eastern Province.<sup>[1]</sup> Aramco teams "controlled the two fires and limited them from spreading," according to the Saudi Interior Ministry.<sup>[2]</sup> Footage from Abqaiq — the world's largest facility of its kind — showed huge fires, clouds of smoke billowing from the plant and the sound of explosions.<sup>[3]</sup> The attacks cut the kingdom's oil output by half — 5.7 million barrels per day — amounting to more than 5 percent of the world's daily oil supply.<sup>[4]</sup> Brent Crude prices ended 15 percent higher at the end of the first day of trading after the attacks — the largest dollar increase since 2008 and the biggest one-day percentage jump in just over 30 years.<sup>[5]</sup>

Hours after the attack, the Houthis claimed responsibility, saying they had bombed the facilities using 10 drones with the assistance of operatives inside Saudi Arabia. They said the attack was a response to Riyadh's intervention in Yemen.<sup>[6]</sup> Members of the UN panel of experts monitoring sanctions on Yemen and Iran traveled to Saudi Arabia days after the attack to carry out investigations, though no results have been released as the time of writing.<sup>[7]</sup> France also sent a team of investigators at the request of Saudi Arabia.<sup>[8]</sup>

[1] "Two fires in two Aramco plants in Abqaiq and Khurais under control," Saudi Press Agency, September 14, 2019, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1968903>.

[2] Ibid.

[3] "Saudi Arabia: major fire at world's largest oil refinery after drone attack," Guardian News YouTube Channel, September 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz58GyPoY3o>.

[4] "Attacks on Saudi oil facilities knock out half the kingdom's supply," Reuters, September 14, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-fire/attacks-on-saudi-oil-facilities-knock-out-half-the-kingdoms-supply-idUSKCN1VZ01N>.

[5] Sheela Tobben, "Oil Prices Jump Most on Record After Saudi Arabia Strike," Bloomberg, September 16, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-15/oil-prices-jump-19-after-attack-cuts-saudi-arabian-supplies>.

[6] "Operation 'Balance of Deterrence II' bombs oil refineries in Abqaiq and Khurais, the far east of Saudi Arabia," Al Masirah, September 14, 2019, [https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=44831&cat\\_id=3](https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=44831&cat_id=3).

[7] Michelle Nichols and Humeyra Pamuk, "Saudi Arabia consults allies on oil attack, awaits result of investigation: official," Reuters, September 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-un/saudi-arabia-consults-allies-on-oil-attack-awaits-result-of-investigation-official-idUSKBN1WA1T9>.

[8] "France sending experts to investigate Saudi oil attack: Elysee," Reuters, September 18, 2019, <https://www>.



The attack came as Saudi Aramco was in the final stages of preparing for its much-anticipated listing on the Riyadh stock exchange, until recently slated for November and which some analysts have said could be the largest initial public offering (IPO) in history.<sup>[9]</sup> Following the attacks Aramco's chairman said the IPO would go ahead within the year, its timing being dependent only on market conditions.<sup>[10][11]</sup> By October 3, Saudi Arabia said it had restored oil output to pre-attack levels.<sup>[12]</sup> Oil prices fell after the announcement. Days earlier, rating agency Fitch downgraded Saudi Arabia from A+ to A, citing geopolitical tensions in the Gulf and the vulnerability of Saudi infrastructure to future attacks as reasons for the change.<sup>[13][14]</sup>

Throughout the conflict, the Houthis have targeted Saudi Arabia using missiles and — increasingly this year — armed drones. These attacks have generally caused limited material damage but have at times resulted in civilian deaths — most recently in June, when a ballistic missile strike on Abha airport in southwestern Saudi Arabia killed one and injured 21 others. However, while Houthi forces have claimed responsibility for numerous large operations, their culpability has often not been verified, including the August attack on Shaybah oilfield, a drone attack on a Saudi oil pipeline in May, and a June 2018 missile strike on Abu Dhabi airport.

The United States and Saudi Arabia quickly dismissed the Houthis' claim of the September 14 attacks, saying Iran was responsible.<sup>[15][16]</sup> A US official said the government believes the attacks were launched from southwestern Iran, though no intelligence detailing Iran's culpability has been made public.<sup>[17]</sup> Coalition spokesman Lt. Col. Turki al-Maliki said cruise missiles as well as drones of Iranian origin were used in the attacks and originated from the north — though he stopped short of saying that they came from Iran. Similarly, the UK, France and Germany issued a joint statement on September 23 that, while also stopping short of claiming the attacks originated from Iran, said that Iran was responsible for them, given that “there is no

[reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-macron/france-sending-experts-to-investigate-saudi-oil-attack-elysee-idUSKBN1W30IH](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks-macron/france-sending-experts-to-investigate-saudi-oil-attack-elysee-idUSKBN1W30IH).

[9] “Saudi Aramco is gearing up for what could be the largest IPO ever. Here are 10 public offerings its massive listing would dwarf,” Business Insider, September 12, 2019, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/10-largest-ipos-in-history-ranked-by-total-proceeds-2019-9-1028521587>.

[10] “Saudi Aramco IPO unlikely to happen this year after oil attacks: sources,” Reuters, September 24, 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-aramco-ipo-timing/saudi-aramco-ipo-unlikely-to-happen-this-year-after-oil-attacks-sources-idUKKBN1W91DA>.

[11] “Saudi Arabia to restore oil output fully by end of September: energy minister,” Reuters, September 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-energy-production-idUSKBN1W2291>.

[12] “Saudi Arabia restores full oil output after attacks, focused on Aramco IPO,” Reuters, October 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-oil-opec-sarabia/saudi-has-restored-oil-output-after-attacks-focused-on-aramco-ipo-energy-minister-idUSKBN1W10NR>.

[13] “Brent Oil Falls Below \$60 After Saudis Restore Production,” Oil Price, September 3, 2019, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Brent-Oil-Falls-Below-60-After-Saudis-Restore-Production.html>.

[14] “Fitch Downgrades Saudi Arabia to ‘A’; Outlook Stable,” Fitch Ratings, September 20, 2019, <https://www.fitchratings.com/site/pr/10091114>.

[15] Mike Pompeo Twitter post, September 14, 2019, <https://twitter.com/secpompeo/status/1172963090746548225>.

[16] “Coalition Spokesman: Initial Operational Indicators in Terror Targeting of Abqaiq and Khurais Oil Plants Confirms Weapons Used are Iranian,” Saudi Press Agency, September 16, 2019, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=ar&newsid=1969944#1969944>.

[17] Phil Stewart and Parisa Hafezi, “Saudi oil attacks came from southwest Iran, U.S. official says, raising tensions,” Reuters, September 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco/saudi-oil-attacks-came-from-southwest-iran-u-s-official-says-raising-tensions-idUSKBN1W2184>.

other plausible explanation.”<sup>[18]</sup> The statement added that the countries still awaited the results of investigations to establish the details.” Iran has denied the accusations, calling the attacks a response by the “Yemeni people” to the Saudi intervention in the country’s conflict.<sup>[19]</sup>

The European powers’ joint statement came during the UN General Assembly meeting, where the remaining signatories to the Iran nuclear deal (unsuccessfully) urged the US and Iranian presidents to meet. Tensions between the two countries escalated following the US withdrawal from the deal last year and the reimposition of sanctions on the Islamic Republic. This animosity approached the boiling point in recent months with the US deploying additional troops and an aircraft carrier to the region following attacks on vessels in the region’s waterways, which Washington blamed on Iran. Europe is also desperate to save the nuclear deal after Tehran’s recent breaches of the agreement. Iran reneged on parts of the deal in July, then, on September 6, lifted all limitations on centrifuge research and development – the devices used for uranium enrichment that were subject to restrictions.<sup>[20]</sup> Though the Europeans have said they remain committed to the deal, the US withdrawal ended sanctions relief – the key incentive for Iran to sign up in the first place. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson meanwhile called for a new “Trump deal” with Iran in his speech to the General Assembly, saying that the current agreement had “many defects.”<sup>[21]</sup>

The rejection of the Houthis’ claims appears to have ruled out an immediate military retaliation by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. However, the coalition’s and Washington’s characterization of the Houthis as an Iranian proxy means that Yemen would likely be pulled into any US-Iran military confrontation. While US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the attacks an “act of war,” President Donald Trump did not appear wedded to military action.<sup>[22]</sup> After saying that the US was “locked and loaded” to respond to the attacks, Trump said that he “would like not to have war.”<sup>[23][24]</sup> US officials told the Washington Post that the Pentagon has urged

---

[18] “Joint statement by the heads of state and government of France, Germany and the United Kingdom,” Prime Minister’s Office, 10 Downing Street, September 23, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-the-heads-of-state-and-government-of-france-germany-and-the-united-kingdom>.

[19] “Iran’s Rouhani says Aramco attacks were a reciprocal response by Yemen,” Reuters, September 16, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-iran-rouhani/irans-rouhani-says-aramco-attacks-were-a-reciprocal-response-by-yemen-idUSKBN1W12AE>.

[20] “Iran nuclear deal: Tehran to develop centrifuges for uranium enrichment,” BBC News, September 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49586508>.

[21] “Boris Johnson calls for new ‘Trump deal’ with Iran,” Politico, September 24, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/boris-johnson-calls-for-new-donald-trump-deal-with-iran/>.

[22] Stephen Kalin, “Pompeo says attack was ‘act of war’ on Saudi Arabia, seeks coalition,” Reuters, September 18, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-pompeo/pompeo-says-attack-was-act-of-war-on-saudi-arabia-seeks-coalition-idUSKBN1W32AG>.

[23] Roberta Rampton and Asrhad Mohammed, “U.S. blames Iran for Saudi oil attack, Trump says ‘locked and loaded,’” Reuters, September 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco-attacks/evidence-from-saudi-oil-attack-points-to-iran-not-yemen-u-s-official-idUSKBN1W00SA>.

[24] Steve Holland Rania El Gamal, “Trump says he does not want war after attack on Saudi oil facilities,” Reuters, September 16, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-aramco/trump-says-he-does-not-want-war-after-attack-on-saudi-oil-facilities-idUSKBN1W10X8>.



caution to prevent a military escalation in the region,<sup>[25][26]</sup> while a statement from the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives warned against the use of force without congressional approval. Even the executive branch itself is torn between the strong representation of Iran hawks, led by Pompeo, in Trump's administration and the president's election campaign platform, which promised a wind-down of military intervention in the Middle East.

Thus far, the US has announced the deployment of an additional 200 troops and air defense systems to Saudi Arabia, as well as new sanctions on Iran's central bank and sovereign wealth fund.<sup>[27][28]</sup> Meanwhile, Rouhani and Trump left the UN General Assembly without a face-to-face meeting, despite European efforts to foster a diplomatic solution.

### ***Tenuous Cease-Fire Takes Hold between Saudi Arabia and Houthis***

A limited cease-fire between the armed Houthi movement and the Saudi-led coalition emerged in the second half of September with the head of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat announcing a unilateral halt to cross-border drone and ballistic missile operations targeting Saudi Arabia on September 20 and calling for Riyadh to respond in kind. Senior Houthi officials and international diplomats confirmed to the Sana'a Center that Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman and Al-Mashat then spoke by telephone, agreeing to try to build on the cease-fire, possibly extending it to other aspects of the conflict. The Houthis, they said, agreed to tone down their anti-Saudi rhetoric in the media.<sup>[29]</sup>

Al-Mashat, during his speech on Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV, also called for negotiations on a "comprehensive national reconciliation that does not exclude anyone" to end the conflict in Yemen.<sup>[30]</sup> On September 27, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported that Saudi Arabia had agreed to a limited cease-fire covering four areas of the country – with the capital region Sana'a noted explicitly.<sup>[31]</sup> However, Mohammed Ali al-

[25] Missy Ryan and Dan Lamothe, "Pentagon urges restraint after strikes on Saudi oil facilities," The Washington Post, September 16, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-urges-restraint-as-administration-blames-iran-for-saudi-strikes/2019/09/16/58743ae4-d8a5-11e9-adff-79254db7f766\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-urges-restraint-as-administration-blames-iran-for-saudi-strikes/2019/09/16/58743ae4-d8a5-11e9-adff-79254db7f766_story.html).

[26] "Engel Statement on the Situation in Saudi Arabia," US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 17, 2019, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-releases?ID=52EE1D6C-B11E-4F87-93FE-7ACD32BD10CB>.

[27] Aimie Willians, "US to send 200 troops and missile system to Saudi Arabia," Financial Times, September 27, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/003fd2aa-e0a9-11e9-9743-db5a370481bc>.

[28] Nicole Gauette, Kevin Liptak and Kylie Atwood, "US to send troops and air and missile defense to Saudi Arabia as Trump announces new Iran sanctions after oil attack," CNN, September 21, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/20/politics/trump-announces-iran-sanctions/index.html>.

[29] Sana'a Center interviews with unidentified senior Houthi officials and international diplomats in September 2019.

[30] "Yemen's Houthis propose to Saudi Arabia that both sides halt missile strikes," Reuters, September 20, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-saudi/yemens-houthis-say-will-cease-targeting-saudi-arabia-if-other-side-does-same-al-masirah-idUSKBN1W5261>.

[31] Dion Nisseumbaum, "Saudi Arabia Agrees to Partial Cease-Fire in War-Shattered Yemen," The Wall Street

Houthi, head of the Revolutionary Committee characterized reports of the cease-fire as rumors and said the group would only accept “an all-out stop to aggression and the lifting of the economic blockade.”<sup>[32]</sup>

While the Houthis conducted several cross-border missile and drone attacks into southern Saudi Arabia targeting Najran airport and King Khalid Air Base in Khamis Mushayt at the beginning of the month, no operations have taken place since the Aramco attacks.

While it is unclear the degree to which both sides remain committed to the partial cease-fire, it nonetheless represents an important new initiative to deescalate the conflict in Yemen. The claimed halt in hostilities is the most significant since the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Houthis to cease fighting and begin a demilitarization process in the port city of Hudaydah. During an interview aired on the US news program 60 Minutes on September 29, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said the kingdom was open to all initiatives for a political solution in Yemen.<sup>[33]</sup> Striking a more diplomatic tone compared to reports of the initial Saudi agreement to the cease-fire, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi labeled Bin Salman’s comments as “a positive step to push for a more serious political dialogue.”<sup>[34]</sup>

On September 30, Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea claimed that the Saudi-led coalition had conducted 39 airstrikes during a 12-hour-period in Sa’ada, Al-Jawf, and Hajjah governorates, though without characterizing it as a cease-fire violation.<sup>[35]</sup>

### ***Houthi Authorities in Sana’a Release Hundreds of Prisoners***

Following their cease-fire proposal, Houthi authorities made another conciliatory gesture on September 30 by unilaterally releasing hundreds of prisoners.<sup>[36]</sup>

In a televised statement, the Houthi National Committee for Prisoners’ Affairs (NCPA) said 350 detainees were being released, including three Saudi nationals, in the capital, Sana’a.<sup>[37]</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which facilitated the release, said that 290 Yemenis had been freed from Houthi custody

---

Journal, September 27, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-agrees-partial-cess-fire-in-war-shattered-yemen-11569580029>.

[32] “Yemen’s Houthis dismiss reports of limited cease-fire deal with Saudi Arabia,” Xinhua, September 28, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/28/c\\_138429448.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/28/c_138429448.htm).

[33] Mohammed Hatem, Arsalan Shahla, and Hailey Waller, “Houthis, Saudi Prince Weight in As Efforts to End Yemen War Grow,” Bloomberg, September 30, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-30/iran-says-saudis-should-end-yemen-strikes-to-ease-tensions>.

[34] Mohammed al-Houthi, Twitter post, “Nora O’Donnell: You say tonight you want to negotiate an end to the war in Yemen?” [AR], September 30, 2019, [https://twitter.com/Moh\\_Alhouthi/status/1178569668895891457](https://twitter.com/Moh_Alhouthi/status/1178569668895891457).

[35] Yahya Sarea, “Aggression warplanes launched more than 39 airstrikes...” [AR], Twitter post, September 30, 2019, <https://twitter.com/army21ye/status/1178721698016833537>.

[36] “Yemen’s Houthis unilaterally release hundreds of detainees,” Reuters, September 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemens-houthis-to-release-350-prisoners-including-three-saudis-al-masirah-tv-idUSKBN1WF0RN>.

[37] “Sana’a announces a unilateral initiative to release 350 prisoners, including 3 Saudis,” Al-Masirah, September 30, 2019, [https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=45476&cat\\_id=3](https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=45476&cat_id=3).

and had returned to their homes.<sup>[38]</sup>

According to Houthi authorities, the released individuals came from a list drawn up as part of the planned prisoner exchange deal outlined in the Stockholm Agreement. Intended as a confidence-building measure, the proposal envisioned the release of around 7,000 prisoners from each side. However, despite exchanging proposed lists of names in January, the Houthi move is the first characterized as a step toward fulfilling what was agreed to in Sweden.<sup>[39]</sup>

## Houthi Forces Flex Battlefield Prowess

### *Houthis Broadcast Images of Captured Soldiers, Military Equipment*

Houthi authorities claimed on September 28 to have captured over 2,000 soldiers in an operation near the Saudi-Yemeni border. The statement said three government brigades had been destroyed in just 72 hours of fighting near the Saudi region of Najran and that “many Saudi commanders, officers and soldiers” were among the prisoners.<sup>[40]</sup>

The next day, Al-Masirah TV broadcast a press conference by Houthi spokesperson Yahya Sarea, during which he narrated alleged footage from what the Houthis had dubbed “Operation Victory from God,” which took place on August 25, contrary to widespread media reports dating it to just prior to the Houthis’ late September announcement. The videos showed attacks against armored vehicles, captured small arms as well as men in civilian clothing marching as apparent Houthi prisoners.<sup>[41]</sup> A Yemeni government source later confirmed that 200 soldiers had been killed in recent fighting in Sa’ada governorate and put the number of captured at 1,300 soldiers, including 280 wounded.<sup>[42]</sup> Meanwhile, Houthi defense minister Mohammed al-Atafi said that Houthi troops are undergoing training on the use of armored vehicles and will use the captured equipment and weapons in future battles.<sup>[43]</sup>

Government security officials who spoke with the Sana’a Center confirmed that the footage aired by the Houthis was from battles that took place around the Kitaf front in Sa’ada governorate, near the border with Najran. Five government brigades had

[38] “Yemen: 290 detainees were released with the facilitation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC),” International Committee of the Red Cross, September 30, 2019, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/yemen-290-detainees-were-released-facilitation-international-committee-red-cross-icrc>.

[39] “Yemen’s Houthis unilaterally release hundreds of detainees,” Reuters, September 30, 2019.

[40] “Yemeni armed forces announce the defeat of three military brigades in the Najran axis” [ القوات المسلحة اليمنية ] [ تعلن إسقاط ثلاثة ألوية عسكرية بمحور نجران ], Saba News, September 28, 2019, <https://sabanews.net/ar/news3071860.htm>.

[41] “Press conference of the Armed Forces Speaker Brigadier General Yahya Sarea – Operation Victory from God” [المؤتمر الصحفي لمتحدث القوات المسلحة العميد يحيى سريع - عملية نصر من الله ], Al Masirah September 29, 2019, [https://almasirah.net/gallery/preview.php?file\\_id=30579](https://almasirah.net/gallery/preview.php?file_id=30579).

[42] “Soldiers killed, captured in Yemen rebel attack,” Asia Times, September 30, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/09/article/soldiers-killed-captured-in-yemen-rebel-attack/>.

[43] “Defense minister; equipment left by the enemy in the Najran front will be utilized” [وزير الدفاع: الآليات التي خلفها] [العدو بجبهة نجران سيتم الاستفادة منها ], Al Masirah, October 4, 2019, [https://almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=45626&cat\\_id=3](https://almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=45626&cat_id=3).



a presence in the theater: Al-Wahda Brigade, Al-Tahrir Brigade, Al-Tawhid Brigade, Al-Ezz Brigade, and Al-Fatah 84th Infantry Brigade. In late August, the 84th Brigade attacked the Houthis in the Abu Jabarah Valley area in an attempt to reach Houthi supply lines near Mount Anban. However, Houthi forces counter-attacked with reinforcements in an apparent planned trap, surrounding the government forces.<sup>[44]</sup> According to the government official, the fighting resulted in hundreds of casualties on both sides, including the deaths of two Houthi commanders, Haidar Qaid Haidar Qaid Haidar, known as Abu Abdullah Haidar, and colonel Mohammed Yahya Saleh al-Zahrour, known as Abu al-Hassanein.<sup>[45]</sup>

Senior Yemeni military leaders told the Sana'a Center that the captured fighters were from a brigade led by Radad al-Hashimi, a Salafi leader who received weapons and millions of dollars from Riyadh to recruit thousands of fighters from across Yemen via local agents. Al-Hashimi's recruits were paid 3,000 Saudi riyals per month, but received little military training or equipment. Al-Hashimi, who had no military experience, was introduced to the Saudis by Yemeni Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, senior Yemeni military sources told the Sana'a Center. Security sources knowledgeable about the brigades involved told the Sana'a Center that the government troops' failure resulted from entering the battle without sufficient prior military planning.

### *Renewed Clashes in Hudaydah*

Fighting occurred along several fronts in Hudaydah during the month of September. In Hudaydah City, there were almost daily reports of shelling, with 11 civilians killed on September 13.<sup>[46]</sup> On September 19, the Saudi-led coalition said it had intercepted an unmanned boat packed with explosives offshore from the Red Sea port city. In response, coalition airstrikes hit positions north of the city, which they claimed were used for assembling booby-trapped boats and mines. The Houthis said the strikes violated the cease-fire agreed to in the Stockholm Agreement.<sup>[47]</sup> On October 1, intense fighting took place in Hais district, while shelling was reported in Tahita and Duraihmi districts and inside Hudaydah City.<sup>[48]</sup>

[44] "What happened in Al-Kitaf? 9 points explain the facts and results of the biggest battles between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis" [ ما الذي حدث في كتاف والبقع؟ 9 نقاط تشرح بالفيديو وقائع ونتائج أكبر المعارك بين السعودية والحوثيين ], Al Jazeera, September 29, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2019/9/29/اليمن-السعودية-كتاف-والبقع-الحوثيون>.

[45] "Who is Abu Abdullah Haider, which Sanaa named after the first stages of the operation Victory from God" [ من هو " أبو عبدالله حيدر الذي اطلقت صنعاء اسمه على أولى مراحل عملية "نصر من الله" متحدث القوات المسلحة: أهداف المرحلة الثانية لعملية نصر من الله تمثلت في التقدم وتحرير مناطق واسعة ضمن ] [محور نجران], Saba News, October 2, 2019, <https://www.yemenipress.net/archives/166301>;

[46] "Yemen: Latest Developments" ACAPS, September 14, 2019, <https://www.acaps.org/country/yemen/crisis/complex-crisis>.

[47] Rabie Abu Zamil "Saudi-led coalition destroys 4 Houthi positions," Anadolu Agency, September 20, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/saudi-led-coalition-destroys-4-houthi-positions-/1589175>.

[48] "Fierce clashes in south Hodeidah and breaking the attack of Houthi militias" [مواجهات عنيفة في جنوب الحديدة وكسر] [ هجوم المليشيات الحوثية ], News Yemen, October 1, 2019, <https://www.newsyemen.net/news46363.html>.

## STC, GoY Continue Power Struggle Over South Yemen

### *Negotiations Fail to Launch After Hadi Rejects Saudi Reconciliation Proposal*

Saudi attempts to broker talks between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) showed little sign of progress in September. Saudi Arabia and the UAE called for reconciliation talks in August, shortly after the separatist STC staged a coup against the government in Aden, the government's interim capital. Both parties had agreed to take part in negotiations in Jeddah despite continuing clashes between the two in southern Yemen.<sup>[49]</sup> An STC delegation, led by council head Aiderous al-Zubaidi, arrived in Jeddah on September 4.<sup>[50]</sup> According to political sources in southern Yemen, Abdel Rahman al-Sheikh, a leading figure in the UAE-backed Security Belt forces, and Nasser Al-Khabji, a long-time southern secessionist leader, were also among the STC emissaries. Reuters reported that indirect talks began that day.<sup>[51]</sup> However, Yemeni government spokesperson Rageh Badi later denied to the Sana'a Center that any direct or indirect consultations had occurred.

On September 9, Saudi Arabia and the UAE issued a joint statement in which they welcomed the response of the Yemeni government and the STC to the proposed negotiations, labeling it “a major and positive step” toward resolving the current tensions in southern Yemen, and called for an immediate end to all armed confrontations.<sup>[52]</sup> The STC responded to the statement by expressing its readiness to attend the talks in Jeddah without preconditions.<sup>[53]</sup> According to a high-ranking Yemeni government official and international diplomats with knowledge of the Jeddah talks, Saudi Arabia attempted to break the deadlock by presenting a draft agreement to President Hadi that would return Aden to Yemeni government control in exchange for granting the STC official positions in the cabinet. The proposal was rejected outright by Hadi, who continued to cling to the demand made in August that the STC-aligned forces withdraw from all military bases seized during the fighting that month as a precondition before any dialogue could begin.<sup>[54]</sup>

[49] Mina Aldroubi, “UAE calls on Yemen government and STC to engage in Saudi-led dialogue,” The National, September 1, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/uae-calls-on-yemen-government-and-stc-to-engage-in-saudi-led-dialogue-1.904925>.

[50] Ali Mahmood, “Southern Transitional Council delegations arrives in Saudi Arabia for Yemen talks,” The National, September 4, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/southern-transitional-council-delegation-arrives-in-saudi-arabia-for-yemen-talks-1.906052>.

[51] “Yemen’s government starts indirect talks with southern separatists in Saudi Arabia: officials,” Reuters, September 4, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemens-govt-starts-indirect-talks-with-southern-separatists-in-saudi-arabia-officials-idUSKCN1VP1Q6>.

[52] “UAE and Saudi Arabia issue joint statement on Yemen,” Relief Web, September 9, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/uae-and-saudi-arabia-issue-joint-statement-yemen>.

[53] “The Southern Transitional Council welcomes the Saudi-UAE Joint Statement” [المجلس الانتقالي الجنوبي يُرحب بالبيان] [السعودي الإماراتي المشترك], STC Aden, September 9, 2019, <https://www.7adramout.net/almarshadalaraby/7161269/بالتفاصيلاندلاع-اشتباكات-في-حرم-مطار-صنعاء-الدولي>.

[54] “Yemeni gov’t demand withdrawal of separatist forces before Saudi-backed dialogue,” Xinhua Net, August 15, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/15/c\\_138309442.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/15/c_138309442.htm).

The proposed government shakeup would have seen the currently 30-member cabinet dramatically slimmed down in size. The STC would also be promised a seat at the table as part of the government delegation during any future peace talks. In return, Saudi-backed Salafi units within the Giants Brigades – currently based in Mokha on the Red Sea Coast – would deploy to Aden, and a government military unit loyal to president Hadi would assume control in Aden’s Ma’ashiq district to protect the presidential palace, which had served as the seat of the Yemeni government in the city. Importantly, Saudi Arabia assuming responsibility for overall security in interim capital would allow STC and government forces currently facing off in southern Yemen to be redeployed to the frontlines against the Houthis.

Since Hadi rejected to draft agreement, it was never presented to the STC delegation. Sources said the agreement was meant to satisfy the STC’s demand for an official role in the Yemeni government as part of any reconciliation agreement. The STC is also seeking positions in the local administrations of southern governorates. Given their current control of Aden and Lahj governorates, along with parts of Abyan, being granted an official governance role in places such as Shabwa, Hadramawt, and Al-Mahra would give the STC a presence and positions of authority across the former South Yemen.<sup>[55]</sup>

### ***STC and Government Forces Continue Skirmishes in the South***

Following fierce fighting in southern Yemen in August between the Southern Transitional Council and the Yemeni government — during which the separatist group seized the interim capital (see “The Southern Implosion – The Yemen Review, August 2019”) — both sides moved to consolidate their gains and advance in multiple theaters across the south, leading to sporadic violence.

On September 5, Qatar-based Al Jazeera TV reported that the UAE had delivered armored vehicles to STC-affiliated forces in Aden, while other troops aligned with the STC reinforced positions in Shaqra district in Abyan governorate.<sup>[56]</sup> Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia sent troops and armored vehicles to Zinjibar, Abyan’s capital city, and reinforced positions in Aden and Shabwa governorates.<sup>[57]</sup>

In Aden, STC-aligned security forces raided the homes of the former district police chief of Al-Bouraiqa, Khalid al-Alwani,<sup>[58]</sup> and the district police chief of Khor Maksar, Nasser Abbad,<sup>[59]</sup> arresting the latter, as well as the home of rival southern leader

[55] “What is happening behind the scenes in the Yemen talks,” Al Monitor, September 23, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/09/south-yemen-houthis-government-legitimate-uae-saudi.html>.

[56] Al Jazeera Arabic Twitter post, September 5, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AJArabic/status/1169588488942960641>.

[57] “Saudi Arabia boosts troop levels in south Yemen as tensions rise,” Reuters, September 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/saudi-arabia-boosts-troop-levels-in-south-yemen-as-tensions-rise-idUSKCN1VO1FA>.

[58] “Security force raids the house of former police chief Brega” [قوة أمنية تدهم منزل مدير شرطة البريقة السابق], Aden Ghad, September 3, 2019, <http://m.adengad.net/news/407173/>.

[59] “Security force raids the home of the police chief of Khor Maksar” [عاجل: قوة أمنية تدهم منزل مدير شرطة خور مكسر], Aden Ghad, September 3, 2019, <http://m.adengad.net/news/406980/>.



Mohammed al-Bukri in Dar Saad district.<sup>[60]</sup> Clashes between unidentified gunmen broke out in the city on September 12, beginning outside a security headquarters in Khor Maksar district and later spreading to Al-Araysh and Dar Saad.<sup>[61]</sup>

Abyan, which is divided between STC and government control, witnessed the highest frequency of clashes of any governorate in the south during the month. Security forces aligned with the government were ambushed in Lawder district on September 10, leading to multiple casualties.<sup>[62]</sup> On September 13, tribal militiamen attacked a checkpoint of STC-aligned forces in Al-Mahfad district, injuring an STC official.<sup>[63]</sup> This followed a statement in which Abyan tribes affirmed their support for the Hadi government and rejected the STC's moves in the south.<sup>[64]</sup> Later, on September 19, pro-STC forces attacked pro-government forces in Sharqa, causing the latter to withdraw.<sup>[65]</sup> The town had been reinforced by the government's 39th Armored Brigade earlier in the month.<sup>[66]</sup>

In neighboring Shabwa, STC-aligned forces attacked the home of Governor Mohammed Saleh bin Adio in the governorate capital Ataq, injuring three of the governor's bodyguards.<sup>[67]</sup> Meanwhile, militiamen from the Sabeha tribes, which had pledged to prevent the passage of any forces through their territory in Lahj governorate, clashed with STC-aligned forces that were moving to attack the government's 4th Jabali Infantry Brigade in neighboring Taiz governorate.<sup>[68]</sup>

[60] "Civilians wounded in an attack by the security belt forces on the house of the leader Mohammed Al-Bukri north of Aden" [إصابة 3 مدنيين في هجوم لقوات الحزام الأمني على منزل القيادي محمد البوكري شمال عدن] , Al Masdar, September 8, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/article/-شمال-البوكري-محمد-القيادي-محمدا-شمال-عدن>.

[61] "Explosions in Hadramout .. and armed clashes between mercenaries in Aden" [إصابة 3 مدنيين في هجوم لقوات الحزام] [إصابة 3 مدنيين في هجوم لقوات الحزام] , September 26, September 12, 2019, [https://26sep.net/news\\_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=162362](https://26sep.net/news_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=162362).

[62] "An armed ambush targets a security patrol in Abyan" [إصابة 3 مدنيين في هجوم لقواتكمين مسلح يستهدف طقم أممي بأبين] , Aden Ghad, September 11, 2019, <http://www.adengd.net/news/408575/>.

[63] "Gunmen attack transition forces in Abyan and injure a leader in the incident" [مسلحون يهاجمون قوات للانتقالي في أبين] [مسلحون يهاجمون قوات للانتقالي في أبين] [وإصابة قيادي في الحادثة] , Yemen Akhbar, September 13, 2019, <https://www.yemenakhbar.com/2111085>.

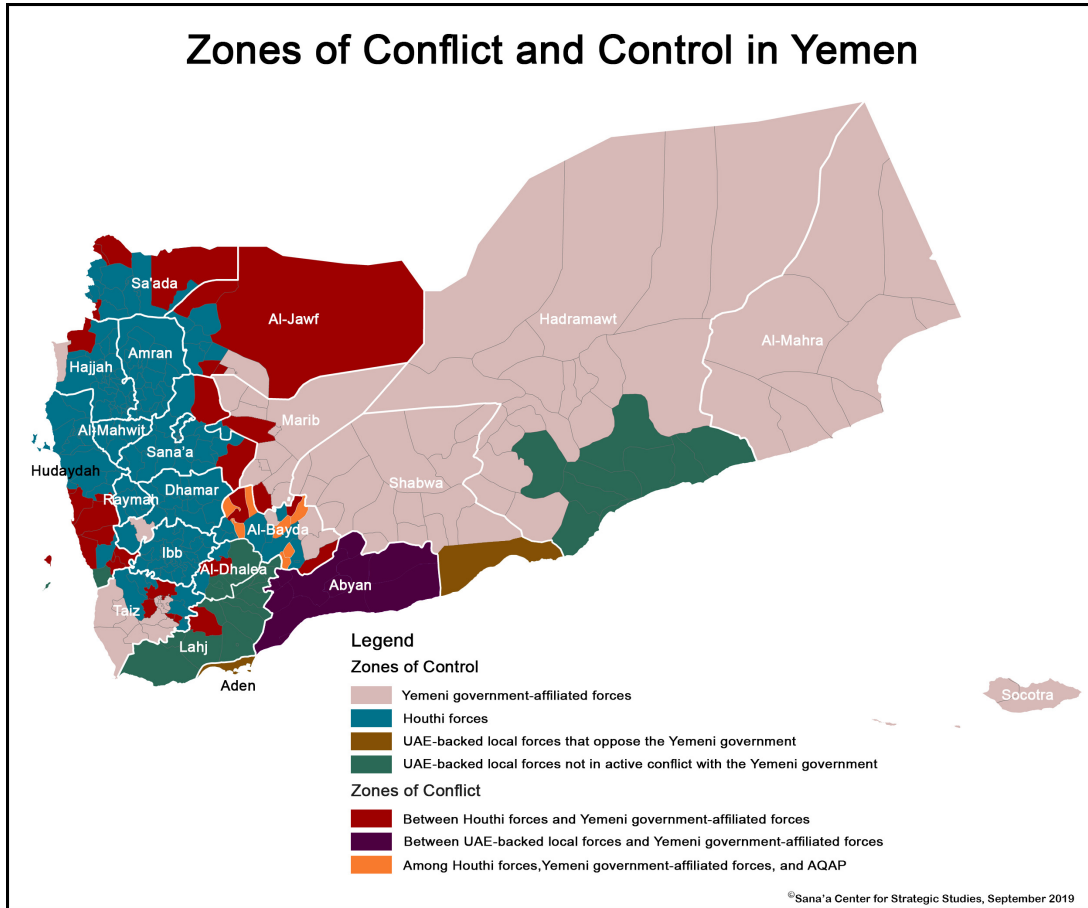
[64] "Preparations for a new round of confrontations .. Abyan tribes declare in support of the government" [تحضيرات] [لجولة مواجهات جديدة.. قبائل أبين تعلن التفير دعماً للحكومة] , Al Masdar Online, September 7, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171411>.

[65] "Large numbers of Hadi militias withdraw from Arqoub and Shaqra" [انسحاب أعداد كبيرة لميليشيات هادي من العرقوب] [انسحاب أعداد كبيرة لميليشيات هادي] [من العرقوب وشقرة] , Al Alam TV, September 19, 2019, <https://www.alalamtv.net/news/4444456/>.

[66] "The commander of the 39th Armored Brigade arrives in Shakra at the head of a military force and makes an important statement" [قائد اللواء 39 مدرع يصل إلى شقرة على رأس قوة عسكرية ويدلي بتصريح هام] , Aden Ghad, September 3, 2019, <http://adengd.net/news/407111/>.

[67] "Southern resistance targets the home of the governor of Shabwa" [المقاومة الجنوبية تستهدف منزل محافظ شبوة] [المقاومة الجنوبية تستهدف منزل محافظ شبوة] , Hadramawt Net, September 27, 2019, <https://www.7adramout.net/almashhadalaraby/7171545/-الجنوبية-الجنوبية-الجنوبية.html>.

[68] "The southern transition is moving towards Taiz to help the outlaws and the Sabeha tribes intervene," Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni, September 20, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/144681>.



## Energy and Environment

### *Houthis Bar UN Inspectors from Red Sea Oil Terminal; Report Foresees Devastating Impacts Spill Could Have on Yemen*

Houthi authorities reneged last-minute on an agreement to allow a UN team to assess a neglected oil terminal with enough crude oil aboard to cause an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea. This came as a new report warned that such an oil spill could compromise Yemen’s food, fuel and fresh-water supplies, cause respiratory illnesses, cripple the fishing industry and spread pollutants down the coast and through the air.

A spill at the FSO SAFER oil terminal off Ras Issa port in Hudaydah governorate “is potentially catastrophic... with ecological, economic and human health impacts all highly likely to occur on a large-scale,” according to a confidential international assessment that was obtained in September by the Sana’a Center.<sup>[69]</sup> The assessment presents worst-case scenarios should the converted tanker explode, rupture as it deteriorates or be damaged and sink, spilling all of its 1.14 million barrels of crude oil into the Red Sea.

[69] International assessment of the impact of an FSO SAFER spill obtained by the Sana’a Center, September 2019.

The report noted the most likely scenario is simply not yet known. In August, a UN team assembled in Djibouti with its equipment and ready to head out to assess the terminal had to be sent home without ever beginning its mission, Mark Lowcock, the UN's senior humanitarian affairs official, told the UN Security Council on September 16. Despite earlier agreeing to allow the UN team access to the terminal, Houthi authorities raised several objections as the August 27 planned start date approached, Lowcock said. He did not detail the Houthis' reasons for preventing the UN assessment, but said it became clear it was "highly unlikely" the issues could be resolved soon.<sup>[70]</sup> Senior Houthi officials told the Sana'a Center in September that they would only allow the UN inspection if the UN also pre-committed to fixing, on site, any issues that were identified. The Houthi apprehension was that the UN assessment would determine that there needed to be an emergency extraction of the oil, which would then create political pressure on the Houthis to allow that to happen and the Houthi leadership could no longer use the SAFER vessel for political and diplomatic leverage.

The international assessment found that a worst-case spill could severely impact port operations in Hudaydah and Mokha, affecting food and fuel imports, and could contaminate shipping routes near the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Desalination plants along the Red Sea, like the one near Al-Mokha in Taiz governorate, are susceptible to spills and the report said that if rendered inoperable, fresh-water supplies would be affected, while coral reef damage would harm the fishing industry. Oil on the water could severely contaminate 100 kilometers of Yemen's coastline. This would affect Hudaydah and Taiz governorates most but also further south toward Aden's Al-Mualla district, directly impacting more than 500,000 people as it would stretch along the coastline over the course of a week.<sup>[71]</sup>

A big concern is a fire or explosion aboard the tanker-terminal, which the assessment said would likely pollute the air across much of Yemen – affecting 9 million people – at levels up to 10 times above World Health Organization air quality guidelines. Beyond harming human health, increasing mortality rates and straining Yemen's already struggling healthcare system, the report said particulates falling to the ground could be expected to contaminate farmland, leading to poor yields in the cereal, vegetable and fruit crops of Hudaydah and Taiz governorates and also affecting qat and coffee-growing areas.<sup>[72]</sup> Though the assessment focused on Yemen, it noted air pollutants would likely also affect other Red Sea coastal countries, especially Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and Eritrea.<sup>[73]</sup>

Accessing the FSO SAFER terminal from shore quickly in the event of a spill or fire could be challenging, the report found, because of roadblocks – every 40-80 meters in some places – as well as checkpoints on main routes to the area. This also would make getting help to the highest-risk areas more difficult, it noted. Another concern in responding to a spill is that the terminal is believed to contain an extra-light crude

[70] "Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen," Transcript from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs via ReliefWeb, September 16, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-21>.

[71] "International assessment of the impact of an FSO SAFER spill obtained by the Sana'a Center, September 2019.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.



oil, which the analysts said evaporates to create a high-concentration of vapors that pose additional health hazards and could accidentally ignite.<sup>[74]</sup>

The terminal, owned by Yemen's national oil company, hasn't been used since 2015, and since then onboard generators have stopped functioning, raising concern that highly flammable gasses have been building up in the holding tanks. Houthi authorities and Yemeni government officials have been unable to agree on what to do with the oil onboard. (For more information, see 'An Environmental Apocalypse Looming on the Red Sea – The Yemen Review, May 2019')<sup>[75]</sup>

The assessment was partly based on projections that considered weather and sea conditions, and it noted the nature of a spill's impact could shift after September.

Lowcock told the UN Security Council that his office remains willing to assist, and could deploy again within three weeks if allowed, but he said that whether work can proceed is up to Houthi authorities.<sup>[76]</sup>

A separate report prepared by the Yemeni government's Environmental Protection Agency, dated September 26, also warned of the potential threat to Yemen's marine environment, biodiversity, fishing industry and trade posed by an oil leak at the FSO SAFER oil terminal.<sup>[77]</sup>

The government agency called for swift measures to prevent a disaster, including a technical evaluation of the terminal by a body assigned by the Yemeni government in coordination with the UN, and the deployment of maintenance teams. It also accused the Houthi movement of using the terminal as a bargaining chip.<sup>[78]</sup>

---

[74] Ibid.

[75] "An Environmental Apocalypse Looming on the Red Sea – The Yemen Review, May 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 6, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/7504>.

[76] Lowcock, "Under-Secretary-General for...," transcript, September 16, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-21>.

[77] "Report on the potential environmental risks of the floating oil reservoir (Safir)," Republic of Yemen, Ministry of Water and Environment, September 26, 2019.

[78] Ibid.

## Military and Security Developments

### *AQAP vs Daesh Redux and Al-Qaeda's Prisoner Exchange with the Houthis*

Throughout September, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continued its three-front war in Al-Bayda, carrying out attacks against the Houthis, the Islamic State group (Daesh), and UAE-backed proxy forces. By far, the vast majority of AQAP's attacks during the month of September targeted ISIS fighters in Qayfa, where the two jihadi organizations have been waging a hit-and-run war for the past 16 months. Much of this war has consisted of little more than shelling, sniper and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, and the occasional raid. September was more of the same: multiple claimed attacks and limited casualties.

Still, by all observable markers, AQAP looks to be the stronger organization. AQAP carried out by one count four times as many attacks as Daesh, and recent footage from AQAP has featured captured Daesh camps in Al-Bayda.<sup>[79]</sup>

On September 13, AQAP and Houthi fighters in Al-Bayda conducted a prisoner swap. AQAP received a reported 50 fighters and in exchange the Houthis received 65 prisoners.<sup>[80]</sup> One local source confirmed the exchange, but suggested that the number of prisoners swapped was much smaller than news reports. None of these prisoner exchanges, however, have contributed to any reduction in fighting. Three days after the prisoner exchange, AQAP carried out an IED attack on Houthi fighters.

Meanwhile, AQAP appeared to be taking advantage of the STC-Yemeni government tensions in the south to conduct further operations. Suspected AQAP militants attacked a UAE-backed Security Belt forces base<sup>[81]</sup> in the Akd region of central Abyan governorate on September 5 while suspected militants also seized territory in Al-Wuday district on September 8.<sup>[82]</sup>

### *String of Unclaimed Bombings Hit Hadramawt*

In Hadramawt governorate, coalition-backed Yemeni security forces raided and blew up the home of an alleged senior AQAP operative near Shibam on September 15, following attacks against Yemeni security forces in the town earlier in the month.<sup>[83]</sup> Unidentified militants detonated a car bomb outside of security forces' offices near

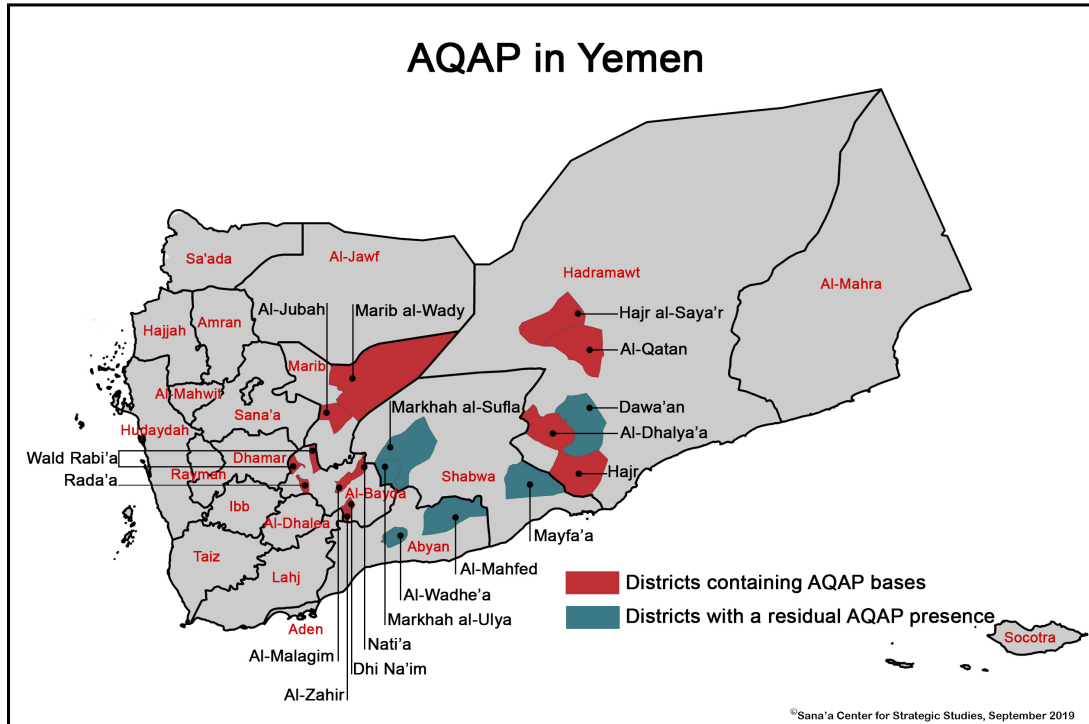
[79] Elisabeth Kendall Twitter post, September 29, 2019, [https://twitter.com/Dr\\_E\\_Kendall/status/1178307158003208193](https://twitter.com/Dr_E_Kendall/status/1178307158003208193).

[80] "Between 50 to 65 .. صفقة تبادل 50 مقابل 65.. أقاليم بين الحوثيين وأنصار الشريعة", Al Ayyam, September 19, 2019, <https://www.alayyam.info/news/7XT7706G-Y48T4R-1CA3>.

[81] "Al-Qaeda detonates the headquarters of the Security Belt in Abyan" [القاعدة يفجرون مقارا للحزام الأمني في أبين], Yemen Akhbar, September 5, 2019, <https://www.yemenakhbar.com/2101332>.

[82] "Al-Qaeda seize control of south Yemen district," Middle East Monitor, September 9, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190909-al-qaeda-seizes-control-of-southern-yemen-district>.

[83] "Joint forces blew up the home of a senior Al-Qaeda leader in Hadramawt," Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni, September 16, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/144330>.



Shibam Palace on September 12, injuring several people.<sup>[84]</sup> The attack in Shibam was followed the next day by a second unclaimed IED attack targeting members of the 23rd Mechanized Brigade.<sup>[85]</sup>

On September 19, Saudi military personnel were killed in two separate incidents in Hadramawt. A Saudi colonel in command of all coalition forces in Wadi Hadramawt was killed while attempting to defuse an IED found in a road in Shibam, according to a video of the incident seen by the Sana'a Center. Four soldiers were also killed in the explosion. Unknown militants also targeted a bus traveling near the Saudi border in the northern part of the governorate, killing two Saudi soldiers and three civilians.<sup>[86]</sup>

[84] "Explosions in Hadramawt .. and armed clashes between mercenaries in Aden" [إصابة 3 مدنيين في هجوم لقوات الحزام الأمني على منزل القيادي محمد البوكري شمال عدن], September 26, September 12, 2019, [https://26sep.net/news\\_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=162362](https://26sep.net/news_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=162362).

[85] "A soldier was killed and three others were injured in an explosion in Hadramawt governorate" Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni, September 13, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/144062>.

[86] "A soldier was killed and three others were injured in an explosion in Hadramawt governorate" [مقتل قائد عسكري سعودي برتبة عقيد وجنوده بحضرموت] Al Jazeera, September 20, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2019/9/19/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81>.

### *Other Military and Security Developments in Brief:*

- **September 12:** The Houthis released a statement claiming to have killed the suspected assassin of Ibrahim al-Houthi, brother of the movement's leader Abdelmalik, in an operation in government-held Marib governorate.<sup>[87]</sup> Al-Houthi was targeted in a set-up in Sana'a's Haddha district (see "Brother of Houthi leader killed in Yemen")<sup>[88]</sup>
- **September 17:** Local media reported that clashes had broken out at Sana'a International Airport between Houthi forces loyal to Revolutionary Committee chief Mohammed Ali al-Houthi and a rival Houthi commander over a large plot of land near the facility.<sup>[89]</sup>
- **September 18:** Two senior commanders of Houthi forces were killed along with six people accompanying them. Details about the deaths of Major General Mohammed Ali Hussein Dabash, commander of Houthi forces in Al-Bayda governorate, and Brigadier General Ahmed Yahya Sharweid, were not released, and there was conflicting information on how they died. Senior officials from the movement attended the commanders' funeral in Sana'a on September 22.<sup>[90]</sup>

## Political Developments

### *Houthi Authorities Seize Assets of Government MPs, Add to Shura Council*

In mid-September, public prosecutors in Sana'a charged 35 government-aligned parliamentarians with treason and ordered their assets seized. The deputies had been referred to the Houthi-run Specialized Criminal Court after having their parliamentary immunity officially stripped earlier in the month. The 35 targeted MPs mostly belong to the General People's Congress (GPC) and the Islah party, and include Parliament Speaker Sultan al-Burakani.<sup>[91]</sup> Al-Burakani had been elected speaker in April during the internationally recognized government's parliamentary session in Sayoun, Hadramawt governorate, the first it had held since the conflict began in September

[87] "Yemen's Houthis kill suspected 'Saudi agent' assassin of leader's brother," The New Arab, September 12, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/9/11/yemens-houthis-kill-suspected-assassin-of-leaders-brother>.

[88] "The Southern Implosion — The Yemen Review, August 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2019, [https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016#Brother\\_Houthi\\_leader](https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016#Brother_Houthi_leader).

[89] "Clashes break out on Sanaa International Airport campus" [بالتفاصيل..اندلاع اشتباكات في حرم مطار صنعاء الدولي], Hadramawt Net, September 17, 2019, <https://www.7adramout.net/almashhadalaraby/7161269/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A.html>.

[90] "Houthi militia recognizes the death of two of its most important leadership with a number of soldiers," Al-Mashhad al-Yemeni, September 23, 2019, <https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/144927>.

[91] "Houthis Order Seizure of Assets of 35 Deputies," Asharq al-Awsat, September 15, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1903216/houthis-order-seizure-assets-35-deputies>.



2014 (see Game of Parliaments – The Yemen Review, April 2019). Members of the 301-seat House of Representatives were elected in 2003, and had their terms extended in 2009 and 2011, meaning there have been no official elections to the body in 16 years. The practice of confiscating homes and real estate from officials aligned with the Yemeni government has been occurring for years. Treason has served as a convenient charge to justify the seizures.

The decision to target MPs who attended the Sayoun parliament meeting comes as the Houthi authorities are publicly touting their own rival legislature. On September 14, the chief of the Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat, swore in 43 new members of the Shura council, the upper house of the Yemeni legislature whose members were traditionally appointed by the president.<sup>[92]</sup>

### *Hadi Appoints New Foreign and Finance Ministers*

The internationally recognized Yemeni government announced a cabinet reshuffle on September 19, with President Hadi appointing Mohammed al-Hadrami as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Selim bin Breik as Minister of Finance. The pair were sworn in at a ceremony in Riyadh on September 21.<sup>[93]</sup> The Yemeni government, after four months without a foreign minister, named Al-Hadrami to the post, succeeding Khaled al-Yamani, who resigned in June over frustration at the presidential office's interference in the ministry, according to a government official who spoke with the Sana'a Center at the time. Al-Hadrami was previously serving as deputy ambassador of Yemen to the US. Bin Breik, who was serving as deputy finance minister, assumed the top job at the ministry after his predecessor, Ahmed al-Fadhli, was appointed the new governor of the Aden-based central bank (see 'Hadi Appoints Yet Another Central Bank Governor').

### *Political Developments in Brief:*

- **September 5:** Ali al-Hurayzi, former Al-Mahra governorate deputy and leader of the anti-Saudi opposition in the governorate, called for the creation of a “national salvation council” representing all southern factions to tackle the conflict between the STC and Yemeni government.<sup>[94]</sup>
- **September 10:** Following a Houthi directive, Ashoura commemorations were held in areas under the groups' control and public sector workers were required to take the day off and participate. The occasion mourns the death of Hussein, Prophet Mohammed's grandson, at the Battle of Karbala in 680. Ashoura historically has not been observed as part of Zaydi Shiism in Yemen. Hussein's

[92] “43 members of the Shura Council are sworn in before President Mashat” [ أعضاء بمجلس الشورى يؤدون اليمين 43 ] [ الدستورية أمام الرئيس المشاط ], Saba News, September 14, 2019, <https://sabanews.net/ar/news3067723.htm>.

[93] Yemen's newly-appointed finance, foreign ministers sworn in,” Xinhua New, September 21, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/21/c\\_138411074\\_2.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/21/c_138411074_2.htm).

[94] “After meetings Russian, British, and Saudi Diplomats .. Where is Al-Mahra going” [ بعد لقاءات معارضين دبلوماسيين ] [ روس وبريطانيين وسعوديين.. المهرة إلى أين؟ ], Al Masdar, September 5, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171333>.

death serves as a critical component in the conception of martyrdom articulated by Iran and its allied proxy forces such as Hezbollah. The Houthis characterized the decision to observe Ashoura as a “revival of the values” of the family of Prophet Mohammed.<sup>[95]</sup> Sana’a residents said Houthi representatives were knocking on doors, asking residents to donate for the Ashoura events and collecting a special tax from businesses to cover costs.

- **September 12:** Rallies were held in Sana’a and across Houthi-held territory to mark the fifth anniversary of the group’s takeover of the capital.<sup>[96]</sup>

## Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments

### *In Focus: A Yemeni Travel Odyssey – Unpredictable Airports and Risky Roads*

Sitting in departures at Queen Alia International Airport in Amman, a backlog of WhatsApp messages ping in upon connecting to the airport Wi-Fi – friends warning me that Aden is risky these days, ready to explode at any moment. Trembling, tears come to my eyes. If something happens to me while in Aden, will my family blame me for not telling them I am traveling? I want to surprise them, but maybe it would be best to forget this entire plan and fly back to Frankfurt. No, I will travel, no matter what.

Under the best of war-time circumstances, travel to, from and within Yemen is long, tiresome and stressful. There is constant uncertainty about whether airports will be open or closed or how smoothly road travel will be through frontlines and scores of checkpoints run by various combatants. Since the Saudi-led coalition stopped all commercial air traffic at Sana’a airport in 2016, many Yemenis have been unable to seek medical care abroad; the journey to alternative airports is simply too long and difficult. But those desperate or determined enough, able to afford it and able to secure visas – often on student or medical grounds – make the exhausting journey. My long-awaited trip began days after deadly attacks on police and militia targets in Aden, as southern separatists turned on their government allies in the southern city.

See Aisha al-Warraq’s full report on traveling to and around Yemen, where freedom of movement is severely inhibited.<sup>[97]</sup>

[95] “Sanaa .. Houthis inaugurate ‘Husseiniyat’ on the occasion of Ashoura” [ صنعاء.. الحوثيون يفتتحون «حسينيات» بمناسبة ] [يوم عاشوراء], Al Ayyam, September 8, 2019, <https://www.alayyam.info/news/7XDH9D41-V8PQA1-6072>.

[96] Emad al-Marshahi, “Yemen prepares mass rally to mark fifth anniversary of September 21st revolution.” Uprising Today, September 21, 2019, <https://uprising.today/yemen-prepares-mass-rally-to-mark-fifth-anniversary-of-september-21st-revolution/>.

[97] Aisha al-Warraq, “A Yemeni Travel Odyssey: Unpredictable Airports and Risky Roads,” Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, October 4, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/8186>.







*Children in Sana'a attend their first day of school on September 14.*



## ***UNICEF: Fighting, Poverty, No Teacher Salaries Make for Rough Start to School Year***

Nearly half-million children have dropped out of school since Yemen's war escalated in March 2015, and millions more are at risk of leaving, the UN Children's Fund warned as the new school year began in September.<sup>[98]</sup>

About 2 million Yemeni children of school age do not attend school – a figure driven by poverty, war and displacement that puts girls at risk of early marriage and leaves boys vulnerable to being recruited by armed groups, according to UNICEF. UNICEF estimates 3.5 million more children are at risk of dropping out.<sup>[99]</sup>

Some 2,500 schools – one in five – are no longer able to be used for education, according to UNICEF, with some damaged, others converted to shelters for internally displaced people and some shut down or seized by fighting factions for military use.<sup>[100]</sup> UNICEF's most recently released figures, from 2018, put the number of boys younger than 18 recruited by armed groups since 2015 at more than 2,400.<sup>[101]</sup> The United Nations' most recent report on children in armed conflict noted that all sides in Yemen's war have recruited children: the armed Houthi movement, Yemeni government forces, Security Belt forces, Shabwani Elite Forces, Popular Resistance Committees, Hadrami Elite Forces and forces loyal to the Southern Transitional Council. Many of the child recruits were younger than 15.<sup>[102]</sup> At its September 9-27 session in Geneva, the UN Human Rights Council called on all parties to Yemen's war to stop recruiting children, release those now in their ranks and help the UN reintegrate them into their communities.<sup>[103]</sup>

UNICEF urged schools to be considered safe zones for children and teachers. It also urged education authorities to work on providing salaries for teachers, and called for international non-governmental organizations to step in with funds until a lasting solution is found for the teacher pay issue.<sup>[104]</sup> Teachers in some areas have not received salaries since September 2016.

---

[98] "As school year starts in Yemen, 2 million children are out of school and another 3.7 million are at risk of dropping out," Reliefweb, September 25, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/school-year-starts-yemen-2-million-children-are-out-school-and-another-37-million-are>.

[99] Ibid.

[100] "If Not In School" UNICEF, March 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/media/721/file/yem-if-not-in-school-2018-en.pdf.pdf>.

[101] Ibid.

[102] "Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General," United Nations General Assembly Security Council, June 20, 2019, p. 29, [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E)

[103] "Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 26 September 2019, 42/2 Human rights situation in Yemen," UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, October 2, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session42/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>.

[104] "If Not In School" UNICEF, March 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/yemen/media/721/file/yem-if-not-in-school-2018-en.pdf.pdf>.

## ***UN Human Rights Council Renews Mandate for Experts to Continue Investigations***

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva renewed the mandate of its UN-appointed experts on September 26, permitting further monitoring and investigating from a panel that already has reported violations from all warring sides and has confidentially turned over names of individuals suspected of war crimes and violations of international law.<sup>[105]</sup> The one-year extension of the mandate for the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts passed with a vote of 22-12, with 11 abstentions.<sup>[106]</sup>

Saudi Arabia, along with Yemen War coalition junior partners Egypt and Bahrain, voted against the resolution. According to Al-Masdar news, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the internationally recognized Yemeni government had been lobbying in the run-up to the HRC meeting to prevent the extension.<sup>[107]</sup> The HRC encouraged all parties to allow the team unfettered access. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Yemeni government have in the past refused to cooperate with the experts.

Through their work thus far, the experts have concluded Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the Yemeni government may be criminally responsible for airstrikes that killed civilians as well as in cases of torture, rape and child recruitment. UAE-allied militiamen and individuals from the armed Houthi movement also could be responsible for war crimes, including torture and sexual violence, they noted, adding that the US, UK, France and Iran could be held responsible for aiding in the commission of violations of international law.<sup>[108]</sup> The UK, also an HRC member, voted in favor of the Yemen resolution.<sup>[109]</sup>

## ***Report: Coalition Shows Disregard for Civilians in Airstrike Policies***

Various airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition since 2015 on markets, prisons, weddings and funerals appeared to be indiscriminate or disproportionate, an online investigative journalism organization said in September after analyzing 20 attacks.

[105] "Situation of human rights in Yemen..." report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts, September 3, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>.

[106] "Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 26 September 2019, 42/2 Human rights situation in Yemen," UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, October 2, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session42/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>.

[107] "Human Rights Council votes by majority in favor of extension of mandate of panel of experts on Yemen," Al-Masdar Online, September 27, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/article/human-rights-council-votes-by-majority-in-favor-of-extension-of-mandate-of-panel-of-experts-on-yemen>.

[108] "Situation of human rights in Yemen..." report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts, September 3, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>.

[109] "Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 26 September 2019, 42/2 Human rights situation in Yemen," UN General Assembly Human Rights Council, October 2, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session42/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>.

UK-based Bellingcat, which culled its information from open-source accounts, images and documents, said seven of eight market attacks it studied that happened between 2015 and July 29, 2019, were daytime strikes when markets were likely to be crowded. Bellingcat was often unable to identify military targets in the strikes, but said September 2 that even when military targets could be identified, heavy civilian casualties appeared predictable and disproportionate to any military advantage.

Its analysis also identified the use of “double-tap” airstrikes, when a second strike follows the first, often killing or injuring those arriving to assist the wounded. In one such case, a July 6, 2015, market attack in Lahj that killed more than 40 people,<sup>[110]</sup> Bellingcat said its analysis of open-source satellite images, photographs and videos indicated a “strong possibility” some casualties were among those responding to the first strike at the Al-Fayoush livestock market, near a qat market, petrol station and restaurant. It could not, however, confirm the intent was to target first responders.<sup>[111]</sup>

Among others, Bellingcat researchers also analyzed a 2018 airstrike on a wedding, a 2016 airstrike on a funeral and a May 12, 2015, airstrike on a prison in Abs, Hajjah governorate, which it described as the first in a pattern of coalition airstrikes on operational prisons.<sup>[112]</sup> Most recently, Saudi airstrikes killed more than 150 people<sup>[113]</sup> at the Dhamar detention facility on September 1 (see story and images in the August Yemen Review),<sup>[114]</sup> Saudi officials said they had targeted a Houthi drone facility in Dhamar.<sup>[115]</sup>

Saudi and Emirati officials established a Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) in 2016, in part to look into claims of violations of International Humanitarian Law, such as airstrikes on civilian objects or that disproportionately affect civilians. However, both Bellingcat and a September 3 report by the United Nations Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts (see ‘UN Experts Identify Suspected War Criminals in Yemen: The Yemen Review, August 2019’) disputed JIAT findings. Bellingcat said JIAT statements on the Abs airstrikes appear to be inconsistent with open-source information gathered on the attack.<sup>[116]</sup> In the case of the Al-Fayoush market bombing, the UN-appointed experts disputed a JIAT statement that said it was not bombed by coalition forces or affected by an accidental bombing.<sup>[117]</sup> The experts’ report noted, however, that a Houthi-Saleh checkpoint was located at the

[110] “Deadly airstrike hits market in Yemen,” The Guardian, July 6, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/06/air-strike-hits-marketplace-aden-yemen>.

[111] “Fayoush Market Strike,” Bellingcat Yemen Project, February 21, 2019, <https://yemen.bellingcat.com/investigations/the-yemen-project-ade10001-fayoush-market-strike>.

[112] “Yemen: Attacks causing grave civilian harm,” Bellingcat press statement, September 2, 2019.

[113] “Death toll from prison attack rises to 156: Houthi,” Anadolu Agency, September 5, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/death-toll-from-prison-attack-rises-to-156-houthi/1574312>.

[114] “The Southern Implosion — The Yemen Review, August 2019,” Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016>.

[115] “Coalition: Dhamar raid targeted militia drones,” Agencies via Gulf News, September 2, 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/yemen/coalition-dhamar-raid-targeted-militia-drones-1.66169436>.

[116] “The Abs Prison Strike,” Bellingcat Yemen Project, April 28, 2019, <https://yemen.bellingcat.com/investigations/haj-10005-the-abs-prison-strike>.

[117] “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014,” report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts as submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 3, 2019, p. 44, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>.

petrol station where fighters would gather and park their vehicles.<sup>[118]</sup>

The experts' report described a double-tap strike on September 4, 2015, when coalition aircraft struck a school in Sa'ada governorate while students were on holiday.<sup>[119]</sup> They concluded some airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition may have violated the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.<sup>[120]</sup> Three other double-tap attacks noted by the experts were attributed to Houthi-Saleh fighters during June 30, 2015, shelling of Al-Mansoura district in Aden.<sup>[121]</sup>

### ***Airstrikes on Mosque, House Kill at Least 22; Several Children Among Casualties***

At least 22 people, including more than five children, were killed in two separate airstrikes, the first hitting a mosque on September 23 and the second a day later on a house. The mosque strike in Amran governorate killed seven people, including children, according to the United Nations resident humanitarian coordinator, Lise Grande.<sup>[122]</sup> The number killed in the strike on a home in Al-Fakhir, a town in Al-Dhalea governorate, was reported variously as either 15 or 16, including five or six children and a woman who was nine months pregnant.<sup>[123][124]</sup> The Save the Children organization called September 24 for an independent investigation into the house strike, saying that five children were among those killed and seven were injured.<sup>[125]</sup> The Saudi-led coalition has not commented.

#### ***Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments in Brief***

- **September 6:** Closed maternal health centers have prevented 650,000 women from accessing health services, the United Nations Population Fund reported. As of the end of August, 100 of 268 UNFPA-supported hospitals had closed due to lack of funds, with a further 75 closures expected by the end of September 2019.<sup>[126]</sup>

[118] Ibid., p. 45

[119] Ibid., p. 171-2

[120] "Situation of human rights in Yemen..." report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts, September 3, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/YemenGEE/Pages/Index.aspx>.

[121] Ibid., p. 32

[122] "Scores of people killed and wounded in Amran and Al Dhale'e," United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen via ReliefWeb, September 24, 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen\\_HC%20Statement\\_24%20September%202019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Yemen_HC%20Statement_24%20September%202019_FINAL.pdf).

[123] Ibid.

[124] "Victims of Al-Adwan Massacre in Al-Dhali rise to 16 martyrs, mostly women and children (names + photos)," Al-Masirah, September 24, 2019, [http://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es\\_id=45240&cat\\_id=3](http://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=45240&cat_id=3).

[125] "Yemen: Save the Children Calls for Investigation into Killing of Five Children," Save the Children via ReliefWeb, September 24, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-save-children-calls-investigation-killing-five-children>.

[126] "Life-saving services at risk as humanitarian funding dries up in Yemen," United Nations Population Fund, September 6, 2019, <https://www.unfpa.org/news/life-saving-services-risk-humanitarian-funding-dries-yemen>.



- **September 12:** The International Organization for Migration announced that 350,000 people have been displaced in Yemen in 2019.<sup>[127]</sup>
- **September 25:** Saudi Arabia donated US\$500 million to Yemen for humanitarian aid, according to UN relief chief Mark Lowcock, who said his office would begin transferring the money, pledged by the kingdom in February this year, to UN agencies handling food, health, development and other programs in Yemen.<sup>[128]</sup>
- **September 26:** More than four years of war has set back human development in Yemen by 21 years with millions more Yemenis sliding into extreme poverty, according to a new report from the UN Development Programme and the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures.<sup>[129]</sup> Some 58.3 percent of Yemenis will be living on less than \$1.90 per day by the end of 2019 if the war persists, up from 18.8 percent in 2014, the report said.

## Economic Developments

### *Central Bank in Sana'a Suspends Operations for Six Money Transfer Networks*

The central bank in Sana'a briefly suspended money exchange licenses on September 22 for six money transfer companies: Al-Najm Plus, Al-Muheet, Dadieh, Al-Emtyaz, Yemen Express and Al-Yabany. All six networks were allowed to resume operations three days later.<sup>[130]</sup>

The central bank in Sana'a had warned it would impose fines on any banks or other financial companies found to be dealing with the networks while they were under suspension. It did not mention whether the companies themselves faced any fines. According to Houthi-aligned sources in the financial sector who spoke to the Sana'a Center, the central bank in Sana'a had intervened to stop money exchangers' activities that encouraged currency speculation. Independent sources in the financial sector said, however, that the move was likely meant to punish the exchangers for facilitating the flow of liquidity out of Houthi-held areas, primarily to Aden, and assisting businesses and individuals in circumventing regulations Houthi authorities have imposed on commercial banks to curtail such activity.

[127] "UN: 350,000 Yemenis displaced in 2019" Middle East Monitor, September 12, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190912-un-350000-yemenis-displaced-in-2019/>.

[128] "Emergency Relief Coordinator Thanks Saudi Arabia for \$500 million for United Nations Agencies in Yemen," UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, New York, September 25, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ERC%20THANKS%20SAUDI%20ARABIA%20FOR%20%24500%20MILLION%20FOR%20UNITED%20NATIONS%20AGENCIES%20IN%20YEMEN.pdf>

[129] "Prolonged conflict would make Yemen the poorest country in the world, UNDP study says" UNDP, September 26, 2019, [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2019/Prolonged\\_conflict\\_would\\_make\\_Yemen\\_poorest\\_country\\_in\\_world\\_UNDP.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2019/Prolonged_conflict_would_make_Yemen_poorest_country_in_world_UNDP.html).

[130] "Sanaa Central Bank Suspends 6 of Yemen's Largest Remittance Networks," Al Masdar, September 6, 2019, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/171851>.

## *Hadi Appoints Yet Another Central Bank Governor*

Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi appointed Ahmed Obaid al-Fadhli governor of the central bank in Aden on September 19, making him the fourth person to hold the post in the three years since Hadi ordered the transfer of the Central Bank of Yemen headquarters from Sana'a to Aden in September 2016. The legal mandate of the central bank governor is a five-year renewable term.<sup>[131]</sup>

Al-Fadhli was appointed finance minister in September 2016 and held the post until he replaced Hafedh Mayad as central bank governor in Aden in September.<sup>[132]</sup> On the same day as Al-Fadhli's appointment, Hadi announced Salem bin Braik as the new Minister of Finance.<sup>[133]</sup> Mayad will continue operating as head of the Economic Committee.

Mayad had said on July 29 that he had agreed with Hadi to a six-month tenure in the governorship to help avert economic collapse in Yemen,<sup>[134]</sup> having taken the post in March 2019 when he replaced Mohammed Zammam. However, according to two senior Yemeni banking officials, long simmering disputes between Mayad and the deputy governor, Shakeeb al-Hubaishi, as well as friction between Mayad and the president's office, likely motivated Hadi's decision to replace Mayad.<sup>[135]</sup>

The high turnover of governors at the central bank of Aden – an indication of the lack of independence granted to the bank by President Hadi – has undermined the bank's ability to maintain monetary policies to stabilize the Yemeni rial and eroded confidence in the central bank of Aden in both domestic and international financial circles.

## *New Fuel Crisis Causes Price Spikes*

The power struggle between the Yemeni government and Houthi authorities over the regulation of fuel imports led to widespread fuel shortages in Houthi-controlled areas again in September – the fourth time such has occurred in 2019. Nine fuel tankers, including two carrying liquified petroleum gas, were left to idle in the waters offshore of the Red Sea port of Hudaydah through the month. The Saudi-led coalition – which assists the Yemeni government in enforcing import regulations – blocked them from accessing the port until they complied with Yemeni government regulations. Meanwhile, the Houthi authorities on land threatened to prevent the tankers from

[131] "Text of the Republic Decrees Released Today," Al-Ittihad, September 19, 2019, <https://www.alittihadnet.net/news7440.html>.

[132] "Yemen President Names New Central Bank Governor, Moves HQ to Aden," Reuters, September 18, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-cenbank/yemen-president-names-new-central-bank-governor-moves-hq-to-aden-idUSKCN1100WB>.

[133] "Text of the Republic Decrees Released Today," Al-Ittihad, September 19, 2019, <https://www.alittihadnet.net/news7440.html>.

[134] Hafedh Meyad, "I am surprised..." [AR], Facebook post, July 29, 2019, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=358334048434010&id=100027722542809&ref=content\\_filter](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=358334048434010&id=100027722542809&ref=content_filter).

[135] Sana'a Center interview with a senior Yemeni banking official on September 19, 2019.

offloading at the port if they complied with the government's regulations, which included paying customs and port fees as per Decree 49.

By September 19, widespread fuel shortages hit areas under Houthi control. Official stations stopped selling fuel, and the price of 20 liters of gasoline increased from YR7,400 to over YR14,000 on the black market. Three weeks later, it had risen to YR20,000 per 20 liters. Seven vessels had been permitted to dock and offload a total of 127,600 tons of fuel at the port by the end of September, according to port data made available to the Sana'a Center, easing shortages. While down from the previous month's total of 212,600 tons, the volume is comparable to April when the last fuel crisis was tailing off and 112,300 tons entered Yemen via Hudaydah Port.

Houthi authorities have been keen to prevent fuel importers from adhering to Decree 49, which the government introduced in July 2019 requiring importers to pay the customs and port fees in order to receive government (and Saudi-led coalition) approval to bring fuel into Yemen. Fuel importers and brokers spoke of their increasing frustration with the new government-issued fees, which stems in part from a fear over them having to pay Houthi authorities separate customs fees at inland checkpoints.

Fuel crises in March and April played out somewhat similarly, with the Houthis holding the internationally recognized Yemen government responsible for the denial of entry of vessels to Hudaydah Port. Then, however, the issue was over the government's Decree No. 75, which required fuel importers to submit fuel import applications to the Economic Committee. Importers, speaking to the Sana'a Center on condition of anonymity out of fear of repercussions, maintain that in March and April this year, Houthi authorities privately pressured them not to do so and offered to cover demurrage costs while their vessels idled off the coast of Hudaydah.

Five different UN officials have told the Sana'a Center that the Houthis complained to the United Nations and other international actors about the shortages in March and April as well as during the September crisis.<sup>[136]</sup>

### ***Hadramawt Temporarily Suspends Glencore Crude Exports, Secures GoY Payment***

Crude oil exports from Hadramawt governorate that were being sold on to the British-Swiss energy company, Glencore, were suspended through the month of September. Hadramawt Governor Faraj Bahsani ordered the suspension, which began August 15, Bahsani's spokesman, Hisham al-Jabrani, told the Sana'a Center. The suspension appeared to be an attempt to ensure a percentage of the profits were being disbursed to local governing authorities, as per agreements with the Yemeni government. The suspension was lifted October 1,<sup>[137]</sup> after the Yemeni government paid the 20 percent of the profit it owed local authorities from a previous shipment, disbursed salaries to public sector employees in Hadramawt.

[136] Sana'a Center interviews with various UN officials in March, April, and September 2019.

[137] Sana'a Center interview with a government official on October 2, 2019.

## *Economic Developments in Brief*

- **September 11:** A vessel belonging to prominent billionaire businessman Ahmed al-Essi arrived to Aden Port, where it offloaded 18,000 tons of diesel fuel for electricity power generation.<sup>[138]</sup> Electricity shortages in Aden were among the factors that undermined the Yemeni government's legitimacy in the city and gave a populist veneer to the Southern Transitional Council's coup against the government there in August. The fuel delivery in September is notable given that Al-Essi is one of President Hadi's most important backers, while the STC had publicly denounced Al-Essi and his monopoly over fuel imports to Aden.

## At the United Nations

### *World Leaders Touch Upon Yemen Crisis at UN General Assembly*

Several world leaders meeting for the 2019 UN General Assembly in New York addressed the Yemen War as a crisis in need of a solution. Prominent among these was French President Emmanuel Macron, who said on September 24 that resolving the conflict should be an objective of any future talks among Iran, the United States and signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.<sup>[139]</sup>

Macron, who has taken the lead for the Europeans in trying to bring about talks between Washington and Tehran, urged the countries to come to the negotiating table in part to bring an end to the crisis in Yemen. Macron said that new negotiations with Iran also should make certain Iran never obtains nuclear weapons, ensure maritime security and lift sanctions against Iran. In light of recent attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities, Macron warned that heightened tensions have led to “a risk of serious conflict (in the Arabian Gulf) based on a miscalculation or a disproportionate response.”<sup>[140]</sup>

Heads of state who touched on the Yemen crisis largely remained consistent with their previous statements on the conflict, with US President Donald Trump blaming Iran for the situation,<sup>[141]</sup> and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi also alluding to Iran in his call for an end to “foreign interventions by non-Arab regional parties that seek to curtail Arab national security.”<sup>[142]</sup> Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the

[138] Sana'a Center interviews with Aden-based officials on September 12, 2019.

[139] “Speech by President Emmanuel Macron at the UN General Assembly,” (fr), The Elysee Palace, September 24, 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/09/24/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-a-la-tribune-de-lassemblee-generale-onu>.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” The White House, September 25, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

[142] “Sisi's full speech at UN General Assembly,” Egypt Today, September 26, 2019, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/58127/Sisi-s-full-speech-at-UN-General-Assembly>.



emir of Qatar, which is at odds with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states over the conflict, said recommendations of Yemen's 2013-14 National Dialogue Conference should be followed and that Yemenis must implement solutions reached without foreign intervention.<sup>[143]</sup>

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who spoke on September 25, said his country is cooperating with the UN's special envoy to Yemen and supports the UN-backed Stockholm Agreement. Rouhani spent a large portion of his speech criticizing American sanctions and said any negotiations for a new nuclear deal would be off the table unless the US lifted sanctions.<sup>[144]</sup>

### ***UN Special Envoy Briefs the Security Council***

A “worrying military escalation” in the form of strikes on Saudi oil infrastructure along with instability in southern Yemen have made diplomacy more urgently needed than ever, UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths told the UN Security Council in his briefing September 16.<sup>[145]</sup>

Griffiths said the September 14 attacks on a Saudi Aramco oil processing facility in Abqaiq and the Khurais oilfield could escalate the regional conflict (see ‘Attack on Saudi Oil Facility Halves Crude Output, Stokes Regional Tensions’). He noted that the armed Houthi movement had claimed responsibility for the attack, but said it was “not entirely clear” yet who was responsible. The United States has accused Iran of being behind the attack, which initially cut the kingdom's oil production in half.<sup>[146]</sup> Iran has denied the accusation.<sup>[147]</sup> Individually, Security Council members also condemned the attacks on the Saudi Aramco oil facilities.

Griffiths also raised concerns about the situation in south Yemen, where forces associated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) have seized control of Aden from the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Griffiths said the situation exacerbates the risk of “further fragmentation and of violence and displacement.” For those reasons, he welcomed mediation efforts by Saudi Arabia, which attempted in September to bring STC and government delegations together for meetings in Jeddah (see ‘Political Developments’).

Regarding the Stockholm Agreement, the Special Envoy reported that parties to the conflict have received a revised proposal about the planned redeployments from Hudaydah City. Griffiths said lack of progress regarding another key area of the Stockholm Agreement, a planned prisoner exchange, resulted from one party to the

[143] “Only international actions can settle the world's ‘enormous and diverse cross-border challenges’, Qatar tells UN Assembly,” UN Newsroom, September 24, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1047282>.

[144] “At UN, Iran proposes ‘coalition for hope’ to pull Gulf region from ‘edge of collapse’,” UN News, September 25, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1047472>.

[145] “Briefing of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to the open session of the Security Council,” Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, September 16, 2019, [https://osesgy.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/seco\\_briefing\\_sept\\_as\\_delivered.pdf](https://osesgy.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/seco_briefing_sept_as_delivered.pdf).

[146] Jon Gambrell and Zeke Miller, “Trump: US locked and loaded for response to attack on Saudis,” The Associated Press, September 15, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/269744b35e16422fa746b0c1504ceb4f>.

[147] Ibid.

conflict – whom he did not name – demanding a complete swap of all prisoners in one go, rather than in batches as he had proposed. By month’s end, however, the Houthi authorities had unilaterally released hundreds of prisoners on the agreed-to list (see ‘Houthi Authorities in Sana’a Release Hundreds of Prisoners’). On the third part of the Stockholm Agreement, the special envoy attributed the lack of movement on a de-escalation in Taiz to the complexity of the military situation in the city.

### *The UN Special Envoy’s Shuttle Diplomacy*

Griffiths’ regional shuttle diplomacy in September included meetings with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in Amman, Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir in Jeddah, Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdel Salam in Muscat and Saudi Vice-Minister of Defense Khalid bin Salman in Jeddah. Griffiths also met in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly events with the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit.<sup>[148]</sup>

#### *Developments at the United Nations in Brief*

- **September 8-9:** At the 6th meeting of the Hudaydah Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) aboard a UN ship anchored off Hudaydah port, the Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement agreed to activate the ‘Cease-Fire Enhancement and De-Escalation Mechanism’ that had been agreed at their previous meeting in July.<sup>[149]</sup> This involves the establishment of the Joint Observation Center, which is meant to “work on de-escalation and address incidents that occur in the field by maintaining direct communication with field liaison officers deployed on the fronts of Hudaydah governorate.”<sup>[150]</sup>
- **September 11:** A new chairperson for the RCC was appointed; retired Indian Lieutenant General Abhijit Guha was named the new head of the UN’s Observer Mission in Hudaydah, replacing General Michael Lollesgaard whose term ended in July.<sup>[151]</sup>
- **September 26:** The Government of Sweden hosted a ministerial meeting with representatives from France, Germany, Kuwait, China, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States on the situation in Yemen. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a communiqué reiterating their support for the Special Envoy and urging all parties to de-escalate tensions.

[148] Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, official Twitter account, [https://twitter.com/OSE\\_Yemen](https://twitter.com/OSE_Yemen).

[149] “Note to Correspondents: Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) Joint Press Statement – The Sixth Joint RCC Meeting,” UN Secretary-General’s Office, September 9, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2019-09-09/note-correspondents-redeployment-coordination-committee-%28rcc%29-joint-press-statement-the-sixth-joint-rcc-meeting-scroll-down-for-arabic>

[150] “Yemen Briefing and Consultations,” What’s in Blue, July 17, 2019, <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2019/07/yemen-briefing-and-consultations-11.php>.

[151] “Letter dated 11 September 2019 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General,” United Nations Security Council, September 12, 2019, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2019\\_735.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2019_735.pdf)

## ***Acknowledgments***

---

*This report was prepared by (in alphabetical order): Ali Abdullah, Waleed Alhariri, Ghaidaa Alrashidy, Nicholas Ask, Ryan Bailey, Anthony Biswell, Hamza Al-Hamadi, Gregory Johnsen, Maged Al-Madhaji, Farea Al-Muslimi, Spencer Osberg, Hannah Patchett, Victoria Sauer, Susan Severeid, Holly Topham and Aisha al-Warraq.*

---



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

[WWW.SANAACENTER.ORG](http://WWW.SANAACENTER.ORG)

Yemen, Sana'a, Hadda St  
Tel: +967 1 444 375  
Fax: +967 1 444 316  
Email: [info@sanaacenter.org](mailto:info@sanaacenter.org)  
f /sanaacenter