



THE YEMEN TREND

**Mar-Apr
2019**

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

With a renewed surge in suspected cholera cases and several mass population displacements away from areas of concentrated fighting, developments in March and April indicate that amid the stalled peace process, the humanitarian situation continues to worsen. By mid-April, nearly a quarter-million suspected cholera cases had been reported in 2019. “Gains made against the disease in 2018 have unraveled in the face of relentless violence,” Save the Children said. Clashes intensified in several areas, including in Hajjah governorate, where a tribal uprising against the Houthis has resulted in tens of thousands of new IDPs. In a worst-case scenario, “the shifting frontlines could displace up to 400,000 more people in the governorate,” aid agencies warned.

In an unprecedented sign of cooperation within the government, the internationally-recognized parliament reconvened for the first time in over four years. From Seyoun, Hadhramawt, Sultan Al-Barakani presided over the session as speaker of parliament, with President Hadi and an estimated 145 parliamentarians present. That same day, on April 13 the Alliance of Political Forces formed under the leadership of presidential advisor Rashad Al-Aleemi. The alliance brings Yemen’s major political parties in closer alignment against the Houthis. Al-Barakani announced he intends to convene parliament in Aden after Ramadan ends in June.

UN Envoy Martin Griffiths assured the Security Council that the warring parties had agreed to the first phase of redeployment from Hodeidah’s ports. However, optimism has waned as disagreement over key components of the agreement – particularly which security forces have the legitimate authority to secure the ports – continues unresolved. The shaky ceasefire in Hodeidah has resulted in a reduction in conflict-related incidents in the governorate, but there has been an uptick in fighting elsewhere, including in Taiz, Hajjah, Al-Jawf, Al-Baydha and Al-Dhale’a governorates. Meanwhile, a controversial security campaign provoked clashes between nominally government-aligned forces inside Taiz city, resulting in the complete withdrawal of the Abu Al-Abbas Battalions from the city.

Timeline

- Mar 1-3 UK Foreign Secretary visits Muscat and Aden to meet officials of both warring parties
- Mar 10 UNICEF announces it is providing financial incentives to tens of thousands of teachers
- Mar 13 Resolution mandating end to US involvement in Yemen war passes in the Senate
- Mar 20 Hafedh Meyad is appointed governor of the Central Bank of Yemen
- Apr 02 World Food Program announces a trip to Red Sea Mills delayed due to “safety concerns”
- Apr 06 US House votes in favor of anti-war resolution, a month after it passes in the Senate
- Apr 07 Explosion in Sana’a near two schools kills at least 14 children, coalition denies responsibility
- Apr 13 Parliament reconvenes in Seyoun, Hadhramawt, for the first time in over four years
- Apr 13 Leading political parties announce the formation of the Alliance of Political Forces
- Apr 15 UN envoy announces the warring parties agree on first phase of Hodeidah redeployment
- Apr 16 Trump vetoes anti-war resolution, says US to continue intelligence, logistical support to coalition

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

Cholera cases are once again sweeping across Yemen at an alarming rate. Around 236,000 suspected cases have been reported between the beginning of the year and mid-April, [according](#) to Save the Children, and about half of these are among children. Lise Grande, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Yemen, [warned](#) in March that the sometimes-fatal bacterial disease was “starting to spread like wildfire across the country.” Over the last two weeks of March about 2,500 new cases were being reported daily, Oxfam [reported](#), which is more than double the daily rate reported in February. The epidemic reached an apex in 2017, with over 1 million reported cases. “Gains made against the disease in 2018 have unraveled in the face of relentless violence,” Tamer Kirolos, Save the Children’s Yemen director, said.

Humanitarian aid agencies such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have [opened](#) more clinics in an effort to curb the outbreak, but the recent spike shows no sign of relenting. “We fear that the number of suspected cholera cases will continue to increase with the early arrival of the rainy season and as basic services including lifesaving water systems and networks have collapsed,” a joint [release](#) by UNICEF and WHO reads. Relatedly, an Associated Press investigation [found](#) that widespread corruption and aid diversion throughout 2017 and 2018 significantly hindered the ability of aid agencies to tackle the worst of the cholera epidemic.

Yemen’s human development has already been set back by 21 years, according to a study commissioned by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The [report](#) estimates that war-related economic losses amount to almost \$90 billion. The researchers developed their assessments using the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which include categories such as the economy, health, and education. Development projections are made based on the conflict ending in 2019, 2022 and 2030. Yemen’s social and economic progress risks backsliding 26 years if the conflict continues until 2022, and almost double that if fighting ceases in 2030. “The long-term impacts of conflict are vast and place it among the most destructive conflicts since the end of the Cold War,” the report reads.

UNICEF began paying incentives to tens of thousands of teachers across Yemen, in an effort to prop up Yemen’s crumbling education system. The UN agency aims to reach more than 136,000 educational staff, with 97,000 already included in its

first payment cycle, UNICEF [announced](#) in March. “Teachers and school-based staff are required to go through a verification process as a pre-condition for payment,” which amounts to about \$50 per month, the UN agency said. “Without a regular salary... teachers have been unable to commute to their schools or had to look for other livelihood opportunities to sustain their families,” said Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s regional director. Of Yemen’s approximately seven million school-aged children, over two million are currently out of school. The incentive program aims to benefit about three million children.

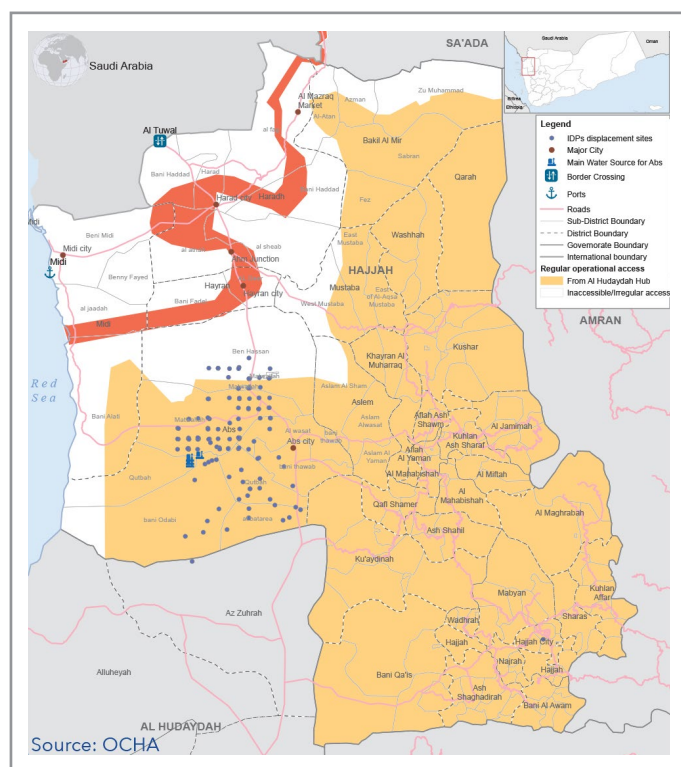
The rate of civilian casualties has mounted at several frontlines, despite a reduction in civilian deaths in Hodeidah since the local ceasefire went into effect in December 2018. This is according to an [analysis](#) from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). “While airstrikes on Hodeidah city have reduced significantly and a semblance of life has resumed, the fighting is intensifying in other parts of the country with a devastating impact on civilians,” said NRC country director Mohamed Abdi. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) [reported](#) similar findings, saying “even as reported fatalities have plummeted in Hodeidah, they have risen in Taiz, Hajjah, and Al-Jawf.” In Taiz and Hajjah, the NRC said civilian casualties have more than doubled since the Hodeidah ceasefire came into effect. The NRC also notes that while civilian casualties from airstrikes are down, non-combatants are increasingly harmed by landmines, snipers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Relatedly, a [report](#) by the UNHCR-led Civilian Impact Monitoring Project shows that almost 100 civilians were either killed or injured every week in 2018. The majority of deaths happened near the frontlines in Hodeidah and in pockets of Sa’ada governorate. Airstrikes accounted for a little more than half – 52 percent – of all civilian deaths. Shelling incidents caused the second highest number of casualties followed by landmines. Women and children accounted for a third of all civilian deaths. “The year was marked by mass civilian casualty incidents,” the report reads, noting that 44 percent of deaths occurred in incidents that resulted in more than 10 casualties.

Fighting in several areas of Hajjah governorate resulted in “two mass population movements,” [according](#) to the UN’s Humanitarian office (OCHA). Between mid-February and mid-March, around 8,400 families were forced to seek safety from the fighting

in Kushar district. A local uprising broke out there in January between Hajour tribesmen and the Houthis the Houthis, who sought to solidify their control over the area as an important vantage point and supply route against the government and coalition.

International NGOs [reported](#) civilian casualties on a daily basis, and the UN [confirmed](#) that a March 11 coalition airstrike killed at least 22 civilians (including 12 children and two women) and injured as many as 30 others in Kushar district. Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani [called](#) the Houthis' actions in Hajour "reminiscent of the genocide the Yazidis were exposed to at the hands of the terrorist organization Da'esh," and pro-government media [reported](#) scores of civilian casualties due to heavy shelling by the Houthis.



Hajjah governorate and estimated frontline as of March 31 (Source: OCHA)

A second wave of displacement happened in late March, along frontlines in the Midi and Hayran districts, forcing 17,000 families to flee their homes. "By the end of March, up to 68,000 families were estimated to be displaced within or from Hajjah," OCHA [said](#). "Humanitarian partners estimate that in the worst-case scenario, the shifting frontlines could displace up to 400,000 more people in the governorate." Fighting and the refusal of warring parties to ensure safe access has prevented organizations like the NRC from reaching some 60,000 people in Kushar and the nearby Abs district. Across the governorate, the UN [says](#) internally displaced person have more than doubled over the last six months.

Humanitarian access in Hodeidah remains severely restricted, raising [concerns](#) that efforts to reach other conflict-prone areas like Hajjah could also be further impeded. Following an attack in late March on a vital supply route connecting Sana'a and Hodeidah, the World Food Program demanded unhindered access for aid delivery. WFP spokesperson Herve Verhoosel said freedom and protection of movement of aid delivery was vital as 70 percent of the Yemeni population – up 13 percent from last year – remain food insecure and almost 10 million people find themselves "one step away from famine." In one promising development, WFP head David Beasley [told](#) the Associated Press that "progress" has been made following a previous statement that warned the WFP would cut off aid delivery in Houthi-controlled areas that the aid agency [says](#) have experienced rampant corruption in aid delivery.

Relatedly, WFP has continued to struggle with consistent access to the vital Red Sea Mills, where there are concerns the stored wheat – enough to feed 3.7 million Yemenis for one month – is spoiling. UN authorities [confirmed](#) reports that given further access to the mills, some of the wheat can be fumigated and then distributed. A breakthrough was reached in February, when UN staff were finally permitted to safely inspect the mills. However, access to the wheat storage facility had previously been cut for six months. At the beginning of April, WFP spokesman Herve Verhoosel [said](#) that a planned trip to the mills was postponed due to "safety concerns," without assigning blame.

Hafedh Meyad was appointed governor of the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY), replacing Mohammed Zemmam, [effective](#) as of March 20. Meyad has been serving as chairman of the Economic Committee, a body the president formed in August 2018. The former CBY governor, Zemmam, was one of the committee's seven members, which was formed to curb the rapid deterioration of the rial's value.

Political Developments

The internationally-recognized parliament reconvened for the first time in four years, the same day a formal alliance was announced between Yemen's leading political parties. The parliamentary inauguration was held on April 13 in the city of Seyoun, Hadhramawt. Sultan Al-Barakani, an

assistant secretary general of the General People's Congress (GPC), was elected as speaker of parliament along with three deputies: Mohammed Al-Shaddadi, Mohsen Basurra, and Abdulaziz Jubari. Reuters [reported](#) 145 parliamentarians attended the session, as well as President Hadi and Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed.

This attendance record would not typically qualify as meeting the 50 percent quorum, as Yemen's existing parliament has 301 seats. However, government officials and supporters argue that because over 30 parliamentarians have died since the last elections in 2003, a quorum of living members was in fact reached. The same day, officials announced the formation of the Alliance of Political Forces. The alliance brings together the GPC, Islah, Socialist, Nasserist and other major parties in closer cooperation against the Houthis. Rashad Al-Aleemi, a top advisor to President Hadi, was announced as head of the alliance. Later in April, Al-Barakani [announced](#) that parliament would reconvene in Aden after Ramadan ends in June

In Hodeidah, the warring parties have “accepted the detailed redeployment plan” but implementation of the agreement remains stalled. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths [told](#) the UN Security Council on April 15 that following the completion of a plan for the first phase of the redeployment, the two sides would now discuss “operational plans for phase two... also the issue of the status of local security forces.” Phase one entails the Houthis pulling back from Hodeidah Port and the neighboring Saleef and Ras Isa ports, and government and coalition forces decamping from the city's outskirts. Griffiths [told](#) Reuters on April 18 that he hoped the implementation of phase one would begin within weeks. He also said there were “ideas” about how to solve the major sticking point of which “local security forces” would manage the port once troops withdrew. As of the end of April, no deployment operations had begun.

Prior to Griffith's April statement, Mohammed Al-Houthi, head of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, had said the Houthis intend to maintain control of Hodeidah Port even if they remove their soldiers. “We agree on the redeployment according to the presented mechanism, but withdrawal as they are promoting, is impossible,” he [told](#) the Associated Press. For their part, UN Ambassadors from Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [sent](#) a letter to the UN Security Council and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the beginning of March, saying the Houthis were refusing to comply with the terms they agreed to during peace consultations in Sweden. “Last week's sudden and unexplained

refusal by the Houthis to withdraw from the ports of Saleef and Ras Issa comes as no surprise after months of stalling tactics from their side,” the letter reads, according to the AFP.

The Security Council acknowledged a standstill in negotiations in March, and followed with an April statement that said the body was committed to monitoring the warring factions' adherence to the Stockholm agreement. At a press conference March 13, Security Council members [told](#) reporters they had no updates for them on the status of efforts to demilitarize Hodeidah. “It's clear that one party has more problems than the other at the moment, but this tends to swing around,” the UK's ambassador to the UN, Karen Pierce said, according to the Associated Press. She did not identify which party she was referencing.

The UK's foreign secretary met with leaders from both warring parties, urging immediate action to demilitarize Hodeidah. On March 1, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt met in Muscat, Oman with Mohammed Abdulsalam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesman. This was followed by a visit to Aden on March 3, marking the first time a western foreign minister has visited Yemen since the war broke out. He [said](#) afterwards that redeployment efforts in the port city “could be dead within weeks if we do not see both sides sticking to their commitments in Stockholm.” Abdulsalam [accused](#) Hunt of siding with the Saudi coalition, saying that he lacked an understanding of the terms of the Stockholm Agreement. “I have no idea if me being out here had any impact or not,” Hunt [told](#) the Guardian newspaper. “The status quo is not going to last forever if the port of Hodeidah is not cleared.”

The STC reupped its demand to be included in the UN-led peace negotiations. Leaders in the pro-secession Southern Transitional Council (STC) recently [told](#) British lawmakers that not including voices from the south's secessionist movement in a negotiated political agreement is taking a “risk” and working against a sustainable peace. Formed in 2017 with strong backing from the UAE, the STC is highly critical of President Hadi and his government. Leaders in the movement have repeatedly said they intend to hold a referendum on southern secession. STC president Aidarous Al-Zubaidi [told](#) the Guardian that the UN envoy has met with the Council four times but has rejected their requests to take part in peace negotiations.

Military and Security Developments

The Abu Al-Abbas Battalions withdrew completely from Taiz city, following deadly clashes inside the city with security forces. A security campaign by the local authority and security forces targeting wanted persons inside the city resulted in clashes with the Abu Al-Abbas Battalions, which officially belong to the 35th Armored Brigade in Taiz. In mid-April, under the protection of the 5th Presidential Protection Brigade, Salafi Sheikh Abu Al-Abbas agreed to have his fighters leave the city and relocate to the Al-Kidha frontline in Taiz governorate.

The security campaign was widely viewed through the lens of the longstanding feud between Abu Al-Abbas and the Islah Party. On the one hand, opponents of the Salafi-led Battalions accuse them of providing shelter to criminals. On the other, opponents of the Islah party and many neutral observers view Islah as dominating the local authority and most of the military brigades in Taiz, and allege that the security campaign was used as a strategy to oust the party's last remaining armed opponents from the city.

Clashes flared in Hodeidah in March, demonstrating the fragility of the ceasefire. The AFP [reported](#) that a set of clashes on March 25 left five fighters dead. Reuters [quoted](#) residents saying the fighting was some of the fiercest since the Hodeidah ceasefire agreement went into effect in mid-December. The warring parties, Reuters said, traded artillery, mortar and rocket fire near "Hodeidah's usual flashpoints." This includes where coalition troops are encamped on the city's southern outskirts and a district within the city known as July 7, located just miles from the port of Hodeidah. Earlier in the month, on March 18, Action Without Hunger [announced](#) one of its local staff members was killed by stray shrapnel in Hodeidah city.

Several more high-casualty incidents were reported in other frontline governorates.

- In Al-Dhale'a, both sides of the conflict traded blame for the death of a least seven civilians, all believed to belong to a single family, who were travelling in a car on April 27, [according](#) to the Associated Press and the Houthi-run [Saba](#) news. The AP also [quoted](#) anonymous officials as saying that over 85 people had been killed in Al-Dhale during an intense week of fighting in mid-April.

- In Taiz, at least two civilians were killed and five injured during clashes on March 24. Damage caused by fighting in Taiz also shuttered a major hospital inside Taiz city, the UN [said](#). Two days later, AFP [reported](#) a mother and her four children were killed in a government-controlled area of Taiz.
- At least 14 children died and 16 were injured in an unidentified blast in Sana'a near two schools in the Sawan area of the city on April 7, [according](#) to the [UN](#) and its children's agency, UNICEF. The explosion was referred to as an "attack" but the culprit was not identified. UNICEF said the explosion happened at "almost lunch time and students were in class. The blast shattered the windows and unleashed a burst of shrapnel and broken glass into the classrooms." The Houthis blamed a coalition airstrike for the attack. The coalition [denied](#) culpability, although were publicly perceived as having been behind the attack, which happened amid a series of other [airstrikes](#) in Sana'a.
- An attack on a hospital in Kitaf district of Sa'ada governorate on March 26 left seven dead and at least eight injured, the UN [said](#). A missile landed "less than 50 yards" from the health facility's main building, [according](#) to Save the Children, who said at least four children and a hospital health worker were among the dead.

President Trump vetoed a resolution to end US involvement in Yemen's war, after the bill passed the Senate and House. The resolution invokes the War Powers Act, which requires the president to obtain approval from congress before committing American troops to engage in war. In effect, if turned into law, the Trump administration would be forced to end its military support to the coalition in Yemen, although America's campaign against alleged AQAP and Islamic State targets in Yemen would continue. The Senate [voted in favor](#) of the resolution on March 13, before being passed in the House on April 4.

However, Trump issued a rare but widely anticipated veto on April 16, [calling](#) the resolution an "unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities." In his note to congress, he also defended continued assistance to the coalition in the form of "intelligence sharing, logistics support, and, until recently, in-flight refueling of non-United States aircraft." Lawmakers most recent effort to curtail US involvement in the war follows [several](#) other [failed](#) attempts in the past year. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had repeatedly warned lawmakers against voting in favor of the resolution,

[saying](#) it would prolong the conflict in Yemen by “handicapping our partners in the fight.” (Note: on May 2, the Senate held a vote to override Trump’s veto, but the 53-45 vote [failed](#) to reach the required two-thirds majority).

Trump repealed an Obama-era policy that sought to reduce civilian casualties from drone strikes.

The three-year-old order mandated the release of an annual, public summary of estimated civilian deaths resulting from drone strikes in locations the US considers outside of formal war operations. Trump [signed](#) the executive order on March 6, relieving national intelligence officials of the [directive](#) put in place by the Obama administration. The policy was designed to create accountability for an uptick in the authorization of counter-terrorism drone strikes in places such as Yemen. Critics [say](#) the policy change means that non-military agencies such as the CIA – which are exempt from the law requiring the US administration to report civilian casualties annually to congress – now have even less public oversight.

The use of drones in Yemen by the US has [more than tripled](#) since Trump took office in 2017. Meanwhile, the Department of Defense [said](#) it launched six drone strikes in March in the south-central Al-Bayda governorate targeting alleged Al-Qaeda affiliates, offering no further information on the targets.

Recommended reading:

Journalistic articles

- Yemeni researcher Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen tackles [The Houthis-Tribal Conflict in Yemen](#), focusing specifically on how the recent localized battle between the Houthis and the tribes of Hajour in Hajjah governorate exemplify the conflict’s wider tribal dynamics.
- Offering a glimpse into the underlying ideological, tribal, and political driving forces of the de-facto rulers of Sana’a, Yemeni researcher Sama’a Al-Hamdani writes about [Understanding the Houthi Faction in Yemen](#).
- In an effort to eliminate the flow of stolen relics outside its borders, [Yemen Asks US for Help to Curb Smuggling of Looted Ancient Artifacts](#), the New York Times reports.
- In a short video feature shot in Marib, the BBC reports on [Yemen’s ancient city where people escape civil war](#).
- In Washington DC, humanitarian and think tank panelists testified before Capitol Hill on [The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen](#). The two-hour discussion was summarized by the international

development publication Devex, which explained how [USAID tried – and failed – to convince Saudi Arabia not to strike civilian targets in Yemen](#).

Longer reports

- Agriculture should be [A primary pillar for economic reconstruction in post-conflict Yemen](#), Alhasan Alkaff, an associate consultant with DeepRoot, explains.
- The Rethinking Yemen’s Economy initiative produced a report on [Economic Confidence Building Measures](#), which focuses on the importance of civil servant salaries and [Reconstruction and Recovery in Yemen](#), which details a series of recommendations from the Development Champions – a group of over 20 leading Yemeni socio-economic experts. The initiative is implemented in partnership between DeepRoot, the Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies and the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO).
- Commissioned by UNDP, researchers from the Korbel School of International Studies conducted a detailed study [Assessing the impact of war on development in Yemen](#). The study “considers the impact of conflict on the priorities articulated in the globally agreed Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its sustainable development goals.”
- Shining a light on [The Suffering Beyond the Stalemate](#) in Serwah district of Marib, a report by DeepRoot provides a humanitarian assessment of a district that has seen some of the longest-running clashes of the ongoing conflict.
- Calling for the use of banned weapons to cease and for the expansion and improvement of demining efforts, Human Rights Watch says that [Houthi Landmines Kill Civilians, Block Aid](#).
- In [Day of Judgement](#), Yemeni human rights organization Mwatana draws on over four years of extensive field research to highlight “the role of the US and Europe in civilian death, destruction, and trauma in Yemen.”
- A detailed report published by the Brookings Institute on [The Role of the Yemeni Professional Diaspora](#) argues that Yemen’s sizable diaspora population is “a valuable, but largely untapped, resource for the international policymaking community.”

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