

September 2018



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.



Executive Overview

As political consultations in Geneva faltered, the military assault on the port city of Hodeidah was renewed, cutting off access to food storage and relief warehouses. This came against the backdrop of a rapidly deteriorating exchange rate, seen as low as YER 820 to \$1 by the end of the month, which has contributed to driving up the cost of fuel commodities by 25 percent and the minimum food basket by 35 percent since the end of 2017. "We are losing the fight against famine," UN relief chief Mark Lowcock warned the Security Council. An additional 3.5 million individuals could soon be added to the existing eight million severely food insecure people, he said, and pockets of "famine-like" conditions are already present.

UN consultations in Geneva from September 6-8 went ahead without the participation of the Houthi delegation, which remained split between Muscat and Sana'a. Envoy Martin Griffiths, positioning the event as a continuous process of indirect consultations rather than a head-on negotiation, sought to hold discussions that would lay the groundwork for future negotiations, and to advance confidence building measures. The Hadi government and Coalition held that the Houthis' refusal to travel to Geneva amounted to proof of their unwillingness to compromise, while the Houthis said they wanted assurances they would be allowed back into Sana'a and to transfer their injured. For his part, the envoy maintained that both sides continue to support advancing the political track, and after Geneva he held consultations with the Houthis in Muscat and Sana'a.

The UAE-led operation on the perimeter of Hodeidah city began picking up speed on September 7, and by September 12 anti-Houthi fighters claimed they had captured the main road linking Hodeidah to Sana'a. The UAE's foreign minister and permanent representative to the UN stated that military progress in Hodeidah is needed to push the Houthis to make political concessions. Meanwhile, over 500,000 people in the governorate have been displaced since June 1, and the weekly number of suspected cases of cholera reported, while not as calamitous as in 2017, has been increasing for 13 consecutive weeks.

Timeline

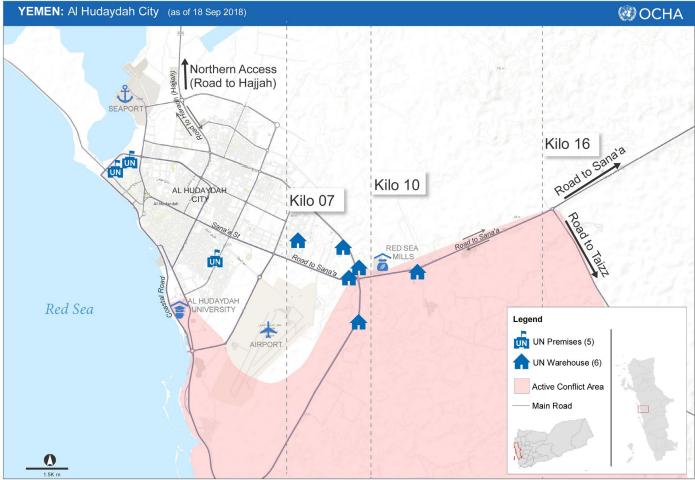
<u>Sep 02</u>	Amid protests over cost hikes, Hadi government announces 30 percent raise for public employees
<u>Sep 06</u>	Three-day consultations with UN envoy in Geneva kick off without Houthi delegation
Sep 08	Consultations in Geneva end, envoy travels to Muscat then Sana'a to meet Houthis
<u>Sep 11</u>	Secretary of State certifies to Congress that coalition took measures to reduce civilian casualties
<u>Sep 12</u>	Coalition claims capture of main Hodeidah-Sana'a road, aid groups say road blocked by clashes
Sep 15	Houthis, OCHA reach memorandum on air-bridge for civilian patients, condemned by government
Sep 28	Mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen extended for one year

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

"We are losing the fight against famine," UN relief chief Mark Lowcock told the Security Council in his September 21 briefing. Pockets of "famine-like" conditions already exist, and the UN estimates an additional 3.5 million individuals could soon be added to the existing eight million severely food insecure people in Yemen. "The position has deteriorated in an alarming way in recent weeks," he said. "We may now be approaching a tipping point, beyond which it will be impossible to prevent massive loss of life as a result of widespread famine across the country." Similarly grim words were reportedly spoken by David Beasley, executive director of the WFP, at a closed-door session during the UN General Assembly. He said Yemen "very well could be" experiencing famine, and "I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel right now."

In Aslam district of Hodeidah, the Associated Press <u>uncovered</u> that some families are boiling leaves for sustenance and children have recently starved to death. Based on a follow-up interview with a senior relief official, the AP <u>wrote</u> that part of the problem with aid delivery is that "local authorities have resisted implementing biometric registration [as used by WFP] and the main Houthi-run aid body, known by the acronym NAMCHA, has sought to do the registration and control the database."

Clashes in Hodeidah cut off access to food and relief items, and disrupted travel between the city and other governorates. In his September 21 briefing to the Security Council, Lowcock said the fighting cut off the main Hodeidah-Sana'a road, described as "the principal artery used by commercial importers and humanitarian organizations to move commodities from the ports to people across the country." Humanitarian agencies are forced to travel via Hajjah, he said, but alternate routes "are heavily damaged and increase transport times and therefore the cost for humanitarian organizations and private companies. Local sources told DeepRoot in early October that while an alternative road to Kilo 16 was being used to enter and exit the city, travel was ongoing on the main road linking the outskirts of Hodeidah city to Sana'a.



The renewed operation to retake the city (covered in the military developments section below), has blocked off access to food storage. UN OCHA <u>said</u> at the end of September that the Red Sea Mills, shown on the map above, remain inaccessible due to the fight. They contain 45,000 MT of food commodities, which OCHA said is sufficient to cover the needs of 3.5 million people for a month. The clashes have also resulted in damage to relief facilities, including a WFP warehouse in the city, which was hit by a mortar shell from "an unidentified armed group" in mid-September. <u>According</u> to the WFP, at the time the warehouse was housing enough food to help 19,200 people in need.

Imports through Hodeidah are coming under severe risk. "Commercial imports of food and fuel have yet to recover from last November's blockade," Lowcock told the Security Council in his briefing. "With the confidence of shipping companies already very battered, as reflected in a 35 per cent drop in clearance requests since the blockade, any further shocks could add to the core humanitarian caseload in a way which would simply overwhelm the capacity of humanitarian organizations." Regarding commercial food imports, Lowcock said there was a 30 percent decrease from a registered 410,000 metric tons imported in May, to 280,000 metric tons in August.

The shortage of fuel imports, which the UN relief chief said were only a third of the quantity imported in August, is even more severe. Only 21 percent of the amount of fuel required to meet Yemen's needs were imported in September, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. "Fuel shortages across Yemen have pushed prices up by as much as

300 percent over the past month in some parts of the country," the NRC said, adding that in addition to transportation, the lack of fuel threatens the running of water pumps and hospital generators.

The value of the riyal dropped to as low as 820 on the dollar in September, as protests in Aden and other areas erupted over the rising cost of food and fuel. The demonstrations began in early September, after the rival had plummeted to 600 at the end of August, from around 500 at the beginning of the year. Amid the protests, on September 2 the government announced a 30 percent raise for public sector employees, and a temporary halt on the import of luxury goods. On September 18, the Aden-based Central Bank of Yemen passed several measures to stabilize the riyal, including raising the interest rate on deposits to 27 percent and government bonds to 17 percent. However, by the end of September, both Sana'a and Aden had exchange rates as low as YER 820 to the dollar.

Costs for basic goods have skyrocketed as a result of the riyal's devaluation. The price of fuel commodities (cooking gas, diesel, and petrol) has increased by more than 25 percent since November 2017, according to OCHA, and 35 percent for the minimum food basket. The European Commission estimated similarly, saying the devaluation "has resulted in a price increase of 30 percent on basic commodities." The graph below, created by OCHA based on data from the Food Security and Agricultural cluster, shows the cost of the "minimum/survival" food basket for seven people per month, averaged based on 13 different markets. The cost has increased 95 percent between 2015 and September 2018.



Source: Food Security and Agriculture Cluster

The Economic Committee proposed several mechanisms to stabilize the riyal. The Committee convened in Riyadh on September 2 in a meeting with President Hadi, Vice President Ali Mohsen, and Prime Minister Ahmed Bin Daghar. This was followed by the announcement of Cabinet decrees No. 75, 76, and 77 of year 2018, concerning the import of basic commodities and oil derivatives through documentary credits; providing foreign currency for medical needs abroad; and controlling the flow of foreign currencies from remittances to banks. On September 8 the Economic Committee submitted to the prime minister its proposed mechanisms for dealing with the import of oil derivatives, medicine, and five essential foods, resulting in the Central Bank and Ministry of Transport enacting several measures.

In addition to the aforementioned measures taken by the Hadi government to stabilize the riyal and improve the accessibility of basic goods, during a meeting between the Economic Committee and Prime Minister Bin Daghar on September 26, it was decided that letters of credit would be covered at the rate of 585 YER to USD for essential food items, and that applications by traders would be accepted or rejected within only three business days.

Background on the Economic Committee

In early August 2018, President Hadi appointed Hafedh Fakher Meyad chairman of the Economic Committee, which at the time did not have members or a mandate. The Committee was formed as a result of the rapidly deteriorating value of the riyal, which had already lost more than half its value against the dollar since the conflict began. In late August, the president added seven members to the committee: Ahmed Obeid Al-Fadhli, minister of finance and deputy chairman of the Committee; Mohammed Zemam, governor of the Central Bank; as well as Monassar Saleh Al-Quaiti; Ahmed Bin Ahmed Ghaleb; Ahmed Thabet Al-Absi; Obeid Saad Shreim; and Faris Saleh Al-Jaadbi.

The oil derivative market is believed to be crucial for stabilizing the riyal because, according to the Economic Committee, approximately 60 percent of transactions in foreign currencies take place within the oil market. Formal banking institutions do not hold sufficient foreign currency reserves to meet traders' needs, and thus importers look to various currency exchange companies to piece together the funds they need. The relatively unregulated process

fuels speculation over the value of the riyal, which is why the Committee is seeking to make it so that the market would be accessible only to importers with sufficient funds and proper paperwork, and that the trader's commercial bank would secure the required foreign funds.

Over half a million people have been displaced in Hodeidah. "Conflict has escalated in recent months, with more than 500,000 people displaced from their homes in Hodeidah governorate since 1 June," UN OCHA <u>said</u> on September 24. The majority of the displacement happened in June, when the offensive sped up the coast and reached the port city. Back in May 2017,

"Those remaining in Hodeidah know they could lose everything, including their lives, but for many, it is not a simple decision to leave. To leave is to abandon everything people know and have worked for, with no certainty about the future. If people leave, they don't know where they will go, how they will find shelter, what they will eat. Many fled here already and the war followed. They're tired of running."

Saleem Al-Shamiri, a Norwegian Refugee Council employee based in Hodeidah

Cholera has been 'kept at bay' but the weekly number of suspected cases is continually growing. UN OCHA head Lowcock told the Security Council that "a third wave of the cholera outbreak has been kept at bay with intensified prevention campaigns, repairing and chlorinating water networks and vaccinating people in highrisk districts in Aden, Hodeidah and Ibb," adding that a program of "incentive" pay to healthcare workers has kept many health facilities open that would have otherwise closed. However, despite the relative decrease from last year, as of mid-September a whopping 154,527 suspected cholera cases have been reported nationwide in 2018, and the weekly number of cases had been increasing for 13 consecutive weeks. Save the Children said that in Hodeidah, a 170 percent increase in suspected cases was reported from June to August at health facilities it supports.

The mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen was extended, following a highly contentious vote in the UN Human Rights Council. The Council extended its mandate for one year,

requesting the experts to again submit a report on potential violations of international law, and also requested technical assistance for the National Commission of Inquiry operating parallel to the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts. The September 28 vote was 21 in favor, 8 against, and 18 abstentions. The bloc of Arab states, minus Qatar, sought to adopt a unified draft that would have weakened the mandate of the UN experts, but this effort was prevented by the bloc of European countries and Canada. The following day, the Hadi government announced it will "not cooperate" with the UN experts based on its right as a UN member state to refuse interference in its internal affairs.

An air-bridge memorandum between the Houthis and OCHA to transport civilians for medical treatment was condemned by the Hadi government. On September 15, UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande and Sana'a-based foreign minister Hisham Sharaf agreed on a procedure to transfer citizens suffering from a list of 12 severe medical conditions by chartered flight to a medical facility equipped to treat them, according to the UN office in Sana'a. Each individual's medical case is to be verified by an independent international company to ensure their eligibility, and the WHO's representative in Yemen estimated that 80 percent of the patients would be women and children. As reported by the Houthi-run Saba News, the memorandum is for six months, beginning in September.

In response, Yemen's permanent representative to the UN, Ahmed Bin Mubarak, demanded the UN only sign agreements with the internationally recognized government. In a letter to the UN, Bin Mubarak said his government "expresses its deep concern and condemnation of this behavior conducted by the United Nations Humanitarian coordinator, categorically rejects this measure and considers this MOU as null and void." Following a meeting on September 20 between Grande and the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed Al-Jaber, Saudi Arabia said the two discussed the recently announced air bridge. "We have been talking about the humanitarian air bridge, to make sure that everyone is clear on the parameters that we all agree, and on the steps forward," Grande is quoted as saying. That same day, the Hadi government state news said that during a meeting with Mansour Bajash, deputy foreign minister for political affairs, "Grande denied signing the memorandum, saying it did not and will not sign any agreement with the Houthis."

Two million children are estimated to be out of school, compared to 1.6 million prior to the conflict, UNICEF reported as the new school year in Yemen began, citing data from the Ministry of Education. "We also estimate that another 4 other million primary school students are at risk of losing access to education – mainly in the northern provinces of Yemen – because about 67 percent of public school teachers – and this is across the country – have not been paid for nearly two years," the UN Children's Agency said.

Political Developments

Heading into the planned three-day consultations in Geneva, Hadi government officials voiced support for a large-scale prisoner exchange deal. One government source told AFP his side planned to demand 5,000 of their prisoners be released, "while the rebels were hoping for the liberation of 3,000 of their fighters." Meanwhile, the day before the talks were set to begin, Saba news guoted the Sana'a-based foreign ministry as saying the "aggression forces" had placed obstacles by not granting permission for an Omani plane to transport their delegation from Sana'a, as they sought "to secure the delegation's return to avoid what happened in previous rounds, when the delegation stayed in Muscat for more than three months."

Consultations, not negotiations

Heading into Geneva, Griffiths made clear the event was not an all-or-nothing negotiation, and laid the groundwork for the discussions he would hold throughout the month. "We are talking about consultations – that word is carefully chosen – this is not a formal negotiation," Griffiths told the press in Geneva on September 5. "We are still in the process of trying to understand how the leadership and others in the two parties want to engage with each other, on what issues, in what sequence, in what place." The envoy further characterized his work as "a process of continuing consultations." The two main aspects of the consultations were set to be as follows:

- To reactivate the peace process by laying the groundwork for future negotiations on the basis of discussions held in Geneva
- To advance confidence building measures in order to achieve a combination of building trust between the warring parties, providing tangible benefits to the people of Yemen, and "to send a signal to the international community and the people of Yemen that something is happening." Confidence building measures under discussion include the release of prisoners, reopening Sana'a airport, economic issues (especially in light of protests in southern Yemen), opening up humanitarian access routes, and localized short-term ceasefires to allow for vaccination campaigns.

The consultations began on September 6, and the envoy met with the Hadi government delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Yamani. That same day, the Houthis <u>said</u> they would not join the envoy in Geneva unless three conditions were met: a guarantee that the delegation from Sana'a could return uninterrupted; the transport of wounded members to Oman; and the repatriation of those who had already received treatment." On three separate occasions in the past (November 6 and October 15, 2016, and January 25, 2018) the Houthi delegation flew between Sana'a and Oman on the same Omani plane used to transport American detainees the same day, in apparent deals to fly direct between the two cities without landing in or being intercepted by Saudi Arabia. The UN envoy did not comment in detail on the guarantees or lack thereof provided to the Houthis this time around.

The Geneva consultations concluded September 8, as originally planned. Though expressing disappoint over the Houthis' absence, Griffiths nevertheless said "the process of beginning, the road back to peace, has started." He said his consultations with the Hadi government were "very fruitful" and the Houthi no-show did not constitute a fundamental blockade in the process. "I think it's important to note that Ansarallah also wanted to be here and that they are disappointed not to be here, but it's important to make that point very clear," Griffiths said. "We have had extensive discussions with their representatives in Sana'a and in Muscat this past week, and I've no doubt about that whatever you may think." According to AFP, the envoy's comments "enraged" Foreign Minister Al-Yamani, who said that in private the envoy had "expressed his dissatisfaction with [the Houthis'] unjustified position," and that his public comments "were unfortunately appearing the coup plotters and giving them an excuse."

Griffiths consulted with the Houthis in Muscat and Sana'a in mid-September. Griffiths first met Houthi delegation head Mohammed Abdulsalam in Muscat on September 13. The Sana'a-based Saba news <u>reported</u> it was agreed that the UN would submit to the Houthis its proposals on issues including reopening Sana'a airport, the exchange of prisoners of war, and the resumption of dialogue. Then, on September 16 and 17, Griffiths met in Sana'a with Houthi-aligned foreign minister Hisham Sharaf, who told Griffiths the National Salvation government "would continue to back the peace efforts by the UN envoy," and with Jalal Al-Rowaishan, the deputy of the delegation to Geneva, who Griffiths briefed on his consultations with the Hadi government.

Coalition leaders voiced support for military progress against the Houthis, while at the same time supporting the resumption of dialogue. On September 12, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said the Houthis refusal to travel to Geneva "is further proof that the liberation of Hodeidah is what is needed to bring them to their senses and constructively engage in the political process," and that "Hodeidah is the change needed." Similarly, Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, the UAE permanent representative to the UN, said in a letter to the UN in mid-September that "while military action should be the last resort in the coalition's view, the liberation of Hodeida is critical to re-engaging Al Houthis in peace talks."

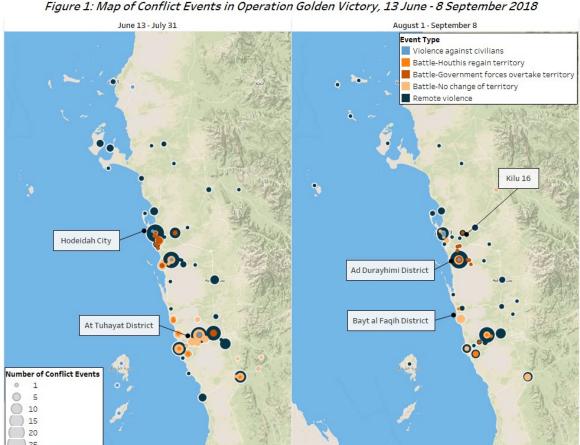
President Hadi said peace attempts with the **Houthis are "doomed to fail."** At his speech before the UN on September 26, President Hadi criticized the Houthis' belief in their exclusive right to rule based on divine right, and said that "all attempts at peace that are made with this group are doomed to fail." As was the case with his speech at the UN in 2017, the president stated peace could arrive only by the Houthis' unconditional withdrawal and handover of weapons, in effect calling for military advancement until the Houthis surrender. France 24 interviewed Griffiths after Hadi's speech, asking about the disparity between the president and coalition officials' public words in contrast to their more optimistic private words to the envoy, to which Griffiths said he believes the Yemeni leadership on either side is in favor of peace talks progressing.

Military and Security **Developments**

Clashes around Hodeidah city began picking up pace as consultations in Geneva faltered. Fighting had continued to rage in southern parts of the governorate, but in July and August the UAE-led fighters held the frontline on the southern perimeter of the city without advancing further, in an attempt to negotiate an unconditional Houthi withdrawal. By September 12, the fighting had reached the main road linking Hodeidah and Sana'a, "effectively closing the eastern route to the city which became too risky to use as a result of fighting," UN OCHA said. That same day, the Coalition claimed that pro-Hadi forces, led on the ground by the Al-Amaliga brigades, captured Kilo 16, the road on the eastern gate of the city connecting it to Sana'a, as well as Kilo 10.

While it could not be independently verified whether full control over the main road was established, the strategy of the anti-Houthi fighters appeared to be to push northward along the eastern outskirts of the city, toward the port to its north, in order to fully encircle the city and cut off Houthi supply routes. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) mapped the locations of incidents recorded between the beginning of the operation on the city on June 13, and around the beginning of the renewed offensive in September:

Spain and Germany will continue selling weapons to Saudi Arabia. The government of Spain announced in early September that it was cancelling a deal to sell 400 bombs to Saudi Arabia. made in 2015 under the previous administration, and returning the money already paid by Saudi Arabia. However, this put at risk a separate sale for Spain to provide five warships, a much larger deal that is to provide around 6,000 jobs. "The government is working to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia and to defend the contracts for the construction of five Corvettes in Navantia's shipyards," Spain's deputy trade minister said. By mid-September, the Spanish government had reversed the original decision to cancel the weapons sale, apparently under pressure from local shipbuilders and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, despite stating earlier in 2018 that it would not sell weapons to any party to the war in Yemen, in September Germany approved the shipment of artillery positioning systems to Saudi Arabia, and dozens of warheads to the UAE.



Nearly 200 ballistic missiles have been fired at Saudi Arabia, killing 112 civilians. On September 5, Saudi Arabia said 26 civilians were wounded by shrapnel after it shot down a missile fired into Najran, which the Houthis claimed was targeting a Saudi National Guard camp. The Saudis also said they intercepted a missile fired at an Aramco oil facility in Jizan. By mid-September, coalition spokesman Turki Al-Maliki estimated that a total of 196 ballistic missiles have been fired toward Saudi Arabia from Houthi-controlled territory, resulting in 112 civilian deaths. Relatedly, Saudi media reported that two remote-controlled boats rigged with explosives and headed toward the port of Jizan in Saudi Arabia were intercepted, causing "minimal damage." The Fifth Military Region discovered an in-tact 'unmanned bomb boat' (pictured) off the Red Coast, providing an example of the likely type of weaponized boat the Houthis used.

The US Secretary of State certified that the coalition has taken measures to reduce civilian casualties. On September 11, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo certified to Congress that "the governments of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are undertaking demonstrable actions to reduce the risk of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure resulting from military operations of these governments." This certification is necessary, pursuant to Section 1290 of the National Defense Authorization Act for 2019, for continued US military support for the coalition. The Wall Street Journal, citing a classified memo and insider sources, reported Pompeo's decision came despite the objection of most of his staff, and was influenced by US weapons sales to the Gulf states.

Relatedly, on September 5, Central Command head Joseph Votel, who oversees US military operations

in the Middle East, met in Aden with Yemeni military chief of staff Taher Al-Aqili. The meeting <u>reportedly</u> discussed developing the coast guard, navy, and special forces, and followed Votel's visits to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

A resolution was introduced to force a vote on US military involvement in the war. "We are preparing to introduce a new, privileged resolution in September invoking the War Powers Resolution of 1973 to withdraw US Armed Forces from engaging in the Saudi-led coalition's conflict with the Houthis should additional escalations continue and progress fail to be made towards a peace agreement," Representative Ro Khanna said on September 6. "There has been no specific authorization for the US Armed Forces to engage in hostilities with respect to the conflict between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis in Yemen. Khanna introduced a similar proposal in September 2017, but in the end a watered-down non-binding resolution was passed, whereby Congress simply stated it has not authorized US military involvement in the war. The bill already has more than 50 sponsors, and will be addressed in the House after mid-terms in November.

Recommended reading and viewing:

Brief articles

- In an article for Just Security titled <u>Grading the Pompeo Certification on Yemen War and Civilian Protection</u>, Larry Lewis explains the specific coalition actions that were factored into the Secretary of State's certification to Congress. Lewis, who until May 2017 advised the coalition on reducing civilian casualties, said, "three of the four actions occurred more than two years ago, and the fourth action is merely a repeat of earlier training that did not seem to help."
- Gregory Johnsen of the Arabia Foundation, who served on the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen from 2016 to 2018, describes <u>Yemen's Three</u> <u>Wars</u>: The US-led war against AQAP and IS, the regional conflict pitting Saudi Arabia and the UAE against Iran, and the civil war involving a variety of actors in Yemen fighting the Houthis.
- Photographer Lorenzo Tugnoli reflects on his trip to Aden and Sana'a in a photo essay for the Washington Post telling <u>A tale of two Yemeni</u> cities.

Policymaking and reports

- For the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Michael Knights of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy provides a comprehensive look at the military side of the <u>Houthi War Machine</u>: <u>From Guerrilla War to State Capture</u>.
- At the World Economic Forum's Sustainable Development Impact Summit in New York, panelists discuss <u>Overcoming Fragility and Violence as an SDG Stumbling Block</u>. Rafat Ali Al-Akhali discusses how international stakeholders can better support state-building, using Yemen as an example.
- A report published by the Spanish research institute Escola de Cultura de Pau (the School for a Culture of Peace), Peace Talks in Focus 2018: Report on Trends and Scenarios, analyses the peace processes that occurred worldwide in 2017. It provides an overview of the various methods used, identifies trends, and offers a comparative analysis of the different scenarios. The case study on Yemen begins on page 101.

Compiled by: Brett Scott - DeepRoot Consulting **Cover Photo Credit:** Najeeb Almahboobi/EPA All rights reserved **DeepRoot Consulting** 2018



www.deeproot.consulting

