

YEMEN AT THE UN

April 2018 Review





YEMEN AT THE UN

Yemen at the UN is a monthly series produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. It aims to identify UN-led efforts to resolve the conflict in Yemen and contextualize these efforts relative to political, security, economic and humanitarian developments on the ground.

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.

Founded in 2014, the Sana'a Center is one of the few independent research centers that continues to operate in Yemen. While the Center maintains cordial relations with all key stakeholders it has remained fiercely unaligned with any of the belligerent parties. The Sana'a Center has thus maintained a unique positioning and ability to work throughout Yemen and beyond, distinguishing itself as an emerging leader in Yemen-related research and analysis.

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Executive Summary

In April, Saleh Ali al-Samad, a senior Houthi official and the head of the Supreme Political Council in Sana'a, was killed by an air-to-ground missile strike in Hudaydah city. Al-Samad was one of the most prominent political figures within the Houthi leadership structure and is the group's most senior member to have been killed thus far in the conflict. His death will likely have far reaching implications for both the Houthis and the UN's renewed mediation efforts to end the Yemen conflict (see 'The Killing of Saleh Ali al-Samad').

Just prior to al-Samad's killing, Martin Griffiths, the new United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, had briefed the UN Security Council on his multiple visits around the region since taking the post (see 'New Special Envoy Briefs the UNSC'.) Among the threats to the peace process the Special Envoy noted were the renewed prospect of a large-scale military offensive on Houthi-held Hudaydah port (see 'The Mobilisation and Deployment of Tariq Saleh's 'National Resistance Forces' and 'Anti-Houthi Forces Capture Midi city'), the near-daily Houthi ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabia (see 'Escalating Houthi Missile Attacks'), as well as the increasing cost of the conflict borne by noncombatants in Yemen (see 'Intensified Coalition Airstrikes on Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure').

Internationally, April saw governments in both the United States and Europe face continuing pressure regarding their roles in facilitating the Saudi-led military coalition campaign in Yemen (see 'US Senators Raise Concerns Regarding Support for Saudi-led Coalition', 'MBS Meets Marcon, and Protests, in Paris' and 'German Opposition Groups Challenge Arms Exports to Coalition Members').

Meanwhile in Yemen, restrictions on humanitarian and commercial access into and inside the country continued to hamper efforts to address the humanitarian crisis (see 'Humanitarian Coordinator Briefs the UNSC', 'Declining Food and Fuel Imports' and 'Humanitarian Access Restrictions'). At the same time, Saudi and Yemeni government officials repeatedly accused the Houthis of holding hostage 19 vessels off the coast of Hudaydah — going as far as writing the UN Security Council regarding the alleged incident — even after a Sweden-based maritime transparency project and a vessel owner revealed the claims to be baseless (see 'Saudi, Yemeni Officials Spread Misinformation Regarding Hudaydah Port Access').

In economic developments, Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) Governor Mohammed Zammam stepped up his efforts to restore central bank capacity, stabilize the exchange rate, ease the liquidity crisis and lift restrictions on the Yemeni financial sector's ability to access global networks (see 'CBY Governor Steps Up Efforts to Revitalize Banking & Financial Sector'). In Houthi-controlled areas, severe cooking gas shortages continued, while the authorities in Sana'a, in an attempt to accumulate enough liquidity to pay public sector salaries, instructed the Sana'a-based CBY to temporarily freeze the budget accounts of government agencies (see 'Economic Developments in Houthi-Controlled Areas').

Also in April, Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Daghir toured southern governorates on his first trip to government-controlled areas of Yemen since clashes had erupted in Aden three months ago (see 'Bin Dagher Returns to Yemen With Visits to Aden and Hadramawt').

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

At the United Nations

New Special Envoy Briefs the UNSC

On April 17, the UN Security Council (UNSC) met to discuss the situation in Yemen, hearing briefings by the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock.

In his first briefing to the UNSC, Griffiths said a framework for Yemeni peace negotiations was to be presented to the UNSC within two months. He said a political solution to end the conflict was available and its basic contours were clear, which are: “the end of fighting, withdrawal of forces and handover of heavy weapons in key locations together... with an agreement on the establishment of an inclusive government, one which brings the parties together in a consensus to build peace.”

Griffiths said as part of his mission he had prioritized speaking to Yemenis from across the socio-political spectrum, and that in doing so thus far he had found that all sides wanted the war to end and for a stable, accountable government to be built.

The Special Envoy reported that since taking his post in March he had met with President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi and other officials from the internationally recognized Yemeni government, and visited Sana’a where he met with senior Houthi officials, including a conference call with Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi. The Special Envoy’s trip to Sana’a was particularly significant given that through 2017 Houthi officials had repeatedly refused to meet with Griffiths’ predecessor Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, whom the Houthis had accused of bias.

While the Special Envoy has yet to visit southern Yemen he noted that he had met with southern groups; in referring to their “long-standing frustrations and aspirations.” Griffiths said that “there will be no peace in Yemen if we do not also listen to the voices of the south and make sure they are included in the political arrangements that end this war.”

Notably, on April 5, the Office of the Special Envoy had announced that Griffiths’ plan to visit Aden and Mukalla had been postponed due to “security and logistics issues.” Sana’a Center sources close to the proceedings, however, said that the Hadi government had demanded as a condition of Griffiths’ visit to southern Yemen that he not meet with representatives from the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The Special Envoy refused and the trip was postponed. On April 9, Griffiths then met with STC President Aiderous al-Zubaidi and other STC officials in Abu Dhabi; this was among the Special Envoy’s other stops last month, which included: Muscat, to meet with Omani, Houthi and General People’s Congress representatives; Riyadh, to meet with President Hadi; Washington, DC, to meet US officials, and while in Abu Dhabi Griffiths also met with Ahmad Ali Abdullah Saleh, son of late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

In his briefing to the UNSC, Griffiths said ending the war and building peace were two different processes. Ending the conflict and addressing the humanitarian crisis would require a “negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue,” said Griffiths, for which “all parties to the conflict need to abandon preconditions to talks and grant my office unhindered, unconditional access to all relevant stakeholders.”

The Special Envoy said the peace-building process would be a “larger task based on different precedents and a broader participation.” He referred to Yemen’s previous National Dialogue Conference as a precedent for the needed inclusion and civic participation, and that agenda items would include reconciliation, constitutional review, reconstruction and rebuilding state institutions.

Griffiths noted in his briefing that recent developments in the conflict could “in a single stroke, take peace off the table.” Among the alarming trends and threats Griffiths mentioned were: the increased Houthi missile attacks on Saudi Arabia; intensified military operations in Yemen’s Sa’ada governorate and military confrontations and airstrikes in other governorates; high numbers of civilian casualties, and the renewed prospect of a large-scale military offensive on Houthi-held Hudaydah port that “may soon be forthcoming.” Regarding the latter, Western officials independently confirmed to the Sana’a Center last month that the United States and United Kingdom had given the green light to the Saudi-led military coalition regarding the military assault on Hudaydah governorate.

The Special Envoy also said for him to succeed in his mission he would need united and purposeful UNSC actions to back him: “Mediation without the backing of diplomacy will fail. We will do whatever we can to find agreements that work between Yemenis. But it is for the members of this Council, and other Member States, from time to time, to put the force of international opinion behind these agreements. Your unity and your resolve will be decisive.”

Humanitarian Coordinator Briefs the UNSC

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock also delivered a statement in front of the UNSC. In it, he pointed out that Yemen continued to face the largest humanitarian crisis worldwide, with 22 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, including 8.4 million one step away from famine. Consequently, humanitarian operations in Yemen, among the largest and most complex in the world, were stepped up in recent months, now reaching people in all of Yemen’s 333 districts. Food assistance programs, for instance, now targeted 10 million Yemenis per month, compared to 3 million in January and 7 million in December last year. In addition to five already existing humanitarian hubs in Yemen, more might be installed in the near future, including in Marib and Mukalla.

Lowcock thanked the 40 UN member states and regional organizations that had pledged more than US\$2 billion during a high-level pledging event early last month, co-hosted by Sweden, Switzerland, and the UN. He particularly recognized the US\$930 million donation, already disbursed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In spite of some improvements made, Lowcock raised concern over continued restrictions on humanitarian and commercial access into and inside Yemen, leading to some shipping companies being reluctant to enter Yemeni waters. Lowcock reminded all conflict parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law. He said on the one hand, UN humanitarian vessels and flights were able to regularly operate and the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM), through which cargo ships must pass before docking in the country, was in the process of being strengthened. On the other, however, Yemen continued to face severe challenges such as insufficient food supplies and thus rising prices, shortages and delays of commercial imports, the continued closure of Sana'a International Airport, bureaucratic impediments on humanitarian staff in Sana'a and cases of detained humanitarian aid workers, as well as prevailing insecurity, notably in the south.

These factors contributed to a situation in which an “estimated 1.2 million people in need of assistance live in areas inaccessible to humanitarian organisations.” Furthermore, Lowcock highlighted that, “unless steps are taken now in high risk districts,” a renewed cholera outbreak was possible, given the spring rainy season, with humanitarian agencies currently stocking supplies as a precaution. In addition to improved humanitarian and commercial access, predictable fuel imports were needed for hospitals and water treatment plants to keep operating, while the payment of public salaries needed to be resumed after more than one and a half years of standstill. As the humanitarian response could not resolve the crisis, Lowcock finally echoed the Special Envoy's call for all conflict parties to meaningfully engage in negotiations without preconditions.

UNSC Responses

The two briefings were followed by statements from UNSC member states, in which they voiced support for Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and for a renewed political dialogue, while stressing the need for increased humanitarian access.

Several states condemned ballistic missile strikes conducted by Houthi forces against Saudi Arabia. Referring to the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen report adopted in February, the US and the UK emphasized that Iran was in non-compliance with the arms embargo established by UNSC Resolution 2216, with the US stressing the need for the Security Council to act “that means not being afraid to call out the Houthis and their Iranian patrons by name in future resolutions.”

Other UNSC members, including Sweden, the Netherlands, and Poland, stressed that conflict parties should comply with last month's UNSC Presidential Statement, which was not fully implemented, according to Sweden.

In the United States

Senators Raise Concerns Regarding Support for Saudi-led Coalition

On April 17, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations questioned representatives from the Pentagon, the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) regarding the implications of US support for the Saudi-led military coalition campaign in Yemen, which includes arms sales, logistics assistance and intelligence provision. Various lawmakers, both Democratic and Republican, appeared critical and concerned regarding the US role in facilitating civilian casualties from coalition airstrikes and abetting the collapse of Yemen's humanitarian situation.

In regards to airstrikes, the Pentagon representative at the hearing Robert Karem, assistant secretary for international security affairs, asserted that the Saudi and Emirati "targeting process" had improved and the US was succeeding in its mission to help the coalition reduce non-combatant casualties. Under questioning from Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), however, Karem conceded that the US Department of Defence was not tracking civilian casualties from coalition airstrikes in Yemen, and thus did not have a clear metric by which to judge the success of its efforts.

In regards to a potential coalition attack on Houthi-held Hudaydah and Saleef ports – Yemen's busiest port and the entry point of most of the country's basic commodities – David Satterfield, the State Department's acting assistant secretary for near eastern affairs, said "We have told the Emirates and the Saudis there should be no action undertaken that threatens the ports of Hudaydah and Saleef, or any routes to and from the port for delivery of assistance." However, pressed by Senator Todd C. Young (R-Ind.), Satterfield stopped short of saying that US assistance would halt if the coalition attacked the ports.

Young, along with Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), is also leading a bipartisan group of senators that, through April, was trying to advance a joint resolution to make US support for the coalition dependant on certifiable criteria. These included "urgent and good faith" efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict in Yemen, that the coalition was taking "appropriate measures" to address the humanitarian crisis and allow humanitarian access for food, fuel and medicine in the country, and that the coalition was taking "demonstrable action" to reduce harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure in its military operations. This effort is seen as a more moderate version of a recent joint attempt by Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), and Mike Lee (R-Utah) to pass legislation would have forced the US to withdraw support for the Saudi-led military coalition campaign in Yemen; Senators rejected this earlier previous effort in March by a vote of 55-44.

New Secretary of State Visits Riyadh

On April 26, Mike Pompeo, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was confirmed as the new secretary of state. Two days later, for his first foreign trip in the post, Pompeo was in Riyadh where he met with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and King Salman. According to State Department officials, among the things Pompeo discussed during his meetings was that the coalition must allow easy access for humanitarian and commercial goods in Yemen, as well as fuel.

In Europe

MBS Meets Marcon, and Protests, in Paris

From April 8 to 10, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman was in the French capital Paris for an official state visit. Both in the lead up to, and during his stay, civil society groups and several French parliamentarians pressured French President Emmanuel Macron regarding French arms sales to coalition members and their airstrikes on civilians in Yemen.

Among them were 10 French nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) which, on April 4, called on President Macron to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia due to the latter's action during the conflict in Yemen. The following day in the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, deputy Sébastien Nadot, backed by some 15 other members of the governing party La République en Marche (LRM), demanded the parliamentary commission of inquiry to investigate if French arms sold to coalition members were used against civilians in Yemen. (The draft resolution will need to be approved by the LRM parliamentary group, after which it would move to the foreign affairs commission, and if judged admissible, would be submitted to a vote in the National Assembly.) Following the Saudi crown prince's arrival in France, on April 9 a Yemeni rights group based in Sana'a filed a lawsuit against bin Salman at the Supreme Court in Paris, accusing him of "complicity in acts of torture" in regards to Saudi airstrikes on civilian targets in Yemen.

In the context of such pressure, President Macron defended French arms sales at a joint press conference with bin Salman on April 10, stating that since the conflict in Yemen began "France has adopted a very specific process whereby all sales of military equipment are analyzed on a case-by-case basis and on the basis of reinforced criteria that reflect respect for international humanitarian law and the risk of harm to civilian populations." Macron also announced that a joint humanitarian conference on Yemen was to be held before the summer.

German Opposition Groups Challenge Arms Exports to Coalition Members

In Berlin, the German federal parliament, or Bundestag, dealt with four motions and one inquiry the opposition Left and Greens parties had issued related to arms exports to Saudi-led military coalition members.

On April 9, the German government issued a detailed list of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of annual arms exports to coalition member states approved between January 1, 2009, and February 28, 2018; the move was in response to an official inquiry that had been issued by the Left on March 1.

On April 18, the Bundestag's foreign affairs committee – where the ruling Christian Democratic Union / Social Democrat coalition hold the largest number of seats – voted to advise the government to reject two motions the Left and the Greens had

submitted in February calling for an end to all arms exports to coalition members and for revoking all recent export approvals.

On April 27, the Bundestag held the first reading of two other motions, submitted by the Left and the Greens, with the former calling for a complete arms export ban, and the latter for greater export controls.

Other International and Regional Developments in Brief

- **April 5:** During Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to the US, the Trump administration signed a US\$1.3 billion agreement to sell artillery to Saudi Arabia, after sales of anti-tank guided missiles and other military equipment totaling more than US\$1 billion had been authorized in late March. To become legally binding, the arms sales require congressional approval.
- **April 14:** Russia's Middle East envoy and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov met with President Hadi on the margins of the 29th Arab summit in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, stating "his country's readiness for any role that serves peace, security, and stability in Yemen."
- **April 11:** Sudanese Defence Minister Ali Salem was forced to defend the deployment of Sudanese forces in Yemen after several Sudanese parliamentarians had criticized the decision and called for their withdrawal. Sudan currently has at least 3,000 troops and several aircraft deployed in Yemen as part of the Saudi-led military coalition.
- **April 16:** Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated that the EU had "started a specific dialogue with Iran related to developments in Yemen."
- **May 2:** Sudanese Defence Minister Ali Salem told his country's parliament that the government was reconsidering its troop deployments with the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. Speaking to Reuters, Sudanese parliamentarian Hassan Othman Rizq said his country had not "benefited economically from the participation, unlike (other) countries that did not send troops but are getting financial support," referring to Saudi and Emirati financial support for Egypt. Notably, Sudan is currently enduring a hard currency crisis.
- **May 4:** The British Court of Appeal decided to hear a plea filed by the Campaign Against Arms Trade, which aims to stop the UK government from licensing British arms sales to Saudi Arabia, given numerous reports of human rights violations and war crimes committed by the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen. In July, when the case had been taken before the High Court, the latter had ruled that the UK government's issuing of licenses was not unlawful.

DEVELOPMENTS IN YEMEN

Political Developments

The Killing of Saleh Ali al-Samad

Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi announced on April 23 that senior Houthi official and the head of the Supreme Political Council (SPC), Saleh Ali al-Samad, had been killed in Hudaydah city, along with up to six others who were yet to be identified as of this writing. The exact timing and nature of al-Samad's death also remained unclear as of the end of last month, with conflicting reports claiming that he was killed on April 19 or 22 by an air-to-ground missile strike.

An April 27 Foreign Policy report said the UAE had targeted al-Samad using intelligence channeled through the networks of Tariq Saleh, the nephew of late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Through 2014 to the end of 2017, the former president had been in a coalition with the Houthis, however rivalries between the two had led to street battles in Sana'a at the end of November and early December 2017 during which Saleh was killed.

Al-Samad was one of the most prominent political figures within the Houthi organizational and leadership structure and is the group's most senior member to have been killed thus far in the conflict. Given this, and his relatively conciliatory nature, communication skills, and aptitude for building and maintaining relationships within the Houthi organization and beyond, his loss is significant on many fronts.

Notably, al-Samad's death will likely be a setback to peace efforts that had gained fresh momentum with the appointment of Martin Griffiths as the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen in March. Al-Samad had publicly banned Griffiths's predecessor, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, from visiting Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen in June 2017. Since taking over as Special Envoy, Griffiths has prioritized repairing relations with the Houthis, conducting a week-long visit to Sana'a at the end of March during which he spoke with Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi via conference call. Griffiths was reportedly looking to build on this small, yet important, diplomatic breakthrough via a meeting with Saleh al-Samad at the end of May.

The Houthis appointed Mahdi al-Mashat to replace al-Samad as head of the SPC. Al-Mashat is a perceived hardliner and former member of the Houthi delegation to the 2016 Kuwait peace talks. He is a close associate and former student of Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi, who's office he previously headed. It is also worth noting that al-Mashat was appointed a member of the SPC after its formation in July 2016 and subsequently entrusted with handling the SPC's economic file.

As a political figure, al-Mashat's is seen as far more confrontational than his predecessor, a factor which could risk alienating the often precarious alliances the Houthis have built socially and politically. On April 30, however, al-Mashat convened a meeting with tribesmen and other officials in Sana'a governorate during which he stressed the importance of the Houthis' relationship with the tribes. According to

the Houthi-run Yemen News Agency (Saba), during the meeting al-Mashat praised the tribesmen for their role in maintaining cohesion in Sana'a and highlighted the need to respond to the killing of al-Samad and to stand united against the Saudi-led military coalition.

Notably, during al-Samad's funeral at Sana'a city's Sabeen Square on April 28, coalition missiles struck nearby, killing one and injuring two according to Sana'a Center sources. Following the funeral, Houthi forces then fired eight ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia; the Saudi military claimed to have intercepted four while a Saudi spokesperson in Jizan province announced a man was killed there by "falling fragments of military projectiles."

Other prominent Houthis killed in airstrikes in April include the commander of the naval forces Mansour al-Saidi and his deputy Salah al-Sharqai, as well as Major General Nasser al-Qubri, an important field commander. While reports emerged that Fares Manea, the former governor of Sa'ada and arguably the country's most infamous arms dealer, had also been killed in an airstrike, as of this writing there had been no reliable confirmation of his death.

Bin Dagher Returns to Yemen With Visits to Aden and Hadramawt

On April 12, Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Daghir of the internationally recognized Yemeni government returned to Aden, the government's de facto capital in Yemen, for the first time in almost three months. In January, the UAE-backed STC had accused bin Dagher and his government of corruption and demanded that President Hadi sack them. Clashes then erupted at the end of January across Aden and neighboring governorates between forces allied with the STC and the Presidential Protection Forces, loyal to Hadi (for more see 'Yemen at the UN – January 2018 Review'). Bin Dagher subsequently left Aden.

Upon his return in April, Saudi troops and the Presidential Protection Forces greeted the prime minister on arrival to Aden International Airport, where he was also received by senior Yemeni officials, including Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Ahmad al-Masiri and Aden's acting Chief of Staff Ahmed Salimin. On April 23, bin Dagher travelled to Mukalla city, Hadramawt governorate. Upon his arrival to al-Riyan Airport, bin Dagher was received by the Governor of Hadramawt and Commander of the Second Military District Major General Faraj Salemin al-Bahsani, as well as other military officials from Yemen's armed forces and the UAE-backed Hadrami Elite Forces.

Bin Dagher's visit coincided with the celebration of the second anniversary since al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was routed from Mukalla. To mark the occasion the Prime Minister was present at the opening of the Second Military District headquarters, as well as events unveiling of local development projects; among these was the opening of the Wadi Hadramawt natural gas plant, which is meant to generate a minimum of 75 megawatts of electricity for the surrounding areas.

The relatively warm reception that local powerbrokers in Hadramawt offered the prime minister seems to indicate that mutual relations have vastly improved, or have been more amicable than many observers previously thought.

Military Developments

The Mobilisation and Deployment of Tariq Saleh's 'National Resistance Forces'

Tariq Saleh, the nephew of Ali Abdullah Saleh and former commander of the Yemeni Special Forces, has since February this year been mobilizing troops in Aden with the UAE's military and financial support. In April these troops, dubbed the 'National Resistance Forces,' were deployed to Mokha district in Taiz governorate along Yemen's Red Sea coastline to join the campaign to try to oust Houthi forces from Hudaydah governorate to the north. On April 19, Saleh's National Resistance fighters, backed by UAE Apache attack helicopters, engaged Houthi forces for the first time in the area of Khalid bin al-Walid military base.

Tariq Saleh's presence in Taiz, however, provoked opposition amongst residents. On April 14, a local Islah-affiliated organization called 'The Association of the Families of the Martyrs' staged a demonstration, involving thousands of people, against Saleh and his planned deployment on the governorate's western coastline. While Saleh's affiliation with the UAE – which opposes the Islah party – drew much of the crowd, a significant portion of those attending were reportedly unaffiliated with Islah but opposed to Saleh and his family on moral and political grounds for their role in the former regime.

Anti-Houthi Forces Capture Midi City

On April 6, a Houthi ambush in Hajjah governorate in northern Yemen reportedly killed dozens of Sudanese troops. While the exact death toll is unclear, the attack is thought to have led to the largest number of casualties suffered by the Sudanese Army in Yemen, since they joined the Saudi-led military coalition in 2015.

Less than a week later in Hajjah governorate, on April 10, Hadi government-allied troops routed Houthi forces from Midi city near the Saudi border after days of intense clashes. The breakthrough occurred after more than two-years of intermittent clashes and a prolonged stalemate. Hadi government forces had gained control of Midi port in January 2016 but then, despite support from Sudanese soldiers, struggled to recapture Midi city.

The seizure of Midi city provides Yemeni army troops a platform from which they can advance northeastward toward the neighbouring Haradh district, and southeastward toward Abs district; in addition to giving Hadi government forces a stronger, more stable presence along Yemen's northwestern coastline. Anti-Houthi forces reportedly launched a renewed attempt to advance on and clear Haradh city of Houthi forces on April 17.

Escalating Houthi Missile Attacks

Throughout the month of April, the Houthis launched near-daily rocket and missile attacks into Saudi Arabia, as well as conducting kamikaze drone attacks. The focus of the majority of these attacks was critical Saudi energy, military, and transport infrastructure located in the southern provinces of Asir, Jizan, and Najran. Importantly, some of the attacks were reported solely in Houthi-affiliated media outlets and were neither confirmed nor denied by Saudi sources. There is also no indication that the attacks resulted in any significant damage.

Among these attacks, Saudi ARAMCO facilities in Jizan province were repeatedly targeted on April 4, April 11, and April 23. The Houthis also reportedly targeted a Saudi military base in Khamis Mushait city in Asir province on April 8, the Saudi Ministry of Defence in Riyadh on April 11, and the Abha airport in Asir on the same day, among other targets.

Speaking during a meeting convened in Dhamar governorate on April 9, the late former head of the SPC, Saleh al-Samad, asserted that the Houthis would fire ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia on a daily basis in retaliation for the Saudi-led coalition's continued military involvement in Yemen. Four days later, Houthi leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi vowed to continue developing the Houthis' ballistic missile capabilities.

Through April, the Houthis also launched rocket, missile, and kamikaze drone attacks against coalition targets and domestic opponents in Yemen. This included the Houthis firing a surface-to-ship missile at a Saudi oil tanker off the coast of Hudaydah governorate on April 3, which Saudi-led military coalition Spokesman Colonel Turki al Maliki said caused minor damage. The Houthis also launched a series of missile and drone attacks towards al-Mokha, including allegedly targeting UAE military facilities in the district on April 17.

Other Military/Security Developments in Brief

- **April 7:** Forces aligned with the internationally recognized Yemeni government launched a new anti-Houthi operation in southwestern Sa'ada governorate. Southern Resistance Forces are engaged in the operation and are possibly fighting alongside Sudanese and Saudi troops following earlier reports that contingents from both armies have been deployed on the Saudi-Yemeni border. Anti-Houthi forces are currently stationed on the outskirts of four of the governorate's districts: Sa'ada, Baqim, Kitaf wa al-Boqe'e, and al-Zaher.
- **April 12:** Forces aligned with the internationally recognized Yemeni government reportedly seized control of positions located along the border between al-Bayda and Marib that were formerly controlled by the Houthis, such as those located in Souq Qaniyah of Radman al-Awad district.
- **April 15:** Forces aligned with the internationally recognized Yemeni government reportedly gained control of al-Malahit city in al-Zaher district, western Sa'ada governorate. If true, the capture of al-Malahit city would cut off Houthi supply lines that link Sa'ada city to Haradh city in Hajjah governorate.

- **April 21:** Unidentified gunmen targeted a vehicle belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the Wadi Al-Dabab area of Taiz governorate. Hanna Lahoud, a Lebanese national and head of the ICRC's detention programme in Yemen, died in hospital as a result of the injuries he had sustained during the attack. According to Sana'a Center sources, the attack occurred near a military police checkpoint in close proximity to the 17th Mechanized Brigade. The assailants allegedly fled to areas under the control of the Abu al-Abbas Brigades.
- **April 23 and 24:** Islah-affiliated fighters, such as those that belong to the 22nd Armoured Brigade headed by Sadiq Sarhan, clashed with fighters from the Abu al-Abbas Brigades that operate under the 35th Armoured Brigade commanded by Adnan al-Hammadi. The clashes occurred after the Governor of Taiz, Ameen Ahmed Mahmoud, issued a directive instructing all anti-Houthi militias and soldiers from the different military brigades in Taiz to evacuate government security and administration buildings.
- **April 27:** Local media reported that during the clashes between Islah-affiliated fighters, such as those that belong to the 22nd Armoured Brigade headed by Sadiq Sarhan, and fighters from the UAE-backed Abu al-Abbas Brigades, two prominent AQAP militants were killed: Abu Khalid Al-Sanaani, the deputy AQAP commander in Taiz, and Moustafa al-Haimai, a man who is said to be responsible for an assassination cell that targets soldiers and civilians in Taiz. Local sources in Taiz reported that AQAP militants were fighting with the Abu Abbas militia, while other AQAP militants fought alongside Islah-affiliated forces.

Economic Developments

CBY Governor Steps Up Efforts to Revitalize Banking & Financial Sector

On April 2, Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) Governor Mohammed Zammam met with Tariq Hassan, Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, in Cairo, for consultations on foreign currency government bonds. (However, as noted in Yemen at the UN – March 2018 Review, there is likely little appetite currently in global debt markets for Yemen-issued bonds in foreign currencies, even with favorable interest rates.) The governor also discussed financial sector supervision with his Egyptian counterpart, either through the use of training and automated monitoring programs under a multi-donor institutional support and reconstruction project, or through bilateral cooperation.

On April 11, Zammam visited the CBY's Aden headquarters for the first time since his appointment as governor in February. According to Aden-based banking sector sources, the visit was part of a Saudi Arabia-supported push to restore central bank capacity in Aden following media reports in March that the government was planning to relocate the CBY to Amman, Jordan. Zammam denied the claims at the time.

While in Aden, Zammam held meetings with the CBY board of directors, commercial bank representatives, chambers of commerce and industry, currency exchange institutions and the private sector to discuss plans to reinstate the primary functions

of the CBY. On April 11, Zammam announced that the US\$2 billion Saudi deposit, long promised to help support the central bank, was now accessible in CBY accounts. The governor said the funds would be used in part to support basic commodity imports by providing importers with foreign currency at favorable rates for the purchase of wheat, rice, sugar, milk and edible oil, beginning June this year. In return, traders would be required to deposit equivalent funds in Yemeni rial (YR) at local banks to boost liquidity in the formal banking system.

In further efforts to ease cash liquidity pressures and provide needed resuscitation for Yemen's banking sector, the CBY on April 13 approved returning to a system of using checks to receive state revenues, a move that will likely enable account holders to utilize their commercial bank balances for such payments. In return, traders are required to deposit in local banks the equivalent funds in rial banknotes, again to boost local liquidity in the formal banking system.

Zamman also announced the reopening of CBY accounts with the US Federal Reserve and the Arab Bank in Amman, as part of a drive toward the lifting of global restrictions on Yemen's financial sector over the next three months. Since his appointment in February this year, the governor has held meetings regarding this with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is expected that such moves will play a significant role in restoring confidence and reorienting the monetary cycle away from the black market and back to the banking system and the official economy, which will likely allow the CBY to better protect the value of the Yemeni rial and in turn protect the per capita purchasing power of Yemenis.

As part of a series of multi-round meetings, the CBY governor met the Technical Support Department of the International Monetary Fund on April 29. The department had been tasked with diagnosing technical capabilities at the CBY's headquarters and branches around the country as part of the World Bank-backed Financial Infrastructure Development Project, which was suspended after the escalation of the conflict in late 2016.

On 11 April, the Hadi government then launched a project, with financial backing from Saudi Arabia, to rehabilitate the road network between Lahj and al-Dhalea governorates. The project would allow better connections between Aden and northern areas, facilitating the transport of essential goods.

Economic Developments in Houthi-Controlled Areas

Through April, the cash liquidity and public sector salary payment crisis continued in northern areas of Yemen controlled by the Houthis. One measure hoped to mitigate the pressure – the electronic riyal and mobile purchasing project launched in March this year – remains in its trial period, with sources involved in the project indicating that the system may be rolled out for wider use in May. Cooking gas shortages have also persisted, with gas cylinders trading on the black market at well above YR 3,000 per cylinder, the fixed price established by Houthi authorities in February – a move which severely aggravated shortages.

The Houthi government made no full or partial payments of public sector salaries during April, either in cash or under the voucher program established in April 2017. A Sana'a Center financial source in Sana'a said that toward the end of April, Houthi authorities instructed the Sana'a-based CBY to temporarily cease allowing cash withdrawals from the budget accounts of government agencies. The aim was for the CBY to be able to accumulate the cash liquidity necessary to pay a one-month salary to employees in areas under Houthi control.

Throughout April, Houthi authorities have continued a campaign to keep the new YR 500 and YR 1,000 banknotes, issued by the Aden-based CBY, out of circulation in the north, instructing banks, currency-exchange companies and businesses to refuse the denominations.

In early April, the central bank in Sana'a moved to enhance compliance and supervisory structures around foreign exchange companies. The CBY said that such companies would now be required to establish formal auditing procedures and submit reports to the central bank. A Sana'a-based banking sector source said that the CBY in Sana'a was also planning to install an electronic data registry system for foreign exchange companies to enable central bank supervision and reduce demand pressure in hard currencies.

Humanitarian Developments

Saudi, Yemeni Officials Spread Misinformation Regarding Hudaydah Port Access

On April 21, Saudi Ambassador to Yemen Muhammad al-Jabir claimed that 19 oil vessels heading to Hudaydah port had been prevented from entering the port and taken hostage by Houthi forces for 26 days. On Twitter, Ambassador al-Jabir provided a list of the allegedly hijacked ships. In a letter (S/2018/386) to the President of the Security Council two days later, the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the UN provided a similar list in support of the claim, stating that the incident proved “that the Houthi militias are irresponsible and unqualified to operate such an important port.” Therefore, he stressed “the urgent need to have United Nations supervision of Hudaydah port to ensure the timely, impartial and unhindered access of goods, in order to mitigate the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people.” The same day, the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC, issued a press release supporting this narrative.

The allegation was, however, soon refuted by the Sweden-based maritime transparency project TankerTrackers.com as well as a shipping company managing four of the 19 allegedly hijacked vessels. The same day of Ambassador al-Jabir's tweet, TankerTracker.com released satellite images of 18 vessels identified as the ones in question. Samir Madani, co-founder and head of public relations at TankerTrackers.com, noted to Public Radio International (PRI) that, based on the satellite imagery: “we have not seen any vessels that were surrounded or physically blocked from

entering port... They've been sitting idle in anchorage. And now we see a lot of traffic: vessels that move from anchorage into port to deliver the cargo, and then they leave the port." From this evidence, Madani concluded: "Everything looks normal... It looks like something that you see in Houston outside Galveston right now. But on a smaller scale."

Four of the vessels on Ambassador al-Jabir's list were managed by the Athens-based shipping company Eurotank. On April 24, Capt. Minas Papadakis, a spokesperson of Eurotank, stated that their vessels had not reported anything in support of al-Jabir's claim, pointing out that: "There is congestion at port, but waiting time is normal for Hudaydah." One of the company's vessels on the Saudi ambassador's list had already offloaded its cargo while the other three were awaiting directions from the port authorities to offload.

The same day, the Saudi-led military coalition Spokesperson Col. Turki al-Maliki claimed at a press conference in Riyadh that Houthi forces were preventing 40 relief ships from entering Hudaydah port. However, a spokesperson of Save the Children, also speaking to PRI, reported that the organization "has not had any of our aid supplies blocked entry via Hodeida recently and as far as we are aware, neither have other INGOs."

Declining Food and Fuel Imports

In April, commercial food and fuel imports through UNVIM declined by 22 and 12 percent, respectively, compared to March figures, and no containerized cargo was offloaded for the fifth consecutive month. The level of commercial food imports was the lowest since the beginning of UNVIM operations in July 2016, accounting for half of Yemen's monthly requirements, while fuel imports reached 27 percent of monthly requirements; since November 2017 monthly imports have averaged 21 percent of national requirements.

Among major reasons for declining commercial imports is that shipping companies are increasingly reluctant to enter Yemeni waters, as pointed out by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Mark Lowcock during his statement to the UNSC on April 17 (see above 'At the UN Security Council'). After the UNVIM clears a vessel, the Saudi-led military coalition enforces its own permitting process on cargo ships before they can offload at Hudaydah and Saleef ports, with UN and humanitarian agencies regularly condemning the coalition for imposing undue and excessive delays. Ships heading to Hudaydah and Saleef ports thus frequently face major delays that increase costs for the companies concerned, with perishable items, such as food, often spoiling before being offloaded.

As of April 24, UNVIM reported that four vessels were currently discharging cargo at Hudaydah port and none at Saleef port, while 28 vessels had been cleared by UNVIM of which 17 had received the coalition's permission to enter the anchorage area. The remaining 11 vessels cleared by UNVIM were still awaiting the coalition's permission.

Humanitarian Access Restrictions

Humanitarian access and movement inside Yemen also continued to be largely impeded throughout April, with administrative restrictions frequently mentioned as one of the major causes (see above ‘At the UN Security Council’). On April 3, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that more than 9.2 million people were located in “areas with high or medium access constraints,” compared to 8.9 million in August 2017. Among those 9.2 million people, 1.2 million were located “in the most inaccessible areas of Yemen.”

On April 5, OCHA released maps demonstrating the degree of access severity for each of Yemen’s districts as perceived by humanitarian aid workers (maps were made available for Aden Hub, Hudaydah Hub, Ibb Hub, Sa’ada Hub, and Sana’a Hub). The most inaccessible areas included Yemen’s northwestern districts in Hajjah governorate bordering with Saudi Arabia, districts along the Red Sea coast between southern Hudaydah and Taiz governorates, and most of al-Jawf governorate. The majority of areas perceived inaccessible – except al-Jawf governorate – also faced an elevated level of food insecurity, reaching phase four of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), thus one step away from IPC 5 which is classified as famine.

In its Food Security Outlook Update on the period between February and September 2018, the Famine Early Warning System Network had stated in late March: “As worst-affected households begin to exhaust their coping capacity, populations may begin to move into Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) even in the absence of additional disruptions. In a worst-case scenario, significant declines in commercial imports below requirement levels and conflict that cuts populations off from trade and humanitarian assistance for an extended period could drive food security outcomes in line with Famine (IPC Phase 5).”

Other Humanitarian Developments in Brief

- **April 2:** The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) released its Yemen Emergency Livelihoods Response Plan for 2018. In it, FAO highlighted that around 70 percent of Yemen’s population live in rural areas and that 85 percent of households engaged in agriculture as their primary source of livelihood “are in urgent need of emergency agricultural support,” due to lack of access to inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and fuel for irrigation.
- **April 3:** In support of the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) 2018, the UN, Sweden and Switzerland co-hosted a High-Level Pledging Event at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Donations totalling US\$2.01 billion were pledged by 40 states and organizations, equaling almost 68 percent of the US\$2.96 billion YHRP funding requirements.
- **April 3:** Houthi forces fired on a Saudi oil tanker transiting the Red Sea, west of Hudaydah port. The tanker sustained minor damage. Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih described the incident as “a desperate attempt to undermine and disrupt international maritime trade and safety.”
- **April 5:** Leading marine insurer Gard issued a client update that the Houthi attack on the Saudi oil tanker two days earlier “had no impact on the flow of ships in the region or on the working status of Yemeni ports.”

- **April 9:** OCHA reported that humanitarian partners were planning to conduct a measles vaccination and a malaria spraying campaign in Hudaydah, given increasing numbers of suspected cases across the governorate. Between January 1 and March 31, 131 suspected measles cases had been documented in Hudaydah, including two associated deaths. Cases of malaria, which is endemic to Yemen's Red Sea coast, had recently increased in the districts of al-Luheyah and al-Zuhrah.
- **April 14:** The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Yemeni government reported that 1,584 suspected diphtheria cases, including 85 associated deaths, had occurred in 195 districts across 20 governorates, most notably in Ibb and Sana'a governorates. Children under the age of five accounted for 38 percent of associated deaths. As of April 14, the WHO had documented almost 1.09 million suspected cholera cases since April last year, including 2,274 associated deaths. Last month, the authorities in Sana'a also informed the WHO that they rejected the latter's implementation plan for a cholera vaccination campaign.
- **April 16:** The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that the aid supplies, that had been destroyed by a fire in four warehouses at Hudaydah port on March 31 were meant for 1.8 million beneficiaries, with losses estimated at US\$5 million. The same day, a WFP mobile storage unit in Hudaydah city caught fire, with no significant damage reported.
- **April 16:** OCHA reported that the dialysis department of al-Jomhoury Hospital in Taiz city may soon be forced to close due to a supply shortage; its counterpart at Taiz' al-Thawrah Hospital had already closed for similar reasons. On April 30, OCHA added that Sana'a's al-Jomhoury Hospital was facing the same threat. In February, the ICRC and the WHO had warned that Yemen's few remaining kidney treatment centers were struggling to function (For details see Yemen at the UN – February 2018 Review).
- **April 27:** In Washington, the World Bank and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) signed an agreement for a US\$50 million, three-year solar project aimed at improving access to electricity for 1.4 million Yemenis, 400 health facilities, and 800 schools. The project will be funded by the World Bank's International Development Association and implemented by UNOPS in cooperation with the Yemeni private sector.
- **April 30:** The UN Migration Agency (IOM) evacuated 76 Ethiopian migrants out of Aden to Djibouti through its Voluntary Humanitarian Return (VHR). Earlier during the month, IOM and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) had organized a VHR for 126 and 141 Somali Refugees on April 10 and 23, respectively, evacuating them out of Aden to Berbera, Somalia.
- **April 30:** As April ended, OCHA reported that US\$1.3 billion of the YHRP 2018 had been funded, equaling 45.5 percent of the requested amount. Some US\$710 million in pledges to the YHRP thus remained unfulfilled.
- **April 30:** In a humanitarian update, OCHA raised concerns about the safety of some 4,000 civilians living near the Hudaydah frontlines. Since the escalation of violence in December 2017, OCHA has documented more than 130,000 people newly displaced in Hudaydah and Taiz governorates. Since then, close to 10,000

newly displaced households have sought shelter in the southern governorates of Aden, Lahj, al-Dhalea, Abyan, and Shabwah. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is also rising in other frontline districts such as Kitaf wa al-Boqe'e, Shada'a, Qatabir, and Ghamr in Sa'ada governorate, that have seen about 1,270 households displaced in recent months.

Human Rights and War Crimes

Intensified Coalition Airstrikes on Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure

In April, airstrikes launched by the Saudi-led military coalition frequently hit civilians and civilian infrastructure leading to elevated death tolls and destruction as well as large media coverage towards the end of the month, notably when a wedding was affected on April 22.

On April 2, a coalition airstrike in Hudaydah city killed 16 civilians, including 12 children, according to UNHCR (initial media reports, quoted in Yemen at the UN – March 2018 Review, stated lower casualty figures). The airstrike hit a compound sheltering 128 IDPs who had recently fled frontline fighting in nearby districts. One week later, at least 15 people, including children, were killed by a coalition airstrike in Dimnat Khadir district of Taiz city, according to tribal officials. On April 12, a coalition airstrike hit a film set in Marawiaa district, Hudaydah governorate, where a Ramadan series for the Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV channel was being filmed on a property that had been owned by late former President Ali Abdullah Saleh; reports from the scene indicate the series' set designer and finance director were killed in the strike. Then on April 20, another coalition airstrike killed 21 people when hitting a passenger vehicle in Mawza district, Taiz governorate. Local residents reported that the area was free of military objects.

The incident last month that garnered the most international media coverage involved the Saudi-led military coalition launching airstrikes on a wedding ceremony in Bani Qays district, Hajjah governorate, on April 22. OHCHR reported that the strikes killed 19 people, including the bride, and injured some 50, more than half of whom were children. The wedding had taken place in a tent in al-Raqah village, with no military targets in close proximity at the time of the strike, according to local residents.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres condemned the airstrikes, calling for “a prompt, effective and transparent investigation.” When asked about the above mentioned airstrikes, coalition spokesmen refused to comment, repeatedly saying that the reports were taken “very seriously” and would be “fully investigated.” Also on April 22 in Hajjah, another coalition airstrike hit a civilian house in al-Hadwariah area of Midi district, killing five civilians of the same family, including three children. In late April, a gas station in Hajjah's Abs district was hit by another airstrike, which killed 20 and injured 30, according to OCHA.

In mid-April, airstrikes had further damaged the water infrastructure in Sa'ada governorate as well as a school in Sa'ada's Razih district. The complete destruction of al-Hamazat water system in Sehar district left 7,500 people without water, while a nearby solar energy system was severely damaged. The water system had already

been destroyed in an attack in 2015 and rebuilt by the UN Children’s Fund in 2017, which responded to the attack calling for the protection of civilian infrastructure in line with international humanitarian law.

On April 24, several international NGOs active in Yemen expressed their outrage over the intensified violence in the country and the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Houthi Authorities Impose the Death Penalty

On April 25 and 30, the Criminal Court of First Instance in Sana’a city imposed the death penalty on eight and three persons, respectively. The charges ranged from cooperating with and spying for Saudi Arabia and its allies to fighting alongside AQAP.

On April 13, an Amnesty International report also highlighted the first known case of a Yemeni woman sentenced to death, as part of what the report calls “psychological warfare” the Houthis are waging against perceived opponents. The Amnesty report also detailed human rights violations committed by al-Houthi forces, “including enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, and death sentences following a grossly unfair trial” that “may amount to war crimes” given they were conducted in the context of an armed conflict.

Other Human Rights and War Crimes Developments in Brief

- **April 2:** Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report stating that the Houthi missile attack on the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on March 25 violated the rules of war, given that it had indiscriminately targeted populated areas.
- **April 13:** Belqees TV announced that Abdullah al-Qadri, a journalist and photographer for the channel, had been killed in Houthi shelling of the Qaniya region in al-Bayda governorate.
- **April 17:** In Italy, a coalition of European and Yemeni NGOs filed a criminal complaint at the public prosecutor’s office in Rome against RMW Italia, the Italian branch of the German arms producer Rheinmetall AG, and the Italian arms export authorities. The NGOs accused the company and authorities of being complicit in a coalition airstrike on Deir al-Hajari village in northwest Yemen on October 8, 2016. The strike had killed a family of six, including 4 children and a pregnant woman.
- **April 17:** HRW released a report on human rights violations committed against hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa in a detention center in Aden since early 2017. The facility was under the control of the interior ministry of Yemen’s internationally recognized government, according to HRW. Documented violations included cases of torture, rape, executions, and forced deportations. Later during the month, about 100 detainees at Aden’s Beir Ahmed prison, controlled by the UAE, were said to be entering an open-ended hunger strike protesting their indefinite detention in the absence of charges and trials.
- **April 24:** Reporters Without Borders released its 2018 index on press freedom in which Yemen is ranked 167th out of 180 states evaluated.

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