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Cover photo: Security forces patrol near Al-Turbah, Taiz governorate, on July 23, 2023, in the hunt for suspects in the killing of aid worker Moayad Hameidi, the director of the World Food Programme's Taiz office // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed Al-Basha.



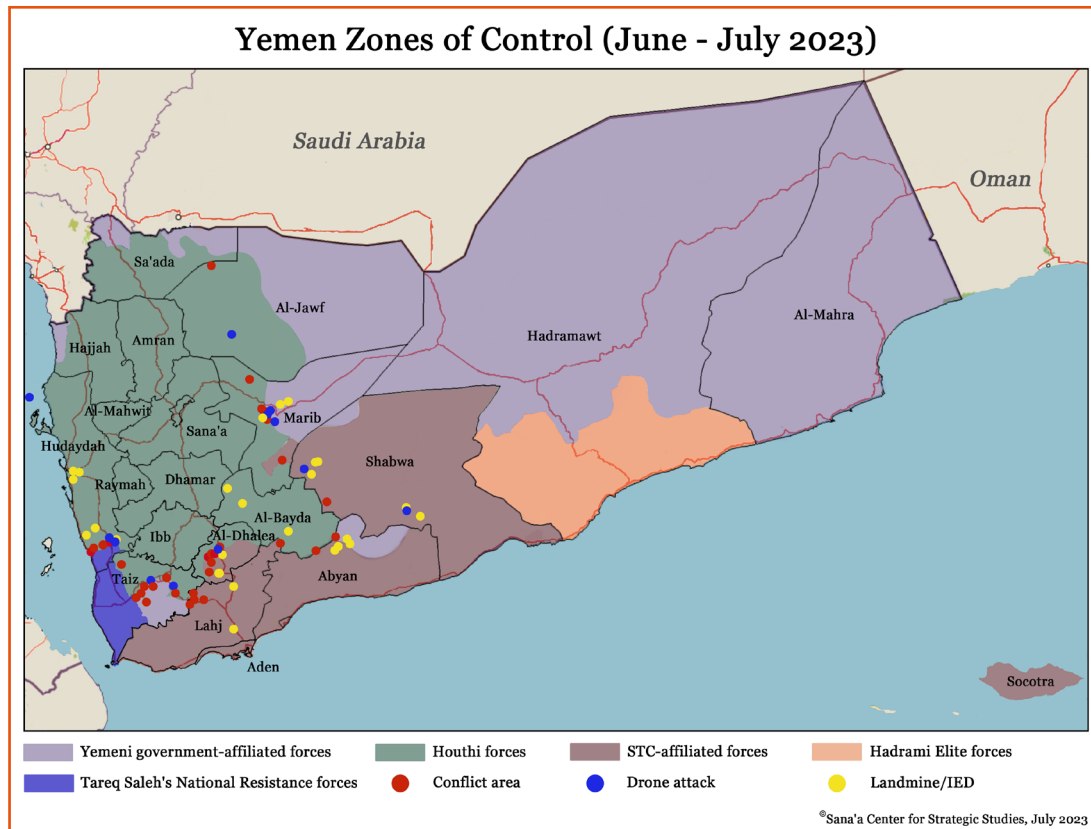
The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related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

The latter part of June and early July saw increased tensions in the region straddling the Al-Jawf-Marib border, as Houthi forces began clashing with tribal fighters in an attempt to fortify the area. Following clashes with pro-government forces on June 11 on fronts in eastern Al-Hazm district in the areas of Al-Rayyan, Al-Shahla, Al-Nusoud, and Al-Jadafer, large groups of Houthi fighters traveled to new camps in the nearby Bir Al-Marazeeq area on June 17, according to the pro-government director of security in Al-Jawf, pro-government military and security forces, and a local tribal sheikh. More reinforcements arrived to the nearby Al-Jadafer area on June 20. On the same day, a Houthi sniper killed one of the most prominent fighters from the Dahm tribe, Hassan Naji Nassim.

Ongoing tensions between the Houthis and the Bani Nawf tribes took a turn when, on July 16, Bani Nawf tribesmen killed the leader of the Houthi-aligned Al-Maraqiz Axis, Abu Aquail al-Matari, in the Al-Sa'a area in eastern Al-Hazm district, setting off a series of clashes and mobilizations that are still ongoing. The killing of Al-Matari – reportedly a case of mistaken identity – came after Bani Nawf tribesmen blocked the main road in the east of Al-Hazm district to demand that the Houthis release a recently detained tribesman. In response to the killing, Houthi leaders sent hundreds of reinforcements into Bani Nawf tribal lands, refusing to lift the siege even after the alleged killer turned himself in. The event caused ripples in Sana'a city as Houthi forces deployed armored vehicles on several streets on July 25 after Noaman al-Matari, also known as Abu Raddad al-Jahili, the commander of the Rescue Forces in Sana'a governorate, deployed dozens of military vehicles loaded with fighters to Al-Jawf without the knowledge of other Houthi leaders in revenge for the killing of his relative.

Houthi forces besieged the Al-Hayfa and Al-Quoz areas in Khabar al-Marashi district along Al-Jawf's western border with Sa'ada on July 26 in an attempt to exploit a land dispute between the Dhu Mohammed, Dahm, and Sufyan tribes, according to the local pro-government district director and a tribal sheikh from the besieged areas. In response, tribal sheikhs from across Al-Jawf set up a series of meetings on July 16, 27, and 29 to discuss the Houthi sieges in both Al-Hazm and Kharab al-Marashi districts, according to tribal sources and sheikhs present at the respective meetings. At the end of the final meeting, which took place in the Al-Rayyan area in the government-controlled area east of Al-Hazm district, the sheikhs issued a statement calling for the tribes to unify to prevent further Houthi encroachment and gathered donations to support Dahm tribesmen in Houthi-controlled areas.

Dormant Frontline Revived, Others Continue to See Fighting



June and July saw steady fighting across fronts in Abyan, Al-Bayda, Shabwa, and Lahj. In general, clashes were lighter in June, with heavier casualties by mid-July. After nearly two months of calm, clashes broke out on July 24 between Houthi fighters and the Southern Transitional Council (STC)-affiliated Shabwa Defense forces on the Aqbat Amqwah front, on the border of Shabwa's Merkha al-Ulya district and Al-Bayda's Maswarah district, the first fighting in the region since June 1, according to an STC-affiliated military source.

Al-Qaeda intensified its attacks on STC-affiliated soldiers in Lahj, Abyan, and Shabwa, using raids, roadside bombs, and drone strikes. Attacks focused on Shabwa Defense forces stationed in the Al-Musina'a area of Al-Saeed district in southern Shabwa, and STC-affiliated 2nd and 6th Support and Backup Brigades stationed in the Omayran Valley in Abyan's Mudiya district, where STC-aligned forces are deployed as part of the Operation Arrows of the East counterterrorism campaign. Over the course of June and July, Al-Qaeda militants killed at least four STC-affiliated soldiers and wounded 13 others. After using drones for the first time in May, the group launched drone strikes on June 12, 14, and 26 and July 4. A raid on July 31 targeted counter-terrorist forces in the Omayran Valley, leaving five STC-affiliated soldiers dead and four wounded, while Al-Qaeda elements claimed they were able to seize a military vehicle, a motorcycle, and various weapons.

In Abyan, Houthi forces continued to clash regularly with Southern Resistance forces on the Aqbat al-Tharah front along the border of Al-Bayda's southern Mukayras district and Abyan's northern Lawdar district. Clashes also occurred on the nearby Aqbat al-Halhal front.

In nearby Lahj, Houthi forces repeatedly clashed with STC-affiliated forces on the Hamala Hawamrah front in Al-Qabaytah district bordering Taiz, as well as along frontlines between near the Al-Hadd district, including the Al-Habaj area, and the Al-Barman area, near the border between Al-Hadd and Al-Bayda's neighboring Al-Zahir district, according to an STC-affiliated military source.

Al-Dhalea also experienced heavy clashes in mid-July, with casualties focused in the Al-Fakher and Bab Ghalq areas in the northwest of Qaataba district, and the Al-Jub and Battar Hajar area in northwestern Al-Dhalea district. On several occasions, civilians were affected by the fighting, and on July 7, Houthi forces arrested 17 civilians after raiding dozens of homes in several villages in the south of Damt district in northern Al-Dhalea, according to tribal sources.

Houthis Launch Coastal Patrols in Hudaydah

Houthi forces tightened security off the coast of Hudaydah, particularly along the Al-Faza coast, which stretches from Al-Haymah in the south of Al-Tuhaytah district to northern Al-Khawkhah district. On June 20, Houthi naval forces stationed on the southern part of the coast engaged Joint Forces stationed on Zuqar Island, near the international shipping corridor, the first maritime clash between the two in this area. The following week, Houthi forces conducted evening patrols in territorial waters along the shipping corridor and prevented fishermen from working along the coast, according to local fishermen and military sources. On June 27, two armed boats approached a ship entering the Houthi-controlled Al-Salif port, adjacent to Kamaran Island northwest of Al-Salif district. According to local fishermen, the ship maneuvered away from the boats, which returned to port.

In the following weeks, Houthi forces heavily policed the area. On July 2, Houthi forces shot and killed a man off the coast of the Al-Qaza'a area in Al-Tuhaytah district after his boat was swept into a prohibited zone next to a secret Houthi construction project. Houthi forces had previously warned locals that anyone venturing into the area would be dealt with harshly. Marine patrols were also reported on July 27, with Houthi ships surveilling the international shipping lane along the Al-Faza coast.

This comes amidst private reports that Iran is moving missiles and drones to the governorate, and a public statement by Houthi president Mahdi al-Mashat that the group intends to stage military drills on Houthi-controlled Red Sea islands. While the motive behind these moves remains unclear, any military display on the islands would signal the Houthis' ability to threaten the international shipping lane.

Fighting continued between Joint Forces and the Houthis along several frontlines, intensifying in July. The Al-Garrahi district was particularly active, with a two-week period in mid-July leaving three Joint Forces soldiers dead and 47 wounded, and five Houthi soldiers dead and 23 wounded.

Assassinations and Tightened Security in Taiz

In Taiz, Houthi forces escalated fighting in areas surrounding Taiz city, launching explosives-laden drones on pro-government military sites on the eastern and western fronts, and carrying out ground offensives and shelling on the eastern, northern, and western fronts.

The Islah-affiliated Taiz Military Axis clashed with Houthi forces on several fronts surrounding Taiz city. Fighting was particularly active to the west of the city, with clashes occurring along the Air Defense camp front, the Al-Ahtoub front in Jabal Habashi district, and the Al-Damina area. Fighting also broke out further west, in the Al-Qahifah Himyar and Al-Kadma areas of Maqbanah district. Houthi advances were repelled on the Aqbat Muneef and Al-Tashrifat fronts to the east of Taiz city, the Asifrah front in northern Taiziyah district, and the Al-Aqroud front in Al-Misrakh district which lies to the city's south.

In July, the governorate witnessed several assassinations, including the killing of Sheikh Ali Mohammed al-Haisi, a prominent Islah party leader, in Al-Makha district on July 5, and the killing of Special Security Forces officer Salah al-Omrani in front of his house in the Ring Road neighborhood of Taiz city on July 10. On July 21, the head of the World Food Programme's local office in Taiz, Moayad Hameidi, was killed in the town of Al-Turbah, in the south of the governorate near the border with Al-Lahj. Hameidi, a Jordanian national, had started the job less than one month prior. Security forces cracked down in the following weeks, arresting more than 20 suspects. In all three assassinations, the victims were shot by assailants on motorcycles.

Houthi Forces Conduct Military Maneuvers

Houthi forces conducted major military exercises as they continued to reinforce frontlines in Marib. This included live-fire exercises on June 26 which featured a helicopter from the Ali Abdullah Saleh era, explosive-laden drones designed by Iran, armored vehicles, sniper rifles, and mortar systems. The location of the event is disputed, as Houthi officials claimed it was in Al-Jawf, while researchers linked it to Marib's Al-Majzar district along the border with Sana'a governorate. Another military maneuver took place in eastern Sa'ada governorate near the Saudi border on July 7.

On July 11, Houthi forces conducted major military maneuvers in Serwah district in western Marib governorate, which included a helicopter, heavy weapons, and tanks. The exercises were held in the presence of a host of top Houthi military leaders, including military intelligence chief and field commander Abdullah al-Hakim (Abu Ali), Maribi military officer Mubarak al-Mishn al-Zayadi, army chief-of-staff Mohammed Abdelkarim al-Ghammari, Defense Minister Mohammed Nasir al-Atefi, and head of the Houthi-affiliated 6th Military Region Jamil Zaraa (Abu Badr). Eyewitnesses who spoke with the Sana'a Center confirmed the presence of a number of foreign observers among the Houthi commanders, who intelligence officials affiliated with the Saudi-led coalition identified as Iranians and Iraqis.

International observers have repeatedly warned about the Marib military buildup, warning that a return to fighting would have detrimental consequences – be they political ramifications for belligerents or damage to local communities affected by the fighting.

Other Developments

On June 2: Houthi forces blew up the house of Sheikh Ali Ahmed Mubarak al-Hijazi, leader of the Bani Jabr tribal resistance forces in the Al-Rawdah area of Marib. On the same day, Houthi military activity was reported on the fronts surrounding Marib city, including the construction of new trenches and fortifications on the Al-Mashjah and Al-Suhail fronts to the west of the governorate capital, according to pro-government security forces and a resident from Serwah district.

On June 6: A convoy of Nation's Shield reinforcements was seen coming from the Saudi border and passing through Abyan on their way to Aden. Throughout June, convoys carrying the Saudi-trained soldiers, who operate under the authority of PLC chief Rashad al-Alimi, were spotted in several governorates, with soldiers reportedly being deployed to locations in Lahj and Aden.

On June 16: Houthi forces reportedly began recruiting children in Natea district in northern Al-Bayda for military conscription, according to a local resident. The recruitment, led by the Natea district security supervisor (mushrif), Abu Taha, reportedly aimed to enroll children aged 13-18 in three-month cultural courses before providing them with weapons and stationing them at checkpoints.

On July 2: The STC-affiliated Southern Armed Forces issued a circular prohibiting the carrying of weapons in Aden. Concurrently, the Al-Asifa forces announced a similar campaign. On July 5, the commander of Aden's Security Belt forces met with the unit's

security and checkpoint leaders in the Martyr Yahya al-Shoubaji Camp in the Al-Nasr area of Khormaksar district to discuss the progress of the campaign and urged officials to back the prohibition on arms in the coming months. The campaign was launched after two deadly shootings of civilians, one of them a **4-year-old girl**.

On July 7: Several people were wounded after clashes broke out at a pro-STC rally held in the square across from the historic Seyoun Palace in Hadramawt's capital city Mukalla (also known as the Al-Kathiri Palace, as it was previously the residence of Sultan Al-Kathiri). The large rally marked "**Southern Land Day**," when forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh took control of southern Yemen at the end of the 1994 civil war. Clashes broke out between demonstrators and gunmen from the Al-Kathir tribe after the tribesmen tore down flags of the former South Yemen and pictures of STC leaders on the palace walls.

On July 29: Al-Subaiha tribesmen in Lahj carried out an armed protest against the deployment of UAE-backed National Resistance forces personnel in the Bab al-Mandab area in the west of Al-Madaribah wa Ras al-Arah district, according to tribal sources.

On July 31: Popular resistance councils from several governorates **formed** the Supreme Popular Resistance Council to fight the Houthis. Led by Hammoud Saeed al-Mikhlaifi, an early commander in the Taiz popular resistance and an Islah-aligned figure backed by Qatar, and composed of fighters who are not affiliated with the government's military and security forces, the formation of the council was announced in Marib city. **Members** of resistance councils from Sana'a, Dhamar, Al-Mahwit, Ibb, Taiz, Marib, and Aden participated in the launch of the new body.



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