

The Yemen Review

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BATTLE FOR MARIB



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:

Tribesmen and Yemeni army forces at a frontline near Al-Jadafer village in Marib, along the governorate's border with Al-Jawf, on September 6, 2020. // Sana'a Center photo by Ali Owidha.

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The FSO Safer oil terminal moored offshore of Ras Issa port // Photo Credit: Safer

The Sana'a Center Editorial

Six Years of Houthi Rule in Sana'a

When the armed Houthi movement, Ansar Allah, took over Sana'a on September 21, 2014, it was almost inconceivable that they would still be holding the Yemeni capital six years on. Look ahead to six years from today, however, and current trajectories seem to foreshadow the group and its leaders being only further entrenched in power at the head of a state they are dramatically recrafting in their image. The increasing likelihood of that possible future should alarm most Yemenis, regional leaders and the international community alike.

The Houthis exemplify the dynamic of the oppressed becoming the oppressors. They arose from a marginalized community within the Zaidi sect in Yemen's northern Sa'ada governorate, and through the 2000s the central government, headed by then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, waged a series of six brutal wars against the group. Houthi fighters ultimately emerged undefeated and battle-hardened, though the widespread death, injury, imprisonment and torture many suffered left deep scars, and helped solidify a militant ideology.

In 2014, however, Houthi leaders managed to cultivate a populist veneer with which to ride into the capital. The Arab Spring-inspired Yemeni uprising had led to Saleh being replaced in 2012 by his deputy, Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who quickly spoiled the general good will accompanying his rise to the presidency through mismanagement

and corruption. Houthi promises to fight corruption and reinstate a fuel subsidy Hadi had clumsily revoked, causing prices to spike, earned the group a degree of welcome when it entered the capital in September 2014. That the Houthis had by then entered an alliance with Saleh also added a layer of popular cover for their subsequent coup d'état against Hadi and the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

Though fearsome on the battlefield as they and Saleh's troops pressed a military campaign south to Aden, drawing Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to intervene in the war, away from the frontlines the Houthis relied heavily on Saleh and his General People's Congress party to take the lead on the diplomatic, political and bureaucratic affairs of state. A stunning feature of their rise, however, has been how much more capable they have become on these other fronts. By the time Houthi fighters murdered Saleh in late 2017, they had learned to handle the levers of state, finance and the economy to further their domestic dominance, allowing them to solidify unfettered control over most of northern Yemen.

The Stockholm Agreement in late 2018, which halted Emirati-backed Yemeni forces from attacking Houthi-held Hudaydah city, then changed the course of the war. The entrenched Houthi forces had threatened a prolonged battle over Yemen's busiest port, which would put millions of Yemenis at risk of famine, compelling western powers to intervene and stop the assault. With its attack thwarted, Abu Dhabi reconsidered its plans and eventually withdrew most of its troops from Yemen the following year. Meanwhile, Houthi tactics to thwart and stall the United Nations from being able to implement the agreed redeployment of forces away from Hudaydah city and port became a study in how to manipulate the international community. The Houthis thus managed to keep control of Hudaydah and effectively be under UN protection from future attack. The Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition lost the military initiative after the Stockholm Agreement, allowing Houthi forces to gradually regain it and eventually relaunch offensives on other frontlines.

In 2019, Houthi forces, with support from Iran, then demonstrated their increasing technological prowess by dramatically escalating their use of weaponized drones and precision guided missiles, allowing them to consistently hit targets across Yemen, Saudi Arabia and potentially beyond. In raising their profile beyond Yemen to become a regional threat, Houthi leaders are accruing international leverage. This is the lens through which to make sense of why the group is allowing the threat of an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea to persist by preventing UN crews from assessing the decrepit Safer oil terminal offshore of Hudaydah. Similarly, Houthi forces' periodic threats and attacks against international shipping passing through the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest corridors for commercial freight, are another way to demonstrate the international community's vulnerability to the group.

Meanwhile at home, the Houthis have been progressively disassembling the existing republican structures and remaking governance and society beneath them. Houthi opponents have accused the group of attempting to reestablish the imamate or to emulate the Iranian model, and while elements of both are present, the group is, in practice, cultivating a bespoke arrangement for social suppression.

The Houthi authorities have placed monitors and supervisors throughout government ministries and departments, creating a parallel command and control network to the traditional institutional hierarchy and thereby supplanting and disempowering

the formal state. In a direct affront to the concept of equal citizenry in a republic, the Houthis' theocratically-inspired khums, or one-fifth tax, implemented on non-Hashemites this year seeks to institutionalize a sectarian elite and social caste system. The effective privatization of public schools through new school fees and the remaking of the school curriculum to reflect the Houthi sectarian doctrine seem intended to foster a culture of ignorance in which to raise the next generation of frontline soldiers, not learned scholars and thinkers.

While casting themselves in religious rhetoric, Houthi cadres employ a ruthless and pragmatic criminality akin to the mafia, using the tools of extortion, intimidation, co-option, corruption and the like in social and economic affairs. The engineering of fuel shortages in areas they control – which the Houthis publicly blame on the Saudi-led coalition's import controls – to extract revenue from the local market through blackmarket fuel sales is a good example of Houthi racketeering on a mass scale. Another is the Houthis' organized plundering of the international relief effort.

Earlier in the war, some commentators had proffered the idea that other Yemenis living under Houthi rule would rise up against the group once its nature became clear. However, the absolute intolerance of dissent in Houthi areas – where security forces brutally stamp out protests, arrest and torture activists and journalists, and persecute minorities – has created a prevailing fear that enforces social compliance. Networks of Houthi informants within communities undermine social momentum against the group by breeding fear between neighbors. Houthi forces also routinely use their ability to deny people access to jobs, aid, and basic necessities as leverage to make them heel. Over time, the Houthis also brought many of the traditional economic elites onside through a combination of coercion and allowing them continued access to Yemen's largest markets in the north.

Much could change in the years to come, but where the Houthis have managed to adapt, evolve and advance since 2014, their Yemeni opponents have radically fractured and weakened. The "regional" military intervention against them has been whittled down to essentially Saudi Arabia, which is desperately looking for a face-saving way to exit the conflict. Looking ahead to the next six years and considering how to curtail Houthi ambitions for statehood, it is important to keep in mind that the military option has been used against the group for most of the past two decades, and through it the group has only become a more cohesive, capable and resilient fighting force. That should be a clear sign that it is time to switch tracks and apply as much time, energy and resources to diplomacy as has been plowed into war.



The armed Houthi movement, which took over Sana'a on September 21, 2014, commemorated its sixth anniversary of holding the Yemeni capital on September 20, 2020, with a parade in Sana'a's Al-Tahrir square // Sana'a Center photo by Asem Alposi.

Developments in Yemen

WITH ENEMIES LIKE THESE, WHO NEEDS FRIENDS?

Commentary by Abdulghani Al-Iryani

It has become a requirement to use the expression “Iran-supported” whenever referring to Ansar Allah, more commonly known as the Houthis. The revivalist and repressive movement has taken over large parts of Yemen and embarked on a campaign to recast the Yemeni people and society in its own image: one that values martyrdom over life.

It is also necessary, however, to be skeptical about the extent of Iranian support to the group. I have always argued that this influence has been exaggerated by Houthi opponents. No matter what the extent of Iranian assistance, the main factor behind Houthi successes over five years of conflict has not been Iran. Iran couldn't have had that level of impact in the group's victories without boots on the ground in Yemen. Rather, Houthi successes should be primarily attributed to the incompetence, corruption, and pettiness of its Yemeni enemies, the duplicity and scheming of their regional allies, and the indifference of the international community, represented by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who, for whatever reason, looked the other way as Houthis took over Sa'ada governorate and advanced toward the capital, Sana'a, in 2012 and 2013, came out in open support of that advance when Houthi forces seized Amran, defeating General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar's main combat unit, Brigade 310. When the Houthis reached Sana'a, they needed a legitimizing cause to enter the city. Hadi came to the rescue again by arbitrarily raising fuel prices, disregarding years of negotiations with international donors and careful planning by the government on ways to mitigate the impact on the poor of reducing the crippling fuel subsidies. With that, Hadi gave the Houthis the rallying cry that they needed. When Houthis assaulted the headquarters of the 1st Armored Division, a unit loyal to Ali Mohsen, units from the Presidential Protection Brigades lobbed rockets into the base in support of the advancing Houthi forces.

Hadi's free service to the Houthis did not stop there. After the takeover of Sana'a, he sheepishly agreed to continue giving them legal cover while he was under house arrest. It took him months to resign and remove that cover. Even after his escape to Aden, then to Riyadh, his services to the Houthis continued. Hadi's long absence from Yemen, his failure to build a national army, his mishandling of the national economy, his corruption and nepotism are only a partial list of acts that served to legitimize Houthi control.

Two disastrous decisions deserve particular mention. On the governance side, Hadi's decision to transfer the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) headquarters to Aden in September 2016 was the single most important event that prompted the Houthi takeover of state institutions in Sana'a. Until then, a tacit agreement to maintain state institutions had prevailed between the warring parties. The Houthis did not appoint ministers or heads of state enterprises and institutions at that time, but rather they appointed acting ministers and acting heads. The CBY in Sana'a had continued to pay the salaries to all state employees, including Yemeni army soldiers who were actively fighting on both sides of the frontlines. When the CBY was moved, all of that changed, with the Houthis quickly seeking control over the mechanisms of state in the north.

On the military and political level, the president's insistence on using his office and, indeed, the entire Yemeni government, to settle old scores with southern opponents fractured any potential coherent military response to Houthi expansion. In short, the "Hadi-supported militia" would be a more appropriate descriptor for the Houthis.

Other Yemeni parties also did their bit to support the Houthis. Now-Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and senior commanders have dubiously handled the government's military budget and battles. Meanwhile, Islah's overbearance and greed in dealing with rivals, particularly in Marib and Taiz, the Southern Transitional Council's ethnic cleansing of northerners in Aden and other parts of the south, and Tareq Saleh's rejection of the legitimacy of the internationally recognized government, are all free gifts that fractured the Houthi opposition and enabled the group to solidify its control over the Yemeni state.

The Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition was equally generous to the Houthi movement. This started with the first civilian massacre in Sana'a – a giant explosion in Faj Attan in April 2015, witnessed personally by the author, which destroyed an entire neighborhood and claimed hundreds of casualties. At times, Yemeni informers gave the gullible Saudis coordinates of civilian targets, often to settle local scores. Such incompetent coalition military actions mainly punished civilians and lent Houthi recruitment drives popular appeal.

The United Arab Emirate's contribution to Houthi success was significant. It fractured and weakened the anti-Houthi front by forming an assortment of militias in Taiz, along the west coast and in the south. Their destructive campaign in the south was enabled by Hadi, who monopolized southern representation at the national level and weaponized Yemeni unity against his rivals in the south. The icing on the cake of the UAE's gifts to Houthis was the recent theatrical normalization of relations with Israel, which, in the eyes of the majority of Yemenis, validates Houthi claims that they are fighting Israel. With that exaggerated display, the UAE handed a poison pill to its allies in Yemen and all the anti-Houthi forces.

However, the Saudis gave the greatest gift to Houthis. Between 2016 and 2018, when frontlines were largely static, the coalition provided the Houthis the opportunity to complete their military takeover of northern Yemen and get rid of their erstwhile partner, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Many Yemeni army units had remained loyal to Saleh, and on various occasions, the Saudis carried out airstrikes on their bases while nearby Houthi militia units were left unscathed, allowing those Houthi forces to move in and assume control. Thus, Riyadh, which for close to a century had a strategic objective to degrade the Yemeni military threat, ended up facilitating the Houthis' assertion of military dominance in the north, a process that was largely completed by 2017, shortly before the Houthis murdered the former president.

Even today, the Saudis will not stop giving. Their thinly veiled designs on Yemeni territory, as clearly demonstrated by their military deployment and actions in Al-Mahra, provide the Houthis a cause to rally Yemeni nationalists in defending the integrity of their homeland.

The international community, particularly through the UNSC, also helped the Houthis, with their greatest gift being Security Council Resolution 2216. The resolution was intended to prevent the Houthis and Saleh from overtaking the Yemeni state and military. In reality, the coalition used the resolution to legitimize its massive military assault and blockade on northern Yemen, unleashing a humanitarian and economic crisis, and weakening the local population vis-a-vis the Houthis. This made the people more compliant and easier for the Houthis to recruit. The UN was then forced to send an army of aid workers and hundreds of millions of dollars to Yemen to address the humanitarian crisis it helped unleash, which the Houthis became increasingly adept at diverting for their own ends. The Houthis also had few vulnerabilities outside Yemen, thus the international sanctions accompanying 2216 did little to harm the group but rather made them more self-reliant.

Those who puzzle over the incredible Houthi success should stop thinking of the movement as an Iranian pawn or a satanic plant. It is neither. It is a youthful Yemeni ideological movement that exploits the weaknesses and contradictions of an aging political system paralyzed by decades of kleptocratic authoritarianism and its scheming regional allies at odds with each other. With enemies like these, the Houthis hardly need friends.

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Armed tribesmen and soldiers from the Yemeni army hold the frontline near the village of al-Jadafer along the border between Al-Jawf and Marib governorates on September 6, 2020 // Sana'a Center photo by Ali Owidha.

The Battle for Marib

Houthis Gain on Key Fronts

The battle for Marib governorate, a Yemeni government stronghold for most of the war, dominated attention in Yemen during September, with Houthi forces seizing territory in several areas, particularly in the northwest and south. Yemeni government-allied tribes, especially the Murad and Bani Abd, struggled to slow the Houthi advances, which highlighted the weakness of the Yemeni government armed forces..

After taking full control of Mahliyah district in southern Marib in early September, the Houthis pressed north into Rahabah district, attacking Yemeni government and allied tribes in the Al-Sadirah area that lies between Mahliyah and Rahabah. The clashes led to few gains for the Houthis until a September 7 agreement between the Houthis and tribal sheikhs from the Qaradi'ah and Al-Jameel tribes, which are part of the Murad tribal confederation, ceded Rahabah district to Houthi control.

This rapid takeover of Rahabah, after a slower campaign in Mahliyah, led to questions about how much longer pro-Yemeni government Marib tribes would be able to hold out against a sustained Houthi offensive. Adding to those fears, local sources said that the Rahabah deal was the result of tribal frustration at a perceived lack of support from the Yemeni government. Following the takeover of Rahabah, clashes moved to the mountainous Jabal Murad and Al-Jubah districts, the tribal heartland of the Murad tribe. Yemeni government and allied tribal forces have gathered at the border of the latter two districts with Rahabah, stopping the Houthi advance, at least temporarily.

Along with its advances in the south, the Houthis inched closer to Marib city from the northwest, taking control of Al-Sufayraa area in northwestern Marib's Madghel district on September 20. That placed the fighting in the vicinity of Maas base, the headquarters for the 7th Military District, approximately 57 kilometers from Marib city. The Houthis had taken control of all the villages in Madghel by mid-September, leaving Yemeni government forces holed up in Maas base and its environs in the northwest of the district. On September 9, 12, and 25, Houthi forces fired ballistic missiles on Marib city, hitting civilian and military locations. There were no reports of casualties, although the September 25 attack targeted a school where officials were scheduled to attend an event marking the anniversary of the 1962 revolution that ended the Yemeni imamate in North Yemen.

UN Envoy Warns Marib's Fall to Houthis Would Undercut Political Process

Martin Griffiths, the UN's envoy to Yemen, warned September 15 against underestimating the political importance of the current fighting in Marib. A Houthi takeover of Marib, Griffiths told the UN Security Council, would not only result in high casualties and the displacement of thousands of Yemenis sheltering in the governorate, it also would shift the dynamics of the entire conflict. "If Marib falls, simply put, this would undermine prospects of convening an inclusive political process that brings about a transition based on partnership and plurality," he said.^[1]

[1] Martin Griffiths, "Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Mr. Martin Griffiths, 15 September 2020," UN OCHA via ReliefWeb, September 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/briefing-united-nations-security-council-un-special-envoy-yemen-mr-martin-griffiths-15>

MARIB'S TRIBES HOLD THE LINE AGAINST HOUTHI ASSAULT

Commentary by Maged Al-Madhaji

The future of the war in Yemen will be determined in Marib, where Houthi forces seeking to extend their control over all of northern Yemen aim to seize control of Marib's oil and gas resources. A desperate defense largely reliant on local tribes is trying to prevent the Houthis from marching on the governorate's capital, Marib city, and the oil fields farther to the east. There has been an exceptional failure by the government and coalition to support Marib's tribes, which have been steadfast in their opposition to the Houthis. The dramatic developments in recent months raise several questions about the military strategy and combat capabilities of the Yemeni government and its allies in the Saudi-led coalition...

Read the full analysis by Sana'a Center co-founder and Executive Director Maged Al-Madhaji [here](#).

Government Forces Push Back Houthis in Al-Jawf

Yemeni government forces fared better in Al-Jawf governorate, to the north, where they were able to push Houthi forces back from the border with Marib. On September 4, Yemeni government military reinforcements arrived in Al-Alam area, in southwestern Al-Jawf, and attacked Houthi positions, successfully taking Mount Huwayshan, in the western part of the Al-Nudhood mountains. Yemeni government forces seized full control of the Al-Nudhood mountains on September 11 before a Houthi counterattack later in the day recaptured some positions. Control of the area has since remained fluid, with positions changing hands several times. Yemeni government forces have been trying to push toward Al-Hazm, the governorate capital, which has been under Houthi control since early March. The Houthis also control the Al-Nudhood mountains and the nearby Al-Labanat base.

In Al-Bayda, to Marib's south, the Houthis faced unrest in Al-Zoub village, Al-Quraishyah district, an area they captured in August. Disputes between the local Al-Zoub tribe and the Houthis arose over control of mosques and Houthi home searches, leading to clashes that began September 3. The Houthis eventually withdrew from the village after four days of fighting, but continued to shell Al-Zoub. At least 41 people were killed or injured on both sides, including six civilians from Al-Zoub, according to local sources. The Houthis permitted a five-member tribal mediation committee to enter the village about a week after the fighting began, but only after residents agreed to hand over men wanted by the Houthis. Eighteen villagers, including children, were eventually detained by the Houthis, locals told the Sana'a Center.

Other Military Developments

The South: Casualties in Lahj, Al-Dhalea; Houthis Focus on Al-Jamajem Mountains

Fighting in Lahj and Al-Dhalea governorates between Yemeni government and Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces on one side, and Houthi forces on the other, led to no real advances for either side in September. However, there were fierce clashes in both governorates, resulting in casualties.

In Al-Dhalea, fighting focused on Qa'atabah district, northwest Al-Dhalea, in particular along the Murays frontline. On September 2, Houthi forces attempted to advance toward positions held by pro-STC 4th Military Zone forces in Murays, with casualties reported on both sides; more heavy clashes erupted in the area on September 16. As the month ended, the Houthis were continuing to send more fighters from Damt city, northern Al-Dhalea, to Murays, while pro-STC forces have been moving heavy guns to the frontline to protect their positions.

In Lahj, the Houthis have been focused on capturing the Al-Jamajem mountains, Al-Had district, in the eastern part of the governorate, for the past two months, with little success. Clashes between Houthi and STC forces on September 17 led to at least 20 casualties on both sides. Al-Jamajem mountains provide a commanding position overlooking the surrounding valleys, including parts of Al-Bayda governorate to the north, and the rest of Lahj to the south. The Houthis' escalation of attacks in Al-Had district came as the STC withdrew a number of fighters from the frontline, some of whom have not been paid wages in three months.

Hudaydah City Fighting Draws Yemeni Government Ire; Coalition Infighting Eases in Taiz

Fighting in September in Hudaydah city prompted the Yemeni government to assert that the UN mission in the northern port city was “shackled and at the mercy of the Houthi militia”.^[2] Yemeni Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Hadrami urged moving the mission, which is responsible for overseeing compliance with terms aimed at maintaining peace in the port city under the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, to a more neutral location.^[3] The Yemeni government increasingly has voiced dissatisfaction with the Stockholm Agreement, which ended a major coalition offensive to retake Hudaydah from Houthi forces, freezing frontlines in place.

Fighting also continued in September across the southern part of Hudaydah governorate between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition-backed Joint Forces led by Tariq Saleh, in the districts of At-Tuhayta, Bayt al-Faqih and Hays. Frontlines throughout the governorate, however, remained essentially unchanged as they did in neighboring Taiz, to the south, where Houthi and anti-Houthi forces also clashed.

[2] Yemeni MOFA, Twitter post, “The UN Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) has become shackled... [AR],” September 6, 2020, https://twitter.com/yemen_mofa/status/1302694125905629184

[3] “Foreign Minister: The Houthi militia is using the Stockholm agreement to escalate militarily in other areas [AR],” 26 September, September 6, 2020, <http://www.26sepnews.net/2020/09/06/1-7186/>

In Taiz, Houthi and Yemeni government forces clashed continuously through September in the districts of Al-Misrakh, Al-Salou, Hayfan, Jabal Habashy, Maqbanah, Sabir-al Mawadim and Taiz city. However, infighting within the ranks of the Yemeni government forces subsided in September, after the pro-Islah Taiz Military Axis largely put down opposition to it in August from rival military units, most notably the 35th Armored Brigade. The Taiz military axis has expanded the scope of its security operations, setting up checkpoints in the western parts of Taiz governorate, near the positions of the Joint Forces, which are allied to some of the forces opposing the Taiz Military Axis.

The security situation in government-held areas of Taiz remains far from stable. On September 18, a car carrying a 35th Armored Brigade commander was attacked by unknown gunmen in Al-Turbah city, southern Taiz governorate. The commander, Hummam Al Qubati, who was regarded as a neutral figure during August's infighting, escaped unharmed.

Abyan: Coalition Infighting Flares with No Advances

Despite the presence of coalition cease-fire monitors, Yemeni government and STC forces clashed throughout September in Abyan governorate, specifically on the Shaqrah frontline, east of Zinjibar, the governorate capital. The clashes occasionally led to casualties, but neither side made any real advances. Monitors were deployed to the district following a July deal to implement the Riyadh Agreement. However, efforts to do so fell apart in August.

Political Developments

Warring Parties Agree to Prisoner Swap

The Yemeni government and the armed Houthi movement reached a prisoner swap deal on September 27, following a week of talks in Switzerland. According to the UN special envoy's office and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which co-chaired the negotiations in Glion, Switzerland, the two sides agreed to release "1,081 conflict-related detainees and prisoners, in accordance with the list of agreed-upon names."^[4]

Such a large-scale prisoner swap has been long-awaited, but there is reason to be wary about whether this deal will come to fruition, given past reports of breakthroughs followed by inaction. The Yemeni government and the Houthis almost agreed to an "all for all" exchange in June 2018 to coincide with the end of Ramadan, but those negotiations stalled. Then, the UN incorporated the issue into its deescalation efforts, culminating in a prisoner exchange deal being included in the Stockholm Agreement in December 2018. However, despite a commitment to exchange some 15,000 prisoners,^[5] and two rounds of talks held in Amman in January and February 2019,^[6] no deal took place as the parties failed to agree on finalized lists. In February 2020, at the third meeting of the Prisoners' Exchange Committee, the two sides agreed on a detailed plan for the phased release of detainees.^[7] Sources within both warring parties told the Sana'a Center at the time that an initial agreement would see each side exchange 700 prisoners as a first step. However, no swap materialized. According to the UN, the deal reached in Switzerland in September built on the detailed plan agreed to by the parties in February.^[8]

Houthi officials, speaking to The Associated Press, said the newly agreed swap deal was set to start on October 15.^[9] The initial exchange is set to include 680 Houthi prisoners released in exchange for some 400 from the government and coalition side, including 15 Saudis and four Sudanese held by the Houthis, according to Saudi-led coalition spokesperson, Turki al-Maliki.^[10] A source involved in the February 2020 negotiations told the Sana'a Center at the time that Riyadh was seeking the release of more than 50 Saudis, including 30 who were captured in August 2019 during battles in Kitaf, Sa'ada governorate.

[4] "Joint press statement by the UN office of the Special Envoy for Yemen and the International Committee of the Red Cross on the fourth meeting of the Supervisory Committee," OSESGY, September 27, 2020, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/joint-press-statement-un-office-special-envoy-yemen-and-international-committee-red-cross-fourth>

[5] Aziz El Yaakoubi, "U.N. proposes Yemen's warring parties pull out of key port: sources," Reuters, December 11, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-prisoners/u-n-proposes-yemens-warring-parties-pull-out-of-key-port-sources-idUSKBN1OA0ZQ>

[6] "The Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Prisoner Exchange Agreement Continues its Work," Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, February 8, 2019, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/supervisory-committee-implementation-prisoner-exchange-agreement-continues-its-work>

[7] "A joint statement by OSESGY and ICRC on the outcome of the third meeting of Prisoners' Exchange Committee," Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General For Yemen, February 16, 2020, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/joint-statement-osesgy-and-icrc-outcome-third-meeting-prisoners%E2%80%99-exchange-committee>

[8] "Joint press statement by the UN office of the Special Envoy for Yemen and the International Committee of the Red Cross on the fourth meeting of the Supervisory Committee," OSESGY, September 27, 2020, <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/joint-press-statement-un-office-special-envoy-yemen-and-international-committee-red-cross-fourth>

[9] Samy Magdy and Ahmed al-Haj, "UN: Yemen's warring sides to swap more than 1,000 prisoners," The Associated Press, September 27, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/yemen-archive-united-nations-044b6eb33bc8ed8141566b99b83b54>

[10] Stephanie Nebehay, "Yemen's warring parties agree to their largest prisoner swap as U.N. seeks ceasefire," Reuters, September 27, 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-yemen-security-prisoners-un/yemens-warring-parties-agree-to-their-largest-prisoner-swap-as-u-n-seeks-ceasefire-idUKKBN26I064>

Hadi, in Speech to UN, Blames Houthi ‘Arrogance’ for Failed Peace Efforts

Yemeni President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi blamed Houthi arrogance and Iranian meddling for the inability to end the Yemen War during his pre-recorded speech delivered September 24 to the UN General Assembly in New York. His government, he said, has made many concessions during the past five years toward securing a permanent cease-fire and the resumption of the political process. “Alas, these efforts fell face down because of the terrorists and their sponsors, the Iranian regime,” he said. “Even worse, they took this opportunity to mobilize and attack governorates and cities to cause further carnage amongst civilians in several regions and cities in Yemen.”^[11]

UN special envoy Martin Griffiths has been pushing the warring parties since March to sign on to a Joint Declaration that would include a nationwide cease-fire; economic and humanitarian initiatives (including the opening of the Sana’a airport, reducing restrictions on imports to Hudaydah ports, paying civil servant salaries, and establishing a joint operations cell to combat COVID-19); and the resumption of political talks.

Hadi’s pre-recorded address marked a rare public speech by the Yemeni president, who has spent most of the conflict based in Riyadh and has been dogged by constant speculation regarding his health. Last year, Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Hadrami addressed the 2019 UNGA on behalf of the Yemeni government instead of Hadi, the head of the state, as is the norm. This year, Hadi traveled to the United States for medical treatment in August before returning to Riyadh in September.^[12] The president has been a regular visitor to the Cleveland Clinic’s cardiovascular treatment center in the United States in the past five years.

New STC-affiliated Aden Governor Makes Slew of District Appointments

On September 19, Aden governor Ahmed Lamlas announced the appointment of eight new director generals for districts in the governorate.^[13] Lamlas, secretary-general of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), had been named governor of Aden in July as part of ongoing reconciliation talks between the STC and Yemeni government. After arriving in Aden in late August, the new governor said his immediate priority would be rehabilitating infrastructure and improving service provision in the city.^[14]

[11] Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, remarks delivered via video to the 75th UN General Assembly, September 24, 2020, 6:00, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/yemen-president-addresses-general-debate-75th-session/6194208781001/?term=>

[12] “Yemen president Hadi returns to Riyadh after medical treatment in the US,” Middle East Monitor, September 2, 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200902-yemen-president-hadi-returns-to-riyadh-after-medical-treatment-in-us/>

[13] “Urgent: the decision to appoint new general directors in Aden [AR],” Aden al-Ghad, September 19, 2020, <https://www.adengd.net/news/491788/>

[14] Ali Mahmood, “Yemen: Aden welcomes newly appointed governor,” The National, August 28, 2020, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemen-aden-welcomes-newly-appointed-governor-1.1069471>



A man counts Yemeni rials at the Bin Yazid money exchange in the Al-Mansoura city in Aden on October 1, 2020 // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed al-Shutiri.

Economic Developments

Continued Rial Collapse in Aden Spurs Central Bank Intervention.

In September, the Yemeni government-controlled Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) in Aden implemented several stop-gap measures to try and contain the rapid decline in the value of the Yemeni rial in government-controlled areas. The rial depreciated around 7 percent in the first three weeks of September, from YR805 per US\$1 to YR860 on September 21. As of September 30, the exchange rate in Aden had recovered to YR821. Notably the exchange rate in Houthi-controlled areas – where the Houthi authorities' ban on newly printed banknotes issued from Aden has constricted the money supply – remained relatively stable at YR608 per US\$1 by month's end.

The diverging exchange rates have created opportunities for profiteering through currency speculation and arbitrage. In an effort to curb such, on September 20 the CBY-Aden announced that it was temporarily suspending the licenses of four major exchange companies for currency speculation, and threatened them with permanent licence suspension if they did not improve their practices. The same day the CBY-Aden issued a circular directed to exchange companies that aimed to curb currency speculation and regulate remittances to areas outside Yemeni government control. According to this circular:

- the maximum transfer amount per person and per transaction should not exceed YR500,000 per day, or its rough equivalent of US\$800 or 2500 Saudi riyals;
- exchange companies are prohibited from both accumulating foreign currencies and from selling them to individual exchange outlets;

- local commercial and service transactions should only be conducted in Yemeni rials;
- exchange companies are prevented from selling or transferring foreign currencies to fund importation of basic commodities such as sugar, rice, wheat, poultry feeds as well as other goods like iron, timber, cement, and fuel derivatives.

The CBY-Aden issued a second circular on September 22 directed at Yemeni banks and money exchange companies, allowing unlimited financial transfers in Yemeni rials. This circular stipulated that Yemeni banks must commit to three main measures:

- banks should completely refrain from using hard currencies to conduct transfers and instead use the Yemeni rial to conduct remittances;
- withdrawals and deposits of clients' accounts in foreign currency within banks are restricted to the branches where those accounts are located;
- both commercial banks and exchange companies should report to CBY-Aden on a daily basis the transactions of foreign currencies made through the foreign exchange treasuries and boxes of their branches.

On September 27, however, the CBY-Aden announced the resumption of foreign currency transactions, increasing the amount limit per financial transfer to US\$2,000 for buying and selling foreign currencies. According to a senior banking source based in Aden, the central bank also decided to delay implementing recent measures related to the import of basic commodities.

On September 30, another circular mandated that exchange companies stop using local hawala financial networks to transfer money. In early October the central bank issued Decree No. (18) to close all money transfer networks operating in Aden and other areas controlled by the Yemeni government. The decree stated that the CBY was aiming to create a unified money transfer network supervised by the central bank, and invited licenced transfer companies to a meeting on October 11 to discuss such.

Additional efforts to reduce the downward pressure on the Yemeni included the CBY-Aden formulating a new mechanism by which traders wishing to import fuel have to purchase foreign currency through the CBY-Aden, and those that do not do so will be barred from bringing fuel shipments through Yemeni ports. Demand for foreign currency to finance fuel imports likely constitutes the single largest destabilizing factor for the domestic currency.^[15] In late September, the central bank announced it had funded two batches of oil imports under the new mechanism. However, the exchange rate and value of foreign currency funds used to cover these imports was not made public, possibly indicating that the level of CBY intervention was limited.

[15] "Unregulated Fuel Importers and Unlicensed Money Exchangers" in "Starvation, Diplomacy and Ruthless Friends: The Yemen Annual Review 2018", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 22, 2019, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/6808#ED-FI-ME>

Analysis of CBY-Aden's New Currency Regulation Measures

Though restrictive measures on foreign exchange by the CBY-Aden have been effective over the short term to ease the rial's rapid depreciation, replenishing the central bank's foreign reserves is essential to maintain long term currency stabilization. Currently, the central bank in Aden has nearly depleted its foreign currency holdings, and should the bank be unable to meet importer demand for hard currency the flow of fuel into the country would likely be disrupted.

The implications of CBY-Aden's recent measures restricting money transfers and exchange transactions could have countervailing impacts in terms of economic stability. On the positive side, these measures could contribute to lessening currency speculation and restoring the monetary cycle to the formal banking system. They could also help the CBY-Aden to efficiently supervise money transfers and foreign exchange transactions in areas under Yemeni government control. However, a strict implementation of the Aden-CBY's restrictions could be detrimental to much of the population, given that 90 percent of Yemenis don't have bank accounts and largely conduct their financial transactions over informal money exchange channels.

Thus, restricting the transfer of foreign currency to US\$2,000 could hinder remittances, commercial trade and business transactions, and inhibit the movement of goods around Yemen. The movement of financial remittances across regions would be highly impacted given that the Houthi authorities issued several regulations to restrict financial transfers in Yemeni rials from areas they control to areas controlled by the Yemeni government.

Historically, Sana'a has been the largest trading center and the country's main trader of goods imported through the country's busiest ports in Hudaydah. Limiting cash transfer amounts made by exchange companies would restrict the ability of people living in southern areas to purchase and transport goods into their markets, particularly when taking into consideration these areas largely purchase their agri-food products – such as fruits and vegetables, as well as locally manufactured commodities like dairy products – from northern areas where industrial factories are located. Similarly, local producers would be negatively affected by losing the business opportunity to trade commodities and receive money return on their sales.

Hadramawt Governor Threatens Suspension of Crude Oil Exports

On September 22, Hadramawt governor and the commander of the 2nd Military Region, Faraj Bahsani, threatened to block oil exports from the governorate in response to the central government's non-payment of salaries to local security units and military forces. Bahsani said the Yemeni government had failed to supply the governorate's power plants with fuel and maintenance services, and had not fulfilled its promise to establish a new power station with a 100 megawatt capacity to ease the critical electrical shortage in Mukalla city, where blackouts often exceed 15 hours

per day and have spurred widespread popular protests.^[16] The local authority in Hadramawt also claimed the central government had failed to meet its commitment to provide Hadramawt with 20 percent of the revenues from oil produced in the governorate. If the oil export suspension was effective it would result in significant revenue loss for the central government, given that some 65 percent of the oil produced in Yemeni government controlled areas is sourced in Hadramawt.^[17]

The central government denied the accusations, saying that it had provided YR150 billion in subsidies to Hadramawt – of which YR22 billion was allocated for fuel for electrical stations – during 2019 and the first half of this year.^[18] The central government also said it had transferred the equivalent of roughly US\$350 million worth of oil revenues to the governorate between January 2018 and August 2020, while the governorate said it had received only US\$266 million. The central government then accused Hadramawt of refusing to transfer tens of billions of Yemeni rials in tax and customs revenues owed to the central government since 2015.^[19]

On September 30, Riyadh-brokered negotiations led to the Yemeni government announcing it would pay three months in security and military salaries to the 2nd Military Region, and continue paying 20 percent in oil revenues to the governorate. While ostensibly ending the standoff for the moment, the incident highlighted the deep schisms in central-local relations and the diminishing power of the central government to maintain state funding mechanisms.

Sabafon Moves its Headquarters to Aden

On September 23, Sabafon, Yemen's first GSM network operator and one of the four major mobile phone operators in the country, officially moved its headquarters to the Yemeni government's interim capital of Aden. The company had first announced its intention to relocate from Sana'a in August 2019. After taking control in Sana'a, the Houthi authorities had pursued legal action against Sabafon to try and force the company to pay US\$72 million in what the Houthi authorities claimed were unlawful tax exemptions dating back to 2007 and 2008.

A source close to company's owners told the Sana'a Center that the move to Aden was to avoid paying the fine, to disengage its network from Houthi wiretapping of customers, and to prepare for expansion into fourth and fifth generation mobile phone services. However, according to a senior telecommunications official in Sana'a, Sabafon in Aden has been disconnected from its telecommunications network and largest subscriber base in the north, while Sabafon subscribers in Aden and other southern areas are unable to place calls to the mobile networks operated by the country's other major carriers, such as Yemen Mobile Company, MTN and Y-Telecom, which largely operate in Houthi-controlled areas.

[16] <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/154211/سياسة/تقارير/حزرموت-تصدير-النفط-مقابل-استمرار-الكهرباء>

[17] "Yemen Monthly Economic Update - Pubdocs.worldbank.org.." 25 Apr. 2020, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/609141590055031061/Yemen-Monthly-Economic-Update-April-2020-eng.pdf>. Accessed 30 Sep. 2020

[18] <http://khlaasa.net/news623625.html>

[19] Ibid.

Humanitarian and Human Rights Developments

UN Pushes Donors, Warns of Famine with Yemen Relief Effort Less Than $\frac{1}{3}$ Funded

With time running down on donor countries to fulfill 2020 aid commitments, the UN pressed Gulf countries in September to pay up if they hope to avoid famine in Yemen as cutbacks diminish the available food, water and health care. Human Rights Watch also warned of deadly consequences for the 80 percent of Yemenis reliant on foreign aid, noting donors' "understandable frustration with aid obstruction," by the Houthi authorities, but urging them to continue funding UN and other relief programs anyway.^[20]

By mid-September, donors had covered only 30 percent of the requested US\$3.38 billion UN budget for the Yemen humanitarian response plan in 2020, forcing aid agencies to scale back essential programs.^[21] The UN humanitarian chief, Matt Lowcock, warned the UN Security Council on September 15 that Yemen was yet again threatened by famine. In unusually pointed remarks, Lowcock singled out Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait – with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi having led the regional military intervention into Yemen in 2015 – as having a particular responsibility to aid Yemeni civilians, but paying nothing toward 2020 UN aid efforts. "It is particularly reprehensible to promise money, which gives people hope that help may be on the way, and then to dash those hopes by simply failing to fulfil the promise," Lowcock told the Security Council.^[22]

Regional countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, do run their own humanitarian and development projects in Yemen, largely through their state-run charities, the Emirati Red Crescent and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief). However both also had been key donors to UN aid programs. At a major donor conference in June, Saudi Arabia agreed to contribute US\$500 million, roughly half its 2019 contribution, but has yet to fulfill the pledge. The UAE and Kuwait did not offer pledges.^[23] Combined with deep funding cuts by Washington, which has eliminated most funding for NGO programs in the Houthi-controlled north where more than 70 percent of the population lives,^[24] the impact has been significant. Thus far, Washington has paid out \$589.9 million to Yemen for 2020, including \$420 million for the UN humanitarian response plan, compared to \$768.5 million in

[20] "Deadly Consequences: Obstruction of Aid in Yemen During Covid-19," Human Rights Watch, September 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/14/deadly-consequences/obstruction-aid-yemen-during-covid-19>

[21] "UN warns of Yemen famine; no aid from Saudis, UAE, Kuwait," Al Jazeera, September 15, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/warns-yemen-famine-aid-saudis-uae-kuwait-200915182103529.html>

[22] Mark Lowcock, "Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock -- Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, 15 September 2020," full transcript from OCHA via ReliefWeb, September 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-31>

[23] "Yemen 2020: High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen," UN OCHA, accessed October 4, 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/yemen2020>

[24] Michael LaForgia, "U.S. Cuts Health Care Aid to Yemen Despite Worries About Coronavirus," The New York Times, March 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/world/middleeast/yemen-health-care-aid-coronavirus.html>

2019.^[25] Gulf Arab financial support, and that of the Arab military coalition's largest Western backer, the United States, diminished as humanitarian workers struggled with Houthi authorities' interference, which has included harassment, delays in approving aid projects, diversion of aid to loyalists and fighters and demands to hand over assets used for projects.^[26]

In a September 23 statement, Lise Grande, the humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, expressed similar concerns about underfunding, warning that 30 out of 41 major UN humanitarian programmes in Yemen risked being reduced or shut down without additional funding.^[27]

Lowcock's admonishment of members' unwillingness to pay for the humanitarian effort came on the opening day of the UN's annual General Assembly gathering of foreign leaders. UN officials took advantage of the occasion to press for member states to fulfill old pledges or make new ones. On September 17, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah announced during a videoconference on Yemen held on the sidelines of the General Assembly that his country would donate \$20 million.^[28] Saudi Arabia appeared ready to release about US\$200 million of its June commitment, with KSRelief announcing signed contracts to do so the same day with three UN aid agencies.^[29]

In Focus: 'A Pandemic of Impunity': UN Eminent Experts Report on Yemen

UN-appointed experts found reasonable grounds that all parties to the Yemen war are responsible for "pervasive and incessant" human rights violations, and possibly war crimes, documenting arbitrary deprivation of life, sexual violence, enforced disappearance, torture and child recruitment in their report presented to the Human Rights Council on September 29.^[30]

In its third report, entitled "A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land", the Group of Eminent Experts focused on alleged violations committed between July 2019 and June 2020. A separate, confidential list of individuals alleged to have perpetrated

[25] "Grouped view: United States of America, Government of," OCHA Financial Tracking Service, accessed October 4, 2020, <https://fts.unocha.org/donor-grouped/2933/summary/2019>

[26] "Deadly Consequences: Obstruction of Aid in Yemen During Covid-19," Human Rights Watch, September 14, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/14/deadly-consequences/obstruction-aid-yemen-during-covid-19>

[27] "Lack of funding cripples humanitarian operations in Yemen," Office of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator For Yemen, United Nations, September 23, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HC%20statement%2023092020%20-%20Final.pdf>

[28] "Kuwait offers \$20mn in Yemen aid after UN dressing-down," The New Arab, September 18, 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/9/18/kuwait-offers-20mn-in-yemen-aid-after-un-dressing-down>

[29] Saudi Arabia's KSRelief to provide \$200m in UN Yemen aid deals," Arab News, September 17, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1736036/saudi-arabia>; Nima Elbagir, Nada Bashir and Angela Dewan, "Saudi Arabia announces more than \$200 million in UN aid funding to Yemen," CNN, September 18, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/18/middleeast/yemen-funding-crisis-saudi-intl/index.html>

[30] "Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014 - Detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen," UN Human Rights Council, September 29, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/GEE-Yemen/A-HRC-45-CRP.7-en.pdf>



crimes was submitted to the High Commissioner for Human Rights “for future accountability efforts.” The experts were unable to access Yemen and coalition countries despite repeated requests for permission to do so, the report noted, relying instead on more than 400 interviews with witnesses, victims and others as well as documents.

‘Horrific’ Civilian Impact of Conflict

The report detailed multiple incidents of disregard for civilian life by the warring parties, including disproportionate airstrikes, indiscriminate shelling and unlawful killings away from the battlefield. These incidents highlight “the horrific impact of the hostilities on the daily life of civilians,” the experts said.

The group found that airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition had failed to take all necessary steps to protect civilians and civilian objects, a concern raised in previous reports. The coalition had not fulfilled its duties to verify targets and assess likely civilian impact, or to cancel strikes if it became apparent the target was unlawful or would be disproportionate, thus constituting a war crime, the experts said.

The coalition failed to take measures to minimize civilian casualties in a series of airstrikes on a Houthi detention facility in Dhamar governorate on August 31, 2019, which killed at least 134 detainees, the report said. The experts could not verify coalition claims that the Houthis were storing drones and missiles at the facility, but said that even if this were the case, the coalition still had a legal obligation to consider the civilian impact of the strikes.

The experts also said the warring parties' use of indirect-fire weapons like rockets and mortars raised the risk of civilian casualties and misdirected attacks, especially when used in populated areas. This can lead to indiscriminate attacks, which are a war crime under international humanitarian law. In one such attack, the Houthis fired mortar rounds that hit the women's section of the Central Prison in Taiz city on April 5, killing six women and two girls. The prison is in a residential area, next to a compound that has been used by the Yemeni army.

The group also documented attacks and unlawful killings away from the battlefield and found a pattern of unlawful uses of lethal force by security and law enforcement actors. In one such incident, Security Belt Forces shot dead five men during Friday prayers at a mosque in Mathad village in Al-Dhalea governorate after accusing them of affiliation to the Houthis.

Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Sexual Violence

Enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention continued to be used by the warring parties, the report found. The armed Houthi movement held detainees — including women, journalists and human rights defenders — in prisons and in unofficial and secret facilities, where many were tortured. This included the use of sexual violence, solitary confinement, suspension, electrocution, burning, beating and mock executions, the experts found. In the Houthi-run Al-Saleh Prison in Taiz, the experts verified the torture of 14 men and one boy, including activists, educators and legal professionals. They were subject to severe beatings, removal of fingernails, electrocution of genitals and forced nudity. The experts also verified the torture of five men and two boys detained by the Yemeni army in Marib, who were subject to beatings, suspension in painful positions, the electrocution and burning of genitals, and being forced to crawl on broken glass and screws. Such acts may amount to war crimes, the experts concluded.

The experts verified the rape of detainees by Security Belt Forces and the armed Houthi movement. Security Belt Forces committed sexual violence against male and female migrants detained in Lahj and Aden between March and July 2019, the experts found, including gang rape. One detainee recounted being raped multiple times over 13 days by 28 soldiers. Women detained by Houthi forces because of their political views were also raped, the experts found, sometimes multiple times over long periods. Male Houthi interrogators and female Zainabiyat guards described the rapes as “purification” and “rehabilitation” for the detainees’ “sins,” the report said.



Four bodies that were extracted from the rubble on September 3, 2019, lie in body bags. By the end of the day, 123 bodies had been found, medics said // Sana'a Center photo by Saqr Abu Hassan.

Endemic Impunity: Nowhere to Find Safety or Justice

The experts' group has documented serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law for three years, the report noted, repeatedly calling for investigations and prosecutions for alleged abuses. No trials have been held in relation to the documented violations, the report said, as survivors faced "an endemic lack of access to justice."

The chairperson of the group, Kamel Jendoubi, told the Human Rights Council that the ongoing violations underlined the warring parties' total lack of respect for international law. "For too many people in Yemen, there is simply no safe place to escape the ravages of the war," Jendoubi said.

In their report, the experts urged the international community to help bridge the "acute accountability gap" and called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Yemen to the International Criminal Court. An investigative body should be established, as in Syria, to conduct investigations and prepare case files, the group said, while in the long term, Yemeni authorities should discuss creating a special tribunal to undertake prosecutions.

In a statement, 24 Yemeni, regional and international civil society organizations urged the Human Rights Council to endorse the report's findings, to renew the Group's mandate and to take concrete steps toward credible justice in Yemen.^[31]

[31] "U.N. Human Rights Council: Help Bridge Yemen's "Acute Accountability Gap,"" Mwatana for Human Rights, September 22, 2020, <https://mwatana.org/en/un-hrc-help-bridge-yemens-acute-accountability-gap/>

UN Urges Houthis to Reopen Sana'a Airport to Humanitarian Flights

In his September 15 briefing to the Security Council, Lowcock called for the Houthis to re-open Sana'a International Airport to humanitarian flights. Houthi authorities suspended flights to the capital's airport September 9, impacting the arrival of aid workers as well as medical supplies. The Houthis cited fuel shortages as the reason for the suspension (for details see Sana'a Center's recent publication: 'Yemen Economic Bulletin: Another Stage-Managed Fuel Crisis'). Lowcock acknowledged the shortages were causing "severe humanitarian consequences," but said they did not justify the Houthi decision to close the airport.^[32]

On September 20, the UN's humanitarian aid coordination office in Yemen said the airport closure thus far had prevented 207 metric tons of equipment as well as some personnel from being brought in for COVID-19 response efforts.^[33]

The Saudi-led coalition controls Yemeni airspace, but has allowed humanitarian flights to take off and land at Sana'a airport. Regular air traffic hasn't been permitted through most of the war.

Video-taped Murder Prompts Outrage

The killing of Abdullah al-Aghbary in late August, allegedly by his employers, sparked protests in Sana'a after a video showing his death was shared on social media. The video shows at least five men subjecting the 24-year-old to beatings and torture for six hours.^[34] Al-Aghbary, from Taiz, had for a week been working at a mobile phone shop owned by some of his alleged killers for a week. Houthi security forces said five men were arrested for the killing. The killing drew hundreds of protesters to the Ministry of Justice building, in solidarity with the victim. Houthi forces detained 30 people at the protest on charges of incitement, local media reported on September 13.^[35]

New Academic Year Begins in Yemen

In early October the new academic calendar 2020-2021 was announced in all parts of Yemen. In Houthi-controlled areas the academic year is planned to begin for primary

[32] Mark Lowcock, "Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs..." full transcript from OCHA via ReliefWeb, September 15, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-mark-31>

[33] OCHA Yemen, Twitter post, "#Yemen: Aid agencies are scaling up response..." September 20, 2020, <https://twitter.com/OCHAYemen/status/1307736328809914374>

[34] "Yemen protesters demand justice for mobile phone shop worker 'tortured, killed by employers,'" The New Arab, September 13, 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/9/13/yemen-protesters-demand-justice-for-worker-killed-by-employers>

[35] «Houthis kidnap 30 in al-Aghbary-demonstrations on accusations of incitement...[AR],» al-Masdar Online, September 13, 2020, <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/203163>

school on October 17, 2020,^[36] while it started for primary school students in areas under the Yemeni government on October 4, 2020.^[37] The Ministry of Education in Aden announced that it will follow its recently adopted “National Response Plan to COVID-19”^[38] that includes measures for safe distance in schools, although it is unclear how this will be implemented.

The Southern Teachers Syndicate suspended its strike in early September following a successful initial negotiation with the governor of Aden.^[39] Labor action by teachers in Aden, Lahj, Dhale and Abyan governorates has been intensifying over the past year, and the Southern Teachers Syndicate escalated its general teachers’ strike in August 2020 and presented a list of demands to the governor of Aden that included a pay rise and health care coverage.

The Houthi-run Ministry of Education announced in September that 260 students of the Muhammasheen^[40] community in Sana’a completed summer training.^[41] In Houthi-controlled areas, a move to incorporate members of the Muhammasheen community in what the group refers to as the “war effort” picked up following a speech by Houthi leader Abdulmalek Al-Houthi in June dedicated to them.^[42] The Houthis, who refer to the Muhammasheen community as the “sons of Bilal” – in reference to the freed black slave who was the first to call for Muslim prayer in the time of Prophet Mohammed – began actively recruiting them to the fronts^[43] as well as organizing ‘educational summer training’ programs for them. Summer ‘educational camps’ are widely organized in Houthi controlled areas. According to Houthi sources, over 2,400 were organized in 2019 in seven governorates, involving more than 120,000 students and 7,500 teachers.^[44]

Further, in late September and October 2020, the Houthi-run Ministry of Education announced the launch of training workshops for over 100 women educators that focused on confronting what the Houthis call the “soft war” and the “western policies” to infiltrate muslim society “tarnish” it with foreign ideas.^[45]

[36] Ministry of Education (Sana’a) Telegram Channel [AR], October 3, 2020 <https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAELXKYqxgYok2AqAuW>

[37] Ministry of Education (Aden) Telegram Channel [AR], October 3, 2020, <https://t.me/MinistryOfEducation1>

[38] Ministry of Education (Aden), “COVID-19 Ministry of Education National Response Plan”, September 15, 2020 <http://moe-ye.net/8717>

[39] Alayyam, “The Teacher’s Syndicate Ends its Strike in Response to the Governor” [AR], September 9, 2020, <https://www.alayyam.info/news/8BXQVI3X-U1D8A1-7362>

[40] World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, “Yemen, Muhamasheen”, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/muhamasheen/>

[41] Ministry of Education (Sana’a) Telegram Channel [AR], September, 20 2020, <https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAADvE9Sg7OS5scjY5UQ>

[42] Yemen Media, “AbdulMalek Al-Houthi Speech, June 18, 2020 for the Sons of Bilal” [AR], June 20, 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zma3Vzf5CSg>

[43] Alayyam, “The Houthis Intensify their Recruitment of the Muhammasheen Community in Ibb” [AR], September 14, 2020, <https://www.alayyam.info/news/8C6C6PET-QYZ7D7-976E>

[44] Ansarollah, “Summer Centers, Renewing Success and Resilience” [AR], December 3, 2019, <https://www.ansarollah.com/archives/261534>

[45] The Ministry of Education (Sana’a) Telegram Channel [AR], September, 27 2020 & August 29, 2020 <https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAADvE9Sg7OS5scjY5UQ>

Lack of Data Obscures COVID-19 Case Numbers, Polio Reemerges

In September, the number of reported COVID-19 cases in government-controlled areas of Yemen exceeded 2,000, with 587 deaths according to most recent data.^[46] Reported numbers, however, likely do not represent actual COVID-19 case numbers in Yemen due to the limited testing in areas controlled by the internationally recognized government and the armed Houthi movement's refusal to disclose confirmed cases or deaths within its territory.^[47]

On September 11, an outbreak of polio, which was thought to be eradicated in Yemen in 2005, was reported in the northwestern Sa'ada governorate.^[48] The World Health Organization has confirmed 14 cases in Yemen.^[49] UNICEF described the outbreak of a vaccine-derived poliovirus as a sign of unacceptably low immunity levels among children. The area is under Houthi control, and UNICEF said its polio program cannot access it. The last immunization campaign there was in November 2018.^[50]

[46] "COVID-19 Response Update (06-19 September 2020)", IOM Yemen, September 28, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/en_iom_yemen_covid_response_update_11_06-19_sept_2020_0.pdf

[47] "Hostage on the Red Sea – The Yemen Review, July-August 2020", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, September 5, 2020, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/11477>

[48] "Polio programme accelerates efforts to respond to new polio outbreaks in Sudan and Yemen", UNICEF, September 11, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/polio-programme-accelerates-efforts-respond-new-polio-outbreaks-sudan-and-yemen>

[49] AFP/polio case count data, World Health Organization, accessed October 4, 2020, <https://extranet.who.int/polis/public/CaseCount.aspx>

[50] "Polio programme accelerates efforts...", UNICEF, September 11, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/polio-programme-accelerates-efforts-respond-new-polio-outbreaks-sudan-and-yemen>

International Developments

Q&A WITH JONATHAN ALLEN, UK CHARGÉ D’AFFAIRES TO THE UN



Ambassador Jonathan Allen has served as chargé d'affaires to the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations in New York since March 2020. He was appointed UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN in August 2017, and was Acting Director General, Defence and Intelligence from November 2016 to April 2017. In correspondences with the Sana'a Center, Ambassador Allen discussed UK and UN Security Council policies regarding the Yemen conflict, UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia, UNSC Resolution 2216, and the potential for environment disaster in the Red Sea related to the Safer oil terminal:

Sana'a Center: Your Excellency, on the sidelines of the 75th UN General Assembly in New York, your government co-hosted, along with Sweden and Kuwait, a meeting on September 17 to discuss the situation in Yemen. What do you see as the role of this group, as it has agreed to reconvene a meeting at a senior-official level within six months in Berlin? And how (if at all) it is different from the Quad group on Yemen?



Ambassador Jonathan Allen: The “P5+” group, which met on the 17th of September this year, is an important mechanism for the international community to demonstrate its unity in support of a sustainable peace in Yemen and avoid the threat of famine. The initial group, which met in the margins of UN General Assembly week last year, comprised of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council (the “P5”) and those countries with a leading historic voice on Yemen. The Quad consists of the UK, USA,

UAE and Saudi Arabia and helps coordinate their action. For example, Quad Ambassadors recently met to discuss how best to support the stabilization of Yemen's economy. Such public facing groups support the frequent private engagements we have and allow us to make clear to the parties that they must put aside their differences and urgently agree a deal. A political solution is the only way to alleviate the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

SC: *The UN Security Council (UNSC) has been in something of a holding pattern regarding Yemen since the Stockholm Agreement in late 2018, giving the current UN Special Envoy broad latitude to conduct consultations with minimal intervention. What will the UK do to influence the behavior of Yemen's warring parties toward a peace settlement? Is the UK in favor of supporting the Special Envoy through the use of more UNSC sanctions — directed at all sides — to influence actors on the ground?*



Amb. Allen: *Through a combination of public and private diplomacy, the UK is playing a leading role in supporting UN efforts. In addition to facilitating the aforementioned P5+ meeting, the UK has been active in engaging the region. On October 6, Minister [James] Cleverly [responsible for the Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office] spoke with the Yemeni Foreign Minister about the peace process and developments in the South. On September 8, the Defence Secretary [Ben Wallace] spoke to Omani Foreign Minister Badr [al-Busaidi] about support for UN Special Envoy (UNSE) Martin Griffiths. On September 2, the Prime Minister [Boris Johnson] discussed Yemen with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. And on July 1, the Foreign Secretary [Dominic Raab] wrote a joint op-ed with his Swedish and German counterparts calling for the international community to back peace efforts.*

The UNSC has a vital role to play: it shines a light into the darkness of conflict, holds actors to account, and helps galvanize international action. To that effect, the UNSC meets monthly to receive briefings from UNSE Griffiths and other important voices including Under Secretary-General (Humanitarian) Mark Lowcock and Head of UNMHA General [Abhijit] Guha. Resolutions are another important tool for the UNSC. For example, UNSCR 2511 (2020) condemned appalling sexual violence in Yemen as well as the use of children in conflict. UNSC sanctions are an important instrument in disrupting actions of targeted individuals and holding them to account. The use of sanctions, however, should be considered strategically and in the UNSC we seek to employ them to support the peace process. I note that the Panel of Experts has recently developed a concerning body of evidence about the Houthi official Sultan Zabin.

Finally, I want to reiterate my call for the Yemeni parties – by which I mean the government of Yemen just as much as the Houthis – to cooperate with UNSE Griffiths and to agree to his proposals as soon as possible. The window of opportunity to end this conflict will close and it is in the hands of the parties to work with Martin Griffiths to reach an agreement. It is in their hands whether they are ready to act in the interests of their people or only in their own self-interest. If they do not, the Council should be ready to take action.”

SC: *The UN Security Council is the world's preeminent body for the maintenance of peace and security, and as pen holder on the Yemen file, the United Kingdom is entrusted with drafting council statements and resolutions to this end regarding the ongoing conflict. At the same time, the UK provides military and logistics support for the Saudi-led military coalition, a major party to the war in Yemen. How would you respond to critics who say this creates an inherent conflict of interest that undermines the impartiality of Security Council interventions related to Yemen? While noting that further engagement with the coalition during the past five years hasn't necessarily stopped Saudi-led coalition bombing of schools, civilians, or prevented violations of international humanitarian laws.*



Amb. Allen: *A political settlement is the only way to bring long-term stability to Yemen and to address the worsening humanitarian crisis. We fully support the peace process led by UNSE Martin Griffiths, and urge the parties to engage constructively with this process. The UK is playing a leading role in responding to the crisis in Yemen both through its humanitarian response and using its diplomatic influence. The UK has used its role as penholder at the UN Security Council to help push the Yemen peace process forward.*

The UK operates one of the most comprehensive export control regimes in the world. The UK takes alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) extremely seriously. We will not issue any export licences when there is a clear risk of a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Every licence application is rigorously assessed against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export licensing Criteria. The UK regularly raises the importance of IHL and of conducting thorough and conclusive investigations into alleged violations with Saudi Arabia, including at senior levels.

SC: *It's been 5 1/2 years since UNSC Resolution 2216 was adopted, do you think it is in need of updating or replacing? If so, what do you think a new UNSC resolution should include?*



Amb. Allen: *We believe UNSCR 2216 is currently fit for purpose and gives the latitude for UNSE Griffiths to operate. The UN process is the best chance for a sustainable peace in Yemen and so we are encouraging the parties to engage constructively with UNSE Griffiths on his proposals. We do recognize there will likely be a need for a UNSCR to endorse any subsequent deal that is agreed.*

SC: *What will the UNSC, especially the UK as a permanent member, do to influence the Houthis' decision regarding the Safer oil terminal, which essentially holds the entire Red Sea region hostage by denying access to UN experts? What is the diplomatic community doing to prevent this imminent catastrophe?*



Amb. Allen: *The UK has put this issue on the international agenda. UK-funded research identified the threat posed by the tanker – a spill four times larger than the Exxon Valdez spill and costing up to \$20 billion – and this was used by the UN and the US to underpin their assessments. The UK, working with Germany, called a standalone UNSC session to raise awareness of this threat and establish international consensus that the Houthis need to urgently grant the UN access to the tanker to assess its condition and carry out urgent repairs.*

We regularly raise Safer in engagements with the Houthis directly and with international partners. Minister Cleverly discussed it with Yemeni Foreign Minister Hadhrami on October 6, Saudi Ambassador Khalid bin Bandar on August 5, and with Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir on June 20. The Foreign Secretary called on the international community to do more to pressure the Houthis to agree to facilitate the UN mission during the aforementioned P5+ Ministerial meeting on Yemen he co-hosted on September 17. It is important that the Safer issue remains in the forefront of the international community's mind until the Houthis facilitate UN access to the tanker and allow resolution of the problem. Given the ship's location, it is clear the Houthis are the blockers and it is they who will be held accountable should a leak occur.

The UK has already contributed 2.5 million pounds to fund the UN mission for the tanker and we are considering what more we can do to support the UN to develop robust contingency plans.

Developments in the United States

Congress Investigates Weapons Sales Procedure

Four internal US State Department memos released September 15 indicate the department attempted to censor information about the impact of arms sales to the Arab coalition on Yemeni civilians. US Representative Eliot Engel, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, released the memos exchanged among a senior political officer in the State Department, a lawyer for the agency and the department's internal Inspector General's office. Engel maintains the memos show an effort to intervene in a report by the Inspector General, who serves as an internal watchdog to flag potential misconduct, and an attempt to hide information about potential civilian casualties from Congress and the public.^[51]

The memos are part of Congressional Democrats' investigations into circumstances behind US President Donald Trump's replacement of Inspector General Steve Linick on June 12, 2020.^[52] Recent matters Linick had been investigating included Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's tasking of personal errands to career foreign officers and the State Department's argument for activating emergency measures in May 2019 to speed \$8 billion worth of arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. By doing so, the Trump administration was able to bypass congressional approval.^[53] Trump dismissed Linick and five other inspectors general from various departments in a span of six weeks, triggering the congressional investigations.^[54]

The four memos dating from July 10, 2020, to August 3, 2020, discussed the inspector general's draft report assessing the State Department's role in the arms sales, including precision-guided munitions (PGMs).^[55] The State Department argued executive privilege to remove content it deemed sensitive.^[56] In a July 10 memo, R. Clarke Cooper, the assistant secretary for political and military affairs, challenged a section of the report that had advised the State Department to "update its analysis of legal and policy risks associated with transfers of PGMs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in support of Coalition operations in Yemen."^[57] This suggests some

[51] "Engel Releases Records Showing State Department's Attempt to Hide Facts in OIG Arms Sales Report," US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 15, 2020, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2020/9/engel-releases-records-showing-state-department-s-attempt-to-hide-facts-in-oig-arms-sales-report>

[52] Eliot L. Engel, letter to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, June 12, 2020, https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/0/e/0e547195-4993-4968-91a9-65574c7cb783/2346FB3B7DB273EECAF56EEC6723AAE1.6-12-2020-ele-letter-to-pompeo-on-bulatao-linick.pdf

[53] Jennifer Spindel, "Yes, Trump can override Congress and sell weapons to Saudi Arabia — even over Republican objections," The Washington Post, May 30, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/05/30/yes-trump-can-override-congress-sell-weapons-saudi-arabia-even-over-republican-objections/>

[54] Melissa Quinn, "The internal watchdogs Trump has fired or replaced," CBS News, May 19, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-inspectors-general-internal-watchdogs-fired-list/>

[55] "Engel Releases Records Showing State Department's Attempt to Hide Facts in OIG Arms Sales Report," US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 15, 2020, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2020/9/engel-releases-records-showing-state-department-s-attempt-to-hide-facts-in-oig-arms-sales-report>

[56] Joshua L. Dorosin, memorandum on redactions to the Inspector General's review, released by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, July 27, 2020, https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/5/e/5e355554-e23b-4163-a2f6-beeced6ef14c/4D5447ED77734F800FB2EF7749EFEE08.3.-july-27-department-response-to-request-for-clarification-on-redactions-sbu-003-.pdf

[57] Political Military Affairs State Department memo to the Office of Inspector General, "Response to Draft OIG

US government concern about liability and risks in supporting the coalition in Yemen. The Trump administration maintains it has taken steps to reduce civilian casualties through the United States' Conventional Arms Transfer policy,^[58] however it is not clear whether or to what extent the measures have been implemented or been effective.

Washington Calls on Houthis to Halt Marib Assault, Mulls Terrorist Designation

The US State Department called on the armed Houthi movement on September 22 to stop attacks in Marib governorate and against Saudi Arabia following a US delegation's meeting on Yemen on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.^[59] The call came as fighting was closing in on the governorate's capital, Marib city, and as the Trump administration was considering designating the armed Houthi movement a terrorist organization and its top leaders global terrorists.^[60]

The proposed designation of Ansar Allah as a terrorist group, reported September 26 by The Washington Post and attributed to anonymous officials within the Trump administration, would elevate the severity of the offense of providing aid to the Houthis — a move that could widen the ever-growing gap between Washington's approach to Iran and the softer line taken by its European allies. The State Department, in its statement, also cited continuing concern about the "Houthis' aggression, supported by Iranian weapons shipments in violation of UN arms embargoes."^[61] Word of the proposed designation came less than a week after Trump issued an executive order expanding US sanctions against Iran. The September 21 order listed more entities and individuals to fall under export controls and asset freezes for alleged involvement in Iran's nuclear program as well as its missile and conventional weapons programs.^[62] While officially designating the Houthis as terrorists could strengthen Washington's hand against Iran, it also could hinder humanitarian operations in Houthi-controlled areas and complicate any US efforts for constructive political engagement toward ending the war.

Report – Review of the Department of State's Role in Arms Transfers to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates" July 10, 2020, https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/_cache/files/6/8/68a68b4c-f4f4-4b7b-a51b-6bc9ede266d3/474A865C629FB3EC00B972C60C6E8943.1.-july-10-department-response-to-draft-report-redacted-by-department-.pdf

[58] R. Clarke Cooper, "Why did the Trump Administration Fire the State Department Inspector General?" remarks to the US House Foreign Affairs committee, 1:16:20–1:20:25, September 16, 2020, <https://youtu.be/Q5gev8ONn50?t=4623>

[59] Morgan Ortagus, "Humanitarian Pledges Must Be Met, Houthis Must Stop Hostilities to Stabilize Yemen," US Department of State, September 22, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/humanitarian-pledges-must-be-met-houthis-must-stop-hostilities-to-stabilize-yemen/>

[60] Missy Ryan, John Hudson and Ellen Nakashima, "U.S. launches new terrorism review of Iran-backed rebels in Yemen", The Washington Post, September 26, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-yemen-houthi-terrorism/2020/09/25/996b2012-fc17-11ea-830c-a160b331ca62_story.html

[61] Morgan Ortagus, "Humanitarian Pledges Must Be Met, Houthis Must Stop Hostilities to Stabilize Yemen," US Department of State, September 22, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/humanitarian-pledges-must-be-met-houthis-must-stop-hostilities-to-stabilize-yemen/>

[62] Donald J. Trump, "Statement by the President Regarding New Restrictions on Iran's Nuclear, Ballistic Missile, and Conventional Weapons Pursuits", The White House, September 21, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-new-restrictions-irans-nuclear-ballistic-missile-conventional-weapons-pursuits/>

Regional Developments

Iran Acknowledges Sharing Arms Expertise with Houthi Movement

Iran has shared its expertise in defense technology with the armed Houthi movement, an Iranian military spokesperson said September 22, and the group is now capable of making drones, missiles and other weapons.^[63] Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi, spokesperson for the general staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, also dismissed accusations Iran has supplied the Houthis with missiles or drones. He noted, however, that due to Iran's economic downturn – in large part caused by the reintroduction of US sanctions – the country is not in a position to assist its allies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen free of charge, indicating the Houthis are paying for the Iranian assistance.^[64]

Shekarchi's comments are the most detailed acknowledgment of Iranian support to date. Coalition partners Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US have long accused Iran of supporting the armed Houthi movement with arms, yet Iran has remained evasive when addressing the extent of its involvement in the Yemen conflict. Iranian military officials have on previous occasions denied the accusations made by the coalition partners, stating that their relationship to the Houthi movement is limited to providing advisory assistance but refraining from specifying further.^[65]

While direct Iranian control over the Houthis may be less than sometimes portrayed,^[66] reports have indicated that their relationship also includes arms sales. In its 2018 report, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen concluded that the Samad drones used by Houthi forces originated from Iran.^[67] Also of significance, the 2019 Aramco attacks – claimed by the Houthi movement but ascribed to Iran by Saudi Arabia and the US – were described by a Sana'a Center source as a coordinated strike between the two parties, with Iran firing missiles while drones were launched by the armed Houthi movement.^[68]

[63] "Iran Has Supplied Yemen with Defense Know-How: Spokesman," Tasnim News Agency, September 22, 2020, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2020/09/22/2354460/iran-has-supplied-yemen-with-defense-know-how-spokesman>; "Spokesman: Iran Committed to Reinvalidate Syria's Air Defense," Fars News Agency, September 22, 2020, <https://en.farsnews.ir/newstext.aspx?nn=13990701000738>

[64] Ibid.

[65] "Iran Has Supplied Yemen with Defense Know-How: Spokesman," Tasnim News Agency, September 22, 2020, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2020/09/22/2354460/iran-has-supplied-yemen-with-defense-know-how-spokesman>

[66] "War's Elusive End – The Yemen Review 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, p. 115, https://sanaacenter.org/files/TYR_Annual_2019_en.pdf

[67] "Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen," United Nations, January 26, 2018, p. 32, https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/594

[68] "War's Elusive End – The Yemen Review 2019," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, January 30, 2020, p. 37, https://sanaacenter.org/files/TYR_Annual_2019_en.pdf

Other International Developments in Brief:

- **September 14:** Three Belgian NGOs announced they had appealed a recent decision by the country's Council of State to only partially suspend licenses granted by the Walloon region for arms exports to Saudi Arabia.^[69] An administrative court acting on a complaint by several human rights groups earlier suspended licenses to the Saudi National Guard but not to the Saudi Royal Guard. The appeal seeks to broaden the suspension to the Saudi Royal Guard.
- **September 17:** The European Parliament adopted an arms export resolution to strengthen the implementation of common rules adopted in 2008 that govern EU member states' exports of military technology and equipment.^[70] The parliament urged member states to refrain from selling arms and any other military equipment to members of the Saudi-led coalition, the Yemeni government and other parties to the conflict, noting that such exports would clearly violate the 2008 Common Position. The resolution also called on member states to refrain from exporting surveillance technology to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain that could facilitate internal repression.
- **September 17:** In Canada, 39 organizations including arms control and rights groups signed a letter addressed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau urging an end to Canadian arms sales to Saudi Arabia.^[71] Earlier in the month, the UN's Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen mentioned Canada for the first time among a list of states selling arms to parties to the conflict in Yemen.^[72] Canadian military equipment exports to Saudi Arabia, which include primarily light-armored vehicles, reached a record high in 2019 of CAN\$2.86 billion,^[73] more than double the CAN\$1.28 billion of 2018.^[74] On September 15, the investigative journalism website Ricochet published a report on Canada's role in international drone wars through drone technology exported by the Ontario-based defense company L3Harris Wescam. Some drones operated by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen contained aerial surveillance technology from Wescam, according to the report.^[75]

[69] "Belgian arms delivered to Saudi Arabia: new appeal to the Council of State by several NGOs" [FR], Sudinfo, September 14, 2020, <https://www.sudinfo.be/id250507/article/2020-09-14/armes-belges-livrees-larabie-saoudite-nouveau-recours-au-conseil-detat-de>

[70] "European Parliament resolution of 17 September 2020 on Arms export: implementation of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP (2020/2003(INI))," European Parliament, September 17, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0224_EN.pdf; "COUNCIL COMMON POSITION 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008," EUR-Lex, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02008E0944-20190917>

[71] Steven Chase, "Trudeau urged to end arms exports to Saudi Arabia after Canada cited for fueling Yemen war" The Globe and Mail, September 17, 2020, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-trudeau-urged-to-end-arms-exports-to-saudi-arabia-after-canada-cited/?utm_medium=Referrer:+Social+Network+:+Media&utm_campaign=Shared+Web+Article+Links

[72] Ibid.

[73] "2019 Exports of Military Goods," Global Affairs Canada via SIPRI, July 2020, p. 6, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/canada_2019_eng_0.pdf

[74] "2018 Exports of Military Goods," Global Affairs Canada via SIPRI, tabled in parliament June 20, 2019, p. 6, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/canada_2018_eng.pdf

[75] Jon Horler, "Unmasking Canada's role in the drone wars," Ricochet, September 15, 2020, <https://ricochet.media/en/3282/unmasking-canadas-role-in-the-drone-wars>

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