



THE YEMEN TREND

**October
2016**



RESEARCH . ANALYSIS . ADVISORY

“The Yemen Trend is a monthly digest that highlights Yemen’s key economic and humanitarian trends and political and military developments, providing context and analysis where necessary in order to facilitate informed discussion deeply rooted in the facts.”

Timeline

Oct

- 1st – UAE military vessel, allegedly for humanitarian aid, hit by Houthi/Saleh forces.
- 2nd – Supreme Political Council names Abdul-Aziz Bin Habtoor Prime Minister.
- 8th – Coalition bombs funeral hall in Sana'a, killing 140 and injuring 525.
- 9th – Missile fired on USS Mason from Houthi/Saleh territory.
- 13th – US strikes three Houthi/Saleh radar sites after 2nd missile fired at USS Mason.
- 15th – Injured Yemenis and two Americans flown to Oman, Houthi delegates return.
- 19th – 72 hour ceasefire begins at 23:59, widespread violations from both sides.
- 23rd – Airstrikes on Sana'a return, ceasefire is not renewed.
- 27th – Houthi/Saleh forces launch ballistic missile at Jeddah, Mecca region.

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

As fallout carried over from the Central Bank relocation in September and hostilities increased on many fronts, the month of October was characterized by spreading famine, a rapidly growing cholera outbreak, and worsening economic hardship. For the second month in a row public sector employees went without pay, while over a thousand suspected cholera cases sprung up across the country. The humanitarian situation has become so catastrophic the World Health Organization (WHO) said "almost half of the children countrywide are irreversibly stunted."

Fifty-one cholera cases across nine governorates, including six deaths, were [confirmed](#) by the WHO at the end of October, and a total of 1,410 suspected cases were recorded (the disparity is due to there being only two labs in the country, which has caused testing delays). Relatedly, the WHO also [said](#) that in recent months the organization has had to "split rations... as needs are increasing and resources are diminishing."

Prime Minister Ahmad Bin Dagher met senior officials in Hadramout on October 9. He announced the allocation of [\\$30 million](#) to restoring oilfields and said a portion of oil revenues will be given to the governorate. Soldiers have been deployed to protect the facilities and the pipeline to Al-Dhabah, a port about 45 km from the capital Al-Mukalla. The Prime Minister said the sale of stored oil and future production will go toward paying government salaries, repairing oil facilities, and building a power plant.

Public sector employees in territory under the control of both sides have not received their salaries since the relocation of the Central Bank to Aden. The Houthis have been [soliciting donations](#) to the Sana'a Central Bank via their media mouthpieces, representatives in public places, and through SMS text messaging. The prime minister has repeatedly said his government, via the Aden Central Bank, will pay public sector employees from the whole country, although this is likely to exclude those hired after the Houthis captured Sana'a in September 2014.

According to a [report](#) by the Yemen Food Security Information System (FSIS) food insecurity has worsened since June 2016, when already 51% of Yemenis were food insecure (in phase 3 crisis or phase 4 emergency). The FSIS is a development program run jointly by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC). In light of the mounting starvation in Hodeidah, among other governorates, the findings regarding the port there are especially pertinent: Due to the destruction of cranes at the Hodeida Port it takes about 6-8 days to offload goods from ships, resulting in queues taking 30-40 days. This is compared to the 1-2 day offloading times in the past, and the delays are driving up costs. Prices have risen further due to insurance costs associated with the risks of sailing to the port, the report says. Furthermore, the transfer of the Central Bank to Aden "without putting essential preconditions for handling the nation's money supply, managing interest rates, [etc.]... will have a devastating effect on the already deteriorating economic performance."

A [report](#) titled From the Ground Up: Gender and Conflict Analysis in Yemen by Oxfam, Care, and GenCap, details the repercussions the war has had on Yemenis from a gendered perspective. Among the findings:

- Gender-based violence (GBV) has reportedly increased 70% as measured in September compared to March 2015.
- 44.3% of households reported having pregnant and lactating women, compared to 23.4% before March 2015. This is hypothesized to be the case due to unemployed husbands spending more time at home and lowered access to contraceptives. The researchers noted some study participants said "community leaders are encouraging women to reproduce because the country needs offspring to recover after the war."
- A reported increase in polygamy due to prolonged conflict, linked to both "protection against harassment outside the extended family and to reduce economic pressure." Dowry payments are said to be lower "as parents are more determined to marry their girls," and some marginalized women told the researchers polygamy is being adopted by men as "a strategy to increase their income through begging conducted by multiple wives."

On October 29 a car bomb attempt on the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) in Aden was partially foiled as guards opened fire on the driver before he reached the building. [Photos](#) show the bank remained structurally intact but the bomb did considerable damage. Earlier in October the CBY issued a [statement](#) following its attendance at the 2016 annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank from October 3 to 9. "CBY has already taken the necessary steps to issue bank notes with the aim of disbursing them throughout all central bank branches," the statement reads. It also notes "limited exports of hydrocarbon products have already been initiated from Masila, Hadhramout, and revenue from the sale of hydrocarbon products is expected to start flowing to the external accounts of CBY."

Using statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Yemen Data Project, London School of Economics Professor Martha Mundy [claims](#) the data "is beginning to show that in some regions, the Saudis are deliberately striking at agricultural infrastructure in order to destroy the civil society." Noting a disproportionate number of strikes on Yemen's cultivated land – a mere 2.8% of total land according to the FAO – the researcher suggests that "to hit that small amount of agricultural land, you have to target it."

Political Developments

On October 2 Supreme Political Council head Saleh Al-Samad issued a presidential decree appointing Abdul-Aziz Bin Habtoor prime minister and tasking him with forming a so-called Government of National Salvation. Habtoor was born in the southern governorate of Shabwa and had previously served as governor of Aden under President Hadi from December 2014 until the coalition joined the war in March 2015. According to his [CV](#), Habtoor has been a member of the Permanent Committee of the General People's Congress (GPC) since 1995. Two days later, on October 4 news leaked that Habtoor had formed his cabinet and a list of 27 ministers, including five women, was widely circulated. However, the cabinet was never officially formed. In a [speech](#) on October 26, Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi said it is "necessary to complete the formation of the government," suggesting such a move could come soon.

At midnight on October 19 a 72-hour ceasefire was initiated, with all parties agreeing to allow unhindered humanitarian access and halt all military activities.

Background: The terms of the ceasefire were those agreed upon for the April 10, 2016 ceasefire, which fell apart on August 6. The ceasefire had been in the works for over a month as part of an effort to revive peace talks. Near the beginning of September, Houthi and GPC representatives met with UN and US officials in Muscat, where they were presented with a proposal based on the plan initiated by Secretary of State John Kerry in late August. The peace talks in Kuwait centered around Houthi/Saleh forces withdrawing from areas they had taken over and handing over heavy weapons as a step to forming a unity government. The Kerry plan presents a simultaneous political and military track for doing so but the details were not laid out. Then on September 21 the foreign ministers of the UK, USA, Saudi Arabia and UAE [met](#) in New York and called for the immediate implementation of a 72-hour ceasefire. Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi confirmed that President Hadi had "agreed in principle" to the halt in fighting, and that he hoped it would start within a few days. However, on Sept. 25 Saleh Al-Samad proposed instead that the Houthis would stop attacks on Saudi Arabia and give amnesty to opposition Yemeni fighters if the kingdom ceased airstrikes and lifted the blockade on the country.

On October 4, Saba News Agency [quoted](#) the Houthi/Saleh alliance's delegation as saying "any talks or negotiations by Yemeni delegates must be on the condition that the United Nations offers a written and comprehensive peace plan," and "if the proposal does not include an agreement on the new presidential institution, then it becomes merely a partial and incomplete vision, which cannot be a foundation for discussion." Then, after meeting with Houthi/Saleh delegates in Oman on October 7 the UN envoy said they agreed to a 72-hour ceasefire, which would be implemented soon. The next day, the coalition bombed the funeral in

Sana'a, causing a sustained escalation of hostilities. Nevertheless, the ceasefire was pushed ahead at the urging of international players.

Analysis: The lack of a clear path forward for peace negotiations indicates the ceasefire was more an attempt by international powers to deflate growing criticism over alleged war crimes and for aid agencies to deliver vital supplies, than a measured attempt at a political agreement. Neither the Houthis nor the Saudis showed any optimism toward the ceasefire, and the Hadi government did only when politically expedient – on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, and again following the backlash from the funeral bombing. With the strides made by the Houthi/Saleh alliance in getting parliamentary approval of the Supreme Political Council in August, then with the appointment of Bin Habtoor as Prime Minister at the beginning of October, the alliance is unlikely to make any of the concessions called for under UNSC Resolution 2216 and the Kerry plan.

The UN envoy visited Sana'a from October 23 to 25 and presented a plan to Houthi and GPC officials. [According](#) to Reuters, which claims to have seen a copy of the plan, it begins with Vice President Ali Mohsen stepping down and the Houthis withdrawing from Sana'a and handing over their heavy and medium weapons. Then, Hadi is to appoint and transfer his powers to a new vice president, who would then form a cabinet, while Hadi would remain a figurehead. On October 29 Hadi met with the UN envoy in Riyadh. The presidential office [quoted](#) him as saying the proposed peace plan "rewards the coup leaders" and "is a gateway to more suffering and war," ultimately rejecting the deal. Hadi's stated position, which has been widely echoed by ministers and senior government officials, is that any peace proposal must conform to three things: The Gulf Initiative, the National Dialogue Conference outcomes, and UNSC Resolution 2216. This means Hadi is calling for the Houthis to withdraw from Sana'a and hand over their weapons – to surrender, essentially – before he negotiate.

On its website, the UNSC acknowledges this negotiating path is problematic. Heading into October the Council [forecasted](#) that it "remains unlikely to depart from Resolution 2216 as a basis for resolving the conflict, despite widespread criticism of the resolution as one-sided and unrealistic in light of the situation on the ground." Russia is said to consider it "unrealistic to expect the Houthis to turn over their arms and withdraw from territory before there was an agreement on their future political participation," but the US and UK's support for Saudi Arabia is said to make a departure from 2216 unlikely. In sum, the UNSC said its approach has "been to hope for progress in the political process which it can then support through presidential statements, gradually shifting the framework away from resolution 2216."

On October 15 an Omani airplane evacuated 115 Yemenis injured in the funeral attack, in addition to two Americans held by the Houthis. Earlier that day, the Houthi and GPC delegates who had been prevented from returning to Sana'a for over one-and-a-half months arrived in Sana'a from Muscat. The US State Department called the release of the two unnamed Americans a "humanitarian gesture by the Houthis." However, China's official Xinhua News Agency [quoted](#) a Houthi official as saying it was a swap mediated by Oman and that one of the Americans was the English teacher arrested in September, which is confirmed by Omani state TV footage. The American, Peter Willems, was detained by the Houthis in Sana'a on September 20 and accused of providing coordinates to the coalition, a standard accusation leveled against foreign detainees. This swap may encourage local authorities to detain more foreigners, especially Americans, to use as bargaining chips in the future.

Military and Security developments

On the ground in Yemen fighting raged in many governorates but the frontlines ultimately remained at a stalemate. The war took on a greater international dynamic as Houthi/Saleh forces took the fighting farther beyond Yemen's borders, attacking two foreign military vessels and launching ballistic missiles deeper into Saudi territory.

The Houthi/Saleh alliance struck a UAE military vessel with a missile on October 1, capturing it on [video](#). The UAE called it a "terrorist attack" on an unarmed civilian ship delivering humanitarian supplies and transporting injured Yemenis, while the Houthis claimed it was being used to transport troops.

Abdulrab Al-Shaddadi, commander of the Third Military Region which operates in Marib and Shabwa governorates and is headquartered in Marib city, was killed on October 7 by artillery fired by Houthi-Saleh forces. This is one of the highest-ranking military figures in Hadi's army to be killed in the war and it happened in the key district of Serwah, which Hadi forces are trying to take over in an effort to consolidate their control over all of Marib. On October 14 a blast from an unknown source hit Al-Shaddadi's funeral in Marib, leaving six dead, including his brother, and 20 injured.

On October 8 the coalition launched airstrikes on a funeral in Sana'a, leaving an estimated 140 dead and 525 injured. The funeral was being held for the father of acting Interior Minister Jalal Al-Rowaishan and of the hundreds of attendees, many were senior military and political officials from the GPC and Houthis. The coalition initially denied responsibility for the attack, then on October 15 shifted the blame to the Yemeni government. The Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) created by the coalition released a [statement](#) saying "a party affiliated to the Yemeni Presidency of the General Chief of Staff wrongly passed information that there was a gathering of armed Houthi leaders." Immediately following the attack White House spokesman Ned Price said "we have initiated an immediate review of our already significantly reduced support to the Saudi-led Coalition." However, the US continued military refueling operations the following day and

on October 16 accepted the controversial findings by the JIAT, saying "The United States [welcomes](#) the initial results... and considers it an important first step toward better understanding the events of that day."

On October 17 the UN Panel of Experts submitted a report on the attack to the UNSC Yemen Sanctions Committee. Ali Abdullah Saleh was said to be at the funeral but left before the attack. "Had the attack killed or seriously injured more of the individuals listed... then the Houthi-Saleh alliance would have been dealt a devastating political and military blow," the report reads. The panel wrote the Saudi-led coalition "could reasonably be expected to conclude" the attack "would result in a high number of civilian casualties," and that the timing of the second airstrike "indicates the deliberate use of the 'double tap' tactic." In conclusion, regarding the second airstrike, the panel found that "the Saudi Arabia-led coalition violated its obligations" under international humanitarian law.

Following the funeral attack, Houthi/Saleh forces escalated attacks into Saudi Arabia and on many battlefronts in Yemen. On October 9 and 12 missiles were unsuccessfully fired at the USS Mason from territory under the control of Houthi/Saleh forces, although the Houthis denied responsibility and Saleh pinned the blame on Al-Qaeda. On October 13 the US military launched cruise missile attacks on three coastal radar sites under Houthi/Saleh control. The US stressed the nature of the strikes as being "limited self-defense strikes... conducted to protect our personnel, our ships and our freedom of navigation," according to Pentagon Spokesman Peter Cook. On October 15 a third incident involving missiles being fired at the USS Mason from Houthi/Saleh-controlled territory occurred, although the US later said the incident was under review and it was not confirmed whether the ship was fired upon.

Missiles were launched at four regions in Saudi Arabia by Houthi/Saleh forces throughout October. On October 7 and 11 ballistic missiles were fired toward the city of Khamis Mushait in Asir region. The Houthis [said](#) they were targeting King Faisal Military Camp located about 40 km north of the Yemeni border. On October 9 a ballistic missile reached Taif city of Mecca region, where King Fahd Airbase is, and on October 12 ballistic missiles were fired into Jizan region. On October 27 Houthi/Saleh

forces fired a ballistic missile with the [stated](#) target being King Abdulaziz Airport in Jeddah city. Many local and international media outlets [incorrectly](#) interpreted the coalition's [statement](#) as claiming the missile was fired toward the holy city of Mecca. Rather, the Saudi Press Agency said the missile was fired toward the region of Mecca, which is a large province that includes the cities of Jeddah and Taif. There is no indication the holy city was at risk, although its proximity to Taif and Jeddah, which are both over 500 km from Yemen and less than 70 km from Mecca city, will surely increase tensions. Throughout the month mortar shells fired over the border killed civilians, [including](#) a Yemeni man, and during the [ceasefire](#) "a variety of weapons were fired, including rockets and projectiles» in the regions of Najran and Jizan."

Pro-Hadi forces advanced across the Al-Buqa border crossing into Sa'ada governorate on October 11, opening up a front into the Houthis' stronghold. Brigadier Hashem Al-Sayyid, a Salafi figure who was prominent in the fight against the Houthis in Aden in 2015, is [said](#) to be leading the campaign for Al-Buqa. Many of the Salafis involved are also thought to have [previously](#) battled the Houthis in Sa'ada in 2013.

A number of attacks with high civilian death tolls occurred in October in addition to the funeral attack. A busy market in Taiz was [shelled](#) on October 3 from an area controlled by Houthi/Saleh forces, killing ten civilians including six children, and wounding 17 others. On October 30 a detention facility in Hodeidah was bombed by the coalition, leaving at least 60 dead and 35 injured. the director of Hodeidah's health office said "all the victims are civilians." The day before, airstrikes struck several homes in Taiz, killing at least 18 civilians, including a family of 11.

Allegations and news coverage of Iranian involvement in Yemen increased markedly in light of the events that took place in the first half of October. On October 13, in a widely shared [article](#) Reuters said that Iran sent two warships to the Gulf of Aden, "establishing a military presence in waters off Yemen where the US military launched cruise missile strikes on areas controlled by Iran-backed Houthi forces." However, it was later found that the two Iranian boats were on a [pre-planned trip](#)

through international waters to multiple locations that Iranian media had announced prior to the recent escalation of fighting in Yemen. In another widely circulated [report](#), Reuters also said in mid-October that Iran has been increasing its smuggling to the Houthis via Oman, a claim Oman denies. Quoting four US officials and one Iranian official, all of whom are unnamed and provide no evidence, the report describes an increased frequency of transfers of anti-ship missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, explosives, weapons, and money.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) said 13 AQAP members were killed in three US strikes in October. CENTCOM [claimed](#) two AQAP members were killed in a strike in Shabwa governorate on October 6 and six were killed on October 18, also in Shabwa. Local [sources](#) claimed another two militants died from injuries in the latter attack, and that a second airstrike missed an additional six AQAP members who escaped. On October 21, the US claims a strike killed [five](#) AQAP members in a remote area of Marib.

RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING:

- A short article on the [spike in solar energy use](#) in Yemen, written by an employee of the Ministry of Telecommunications & IT.
- [The War in Yemen: Is There an End in Sight?](#) The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosts Farea Al-Muslimi, co-founder of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, and Barbara Bodine, former ambassador to Yemen [1h15m].
- [America's Moral Duty in Yemen](#), by the New York Time's editorial board.
- A Reuters article about [African migrants attempting to transit through Yemen](#) and The New Yorker on [Yemeni refugees stuck in Djibouti](#). Intersecting both these issues, Yemen's Afrah Nasser [wrote](#) about "Mouallads," especially Ethiopian-Yemenis, and the unique struggle many have faced during the war.

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