



# THE YEMEN TREND

December  
2016

“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

The humanitarian crisis in December continued along the trajectory charted by UN aid agencies in November: Yemen's 18.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 10.3 million of whom are in acute need, saw little respite as supplies of food and medicine diminished further and the financial infrastructure required to facilitate their import is in tatters since the relocation of the central bank to Aden. The number of deaths from disease continued to dwarf those from direct hostilities, with UNICEF saying "at least one child dies every ten minutes in Yemen because of preventable diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and respiratory tract infections." Averaged out, this means in December alone at least 4,464 Yemenis under the age of 5 died of preventable causes.

By the beginning of December the stage was being set by the Hadi government for a major military escalation on multiple fronts. The president and vice president moved to Aden and Marib, respectively, and major troop and equipment movement was reported toward the stalled fronts they were preparing to break. By the end of December Hadi-aligned forces had captured villages in Nehm district of Sana'a and secured key areas of Shabwa governorate, capturing the coastline from AQAP and confining Houthi/Saleh fighters to part of Bayhan district. At the same time, an assault was launched on the strategic coastal district of Dhubab, Taiz. Meanwhile, claims by anonymous US officials that an arms deal to Saudi Arabia was blocked was later put into question when Secretary of State John Kerry voiced his "regret" that the deal "got more delayed than it should have," saying he has worked hard to move it forward and it is now on track.

On the political front, a joint communiqué issued by the quad – comprised of the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, US, and UK – reaffirmed the UN envoy's roadmap. The communiqué makes no mention of the demands made by the Hadi administration earlier in December, but appears to have modified the sequencing of the roadmap as to require the implementation of all political and security steps to begin before Hadi is to transfer his presidential authority. Whether or not Hadi is to remain in power until a new president is elected, which is one of his reported demands, remains an open question. Meanwhile, the Yemeni parliament gave a vote of confidence to the so-called National Salvation government, cementing the Houthi/Saleh alliance's legitimacy within the Sana'a-based political system.

# Timeline

- Dec. 1** UN envoy visits Hadi in Aden, receives a list of demands for roadmap
- Dec. 4** Hadi forces take control of the coast of Shabwa governorate
- Dec. 10** Parliament gives a vote of confidence to Houthi/Saleh cabinet
- Dec. 10** Islamic State bombs military camp in Aden, kills 50 injures 70
- Dec. 18** Ministerial quad issues joint communiqué clarifying roadmap procedures
- Dec. 18** Islamic State bombs another crowd of soldiers in Aden, kills 52 injures 63
- Dec. 25** Hadi travels to Mukalla, Hadhramout, from his residence in Aden
- Dec. 26** Hadi forces claim capture of towns in Nehm, Sana'a governorate

# Humanitarian and Economic Trends

**Yemen is only a “few months away from running out of food,”** [warned](#) Oxfam’s chief executive, Mark Goldring, at the beginning of December. “First there were restrictions on imports – including much needed food – when this was partially eased the cranes in the ports were bombed, then the warehouses, then the roads and the bridges,” he said. “This is not by accident – it is systematic.” Efforts by humanitarian organizations were [said](#) to be severely hampered by transportation, including delays at main ports, in addition to unreliable quantities and prices of fuel, poor land access from neighboring countries, lacking storage capacity within Yemen, and the rapidly changing security situation.

**Nearly 2.2 million children are acutely malnourished and require urgent care,** of whom at least 462,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition, UNICEF [reported](#) on December 12. UNICEF’s acting representative in Yemen said malnutrition “is at an all-time high and increasing,” adding that health workers have not been paid for months and aid agencies are struggling to import essential supplies. “At least one child dies every ten minutes in Yemen because of preventable diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition and respiratory tract infections.”

**Struggling to Survive: Stories From Yemen’s Collapsing Health System,** a [report](#) by Save the Children, says that based on the recently released UNICEF statistics, “an estimated 52,000 children will now die per year, compared to the nearly 40,000 preventable deaths occurring before the conflict.” Save the Children also said:

- There has been a 289 percent spike in the number of severely malnourished children from before April 2015 to November 2016.
- Hilel Mohammed Al-Bahri, deputy hospital manager of Al-Sabaeen Hospital in Sana’a – the only children’ hospital in the area – said only babies younger than nine months are being put in the intensive care unit due to a lack of space. Because salaries have not been paid, many doctors and nurses can not even afford the

transport costs to get to work.

- As of December 13 there have been more than 10,000 suspected cases of cholera, 156 confirmed cases, and eleven confirmed deaths. An estimated 7.6 million people are at risk unless the outbreak can be rapidly brought under control.
- Noting that “children suffering from malnutrition are 20 times more likely to die from diseases,” Save the Children found an astonishingly high prevalence of pneumonia, which was responsible for 29 percent of all child deaths before the war, when it had a 12 percent prevalence rate. The NGO found a 38 percent prevalence rate, meaning more than a third of all children in sampled locations had contracted pneumonia in the two-week period prior to the assessment.

**The port of Hodeidah, under Houthi control since October 2014,** is a major point of import into Yemen’s northwest. Adding to the many factors inhibiting trade at this port is the increased risk and associated costs for private shipping companies to do business there – business that is sorely needed as aid agencies alone are unable to cope with the severity of the crisis. For example, in recent months a number of vessels have been seized or prevented from leaving due to “legal disputes” with local authorities. These problems carried into December:

- 26 sailors who were detained aboard a Greek vessel in September are still being [held](#) in Hodeidah, along with their ship.
- At the end of November, 49 Egyptian fishermen were abducted by the Houthi/Saleh alliance. On December 24 Egypt’s foreign ministry said they were secured for [release](#) following coordination with the UN envoy and the Red Cross. It remains unclear why they were detained, but Egyptian fishermen have run into trouble off the coast of Hodeida before, for example when in October 2014 over 60 fishermen were [detained](#) by members of the local Tehama Movement, who alleged the men were fishing illegally in Yemeni waters.
- Additionally, on December 18 conflicting reports emerged that an Iranian vessel, MV Jouya8-, had been hit by a missile near to Hodeidah port as it travelled from Egypt to Dubai. The story maintained by the Pakistan Maritime Workers Union is that of the eight Pakistanis on board, seven were killed and one [claimed](#) to have swam to the shore of Hodeidah.



**President Hadi remained in Yemen throughout December**, apart from a short visit to the UAE early in the month. In mid-December the Aden-based government began paying the salaries of military and security personnel for the first time since the Central Bank was relocated in September. Thousands of soldiers were supposed to be paid for three months but it appears at least some were not. "The salaries are from Saudi Arabia and only for one month," Gulf News [quoted](#) an officer in Aden as saying. "I have not been paid my salary for August, September and October." Then, in a rare visit to Mukalla at the end of December, President Hadi laid the foundation stone for a new 25MW natural gas power station and [urged](#) officials to increase oil production across Hadhramout governorate.

**The Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) [reported](#)** that excluding the month of December, 111,504 migrants and refugees are estimated to have reached Yemen's shores in 2016, the highest number since recording began in 2006. Ethiopians are thought to comprise 83 percent of arrivals, the rest being mostly Somali. A tougher stance on migrants is noted with "the new regime in Yemen," and at least 24 migrants are confirmed to have died after the deportations carried out in October.

**The airstrike on Abs hospital in Hajjah governorate on August 15** was deemed an "[unintentional error](#)" in an attack on an otherwise legitimate military target, a statement by the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) said on December 6. The JIAT is a body established by the coalition to investigate attacks with high civilian casualties, and the bombing of Abs hospital caused Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to shut down operations in much of northern Yemen. All claims made by the JIAT resolving the coalition of responsibility, including that the building was not properly identified as a hospital, were [refuted](#) by MSF in a statement made days later.

**The UN envoy met President Hadi in Aden on December 1** for a two-day visit in an attempt to make progress on the roadmap. Hadi reportedly made several demands, including that he should [remain president](#) to oversee the transition process until a new leader is elected. The demands were never made public officially, but sources close to Hadi said he called for Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi and former president Saleh to "abandon politics and be forced into a country of exile of their choice for ten years."

Although later in December Yasin Makkawi, one of Hadi's advisors, [denied](#) these demands were ever made, multiple sources recorded the same demands were given on December 6 to the UN Security Council from Yemen's UN mission. Reuters, which claimed to have seen the letter, [quoted](#) it as saying the two leaders must "leave political life and leave the country with their families into self-imposed exile for a period of at least ten years." Labeling it a "dangerous precedent," the letter also calls the roadmap a "free incentive to the Houthi/Saleh rebels, legitimizing their rebellion, their agenda."

## Background:

UN Envoy Ould Cheikh presented the roadmap at the end of October to the Hadi and Houthi/Saleh camps. Following an initial rejection from both groups, during the first half of November Houthi representatives and Saleh himself lent their support to the plan as a basis for negotiations. However, Hadi and senior officials in his administration consistently voiced their opposition to the plan throughout November, arguing it must conform to three references: UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which calls on the Houthis to withdraw and hand over heavy weapons, as well as the GCC initiative and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference.

With Saudi Arabia showing some optimism toward the plan and other coalition backers urging Hadi not to dismiss it outright, his

administration established committees to consider the roadmap further. On November 10 Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, who serves as foreign minister and head of Hadi's negotiating team, called on the UN envoy to put forward a new roadmap that takes into consideration the three references. However, while Ould Cheikh met with Houthi and Saleh delegates in Sana'a at the beginning of November and in Muscat at the end of the month, Hadi refused to engage with the envoy directly, snubbing him when he travelled to Riyadh.

Meanwhile, a ceasefire attempt from November 19 to 21 failed to jumpstart peace talks, despite Secretary of State Kerry voicing his support for negotiations to begin by the end of the month. On November 28 a so-called Government of National Salvation was formed in Sana'a by the Houthi/Saleh alliance, a long-delayed move that signaled the failure of international efforts to resume negotiations and ushered in a new phase of fighting.

**Hadi's Gulf coalition backers voiced their clear support for the roadmap** in the week after his meeting with the UN envoy in early December. At the end of the GCC Summit in Manama, on December 7 a joint GCC-UK communiqué was released, [stating](#): "We pledge continued support for the UN Special Envoy and the UN-led peace process, and endorse the roadmap presented by the UN Special Envoy." Meanwhile, members of Hadi's administration continued to discourage the envoy's efforts. "There is no use to hold new negotiations without the unconditional commitment to the outcome of national dialogue, the GCC Initiative and above all the UN Security Council Resolution 2216," Yemeni Ambassador to Washington Ahmed Bin Mubarak [told](#) Asharq Al-Awsat on December 9. On December 17 Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi [told](#) Ould Cheikh that his government was still waiting for the new peace plan.

**Secretary of State Kerry visited Riyadh on December 18 and 19**, his last expected trip to the region before leaving office. The Quad – the foreign ministers of the US, UK, UAE, and Saudi Arabia – convened for the fourth time since August, joined by the Omani foreign minister and the UN envoy, and released a [joint communiqué](#) on December 18. The communiqué makes no reference to Hadi's demands or the new proposal requested by his foreign minister. Instead, it "reaffirms" the original October 23 roadmap and issues key points which appear to have incorporated some of the president's concerns.

**Analysis:** The leaked roadmap from October indicates Hadi would transfer his presidential authorities before the Houthis fully withdraw from Taiz, Hodeidah, and other governorates they have taken over. Furthermore, it gives Hadi little power in the transition process, with him playing only a figurehead role as a new vice president oversees the transition until a president is elected. In the joint communiqué released in December the roadmap is modified in that all the withdrawals occur before Hadi transfers his authority. However, step 7, in combination with the key points, seems to leave open the possibility that Hadi would have to transfer his presidential authorities when the electoral roadmap is finalized – meaning before a new president is actually elected.

*The UN envoy's roadmap has never been publically released. However, a purported copy of the draft roadmap was leaked on October 27, following a meeting between Ould Cheikh and Houthi/Saleh delegates in Sana'a. Below, an unofficially translated and heavily condensed version of the leaked roadmap is presented beside the proposed steps and key points taken directly from the December 18 joint communiqué:*

## STEPS IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Joint Communiqué, Dec. 18 ( <a href="#">link</a> )	Leaked Draft Roadmap, Oct. 27 ( <a href="#">link</a> )
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sequenced security steps and necessary withdrawals</li> <li>2. Appointments for the political transition</li> <li>3. Resumption of consultations with the UN based on the GCC Initiative and Implementation Mechanism, the National Dialogue Outcomes, UN Security Council resolution 2216 and other relevant resolutions</li> <li>4. Additional withdrawals</li> <li>5. Signing an agreement</li> <li>6. Donors conference</li> <li>7. The national unity government starts a political dialogue to finalize the electoral roadmap and draft constitution.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The UN proposals, that include the sequencing of political and security steps, represent an outline for a comprehensive agreement whose details will be settled in negotiations.</li> <li>• Those proposals set forth issues to be negotiated by the parties and the Ministers emphasized the operative measures do not take effect until all parties have signed a comprehensive agreement.</li> <li>• The transfer of presidential authorities will not take place until the parties begin implementation of all political and security steps.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UN envoy holds negotiations for initial agreement, to discuss troop withdrawals, naming of a new consensus VP, and Saudi border buffer zone</li> <li>2. Parties meet again to sign a comprehensive agreement. Upon signing, the UN shall announce the formation of a National Unity Government</li> <li>3. Current VP resigns, President Hadi appoints the consensus VP.</li> <li>4. According to the hierarchy of steps negotiated thus far, Houthi/Saleh forces withdraw from Sana'a and surrender heavy and medium weapons. Hadi shall appoint members of Security Committees to oversee execution of the security arrangements.</li> <li>5. After step 4 is complete Hadi shall move all his authorities to the new VP. The VP shall appoint the new PM who shall take over responsibilities.</li> <li>6. The PM shall appoint a new cabinet and will receive his authority once the parliament / national commission agree on the proposed members of the government and their portfolios.</li> <li>7. The new unity government shall oversee delayed withdrawal from remaining areas and receive weapons from Taiz and Hodeidah, which should have already started. Unity government begins new political dialogue to add the final details to the election roadmap and the draft constitution.</li> </ol>

The December 18 joint communiqué also urges all parties to immediately agree to the April 10 ceasefire conditions, which “will be put in place two weeks after representatives of the parties arrive in Amman to begin planning and preparations for the cessation.” At a joint [press conference](#) with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir that followed the quad meeting, on December 18 Kerry said the quad “called for the establishment of a cessation of hostilities which we will all work on in the next several days, with hopes that within two weeks it might be possible to achieve it.”

**Reminiscent of the confusion that surrounded the failed ceasefire in mid-November**, there appeared to be a lack of coordination between the various parties. On December 19 the UN envoy [wrote](#) on Twitter to clarify that the meeting in Jordan would be for the De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC), rather than for the

parties to resume negotiations as the communiqué seemed to suggest. However, Jordanian authorities had yet to confirm they would host the meeting. A request had been received “to host a workshop for the committee but no decision has been made yet,” a Jordanian official [said](#) on December 22. “We are still looking into it.”

By December 29 the foreign minister of the Houthi/Saleh government, Hisham Sharaf, said his side had yet to receive any invitation. “Till this moment, neither the political leadership nor the government received any official invitation to attend any consultations or meetings,” Sharaf [told](#) the state-run Saba news. A week earlier, the foreign minister [said](#) “any procedural steps or consultations about a truce and resumption of the peace talks must be preceded by a good will act and re-open the Sana’a International Airport.”



## Military and Security developments

**The first official meeting in Taiz between Salafis, led by Abu Al-Abbas,** and Hadi's side of the General People's Congress (GPC) took place on December 25. A joint communiqué issued by the two groups lists steps to coordinate efforts between resistance fighters and the national army, as well as to avoid confrontation and division. Notably, the communiqué calls for the [complete integration](#) of popular resistance forces into the national army.

**On December 1 the Houthi delegation, led by Mohammad Abdulsalam,** concluded a three-day meeting in Beijing with Deng Li, director-general of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's department for West Asian and North African Affairs. When questioned the next day about China's stance on the formation of the National Salvation government, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang [said](#), "The Chinese side backs the legitimate government of Yemen. We do not approve of unilateral moves by any side..." and voiced support for continued negotiations. The statement was editorialized in the media as criticism of the Houthi/Saleh alliance but China, like Russia, is being as diplomatic as possible to remain friendly with the Houthi/Saleh alliance while still towing the international line.

**The Houthi delegation, let by Mohammad Abdulsalam, travelled to Moscow** on December 14 for an official meeting with [Mikhail Bogdanov](#), Russia's Special Presidential Representative for the Middle East and Africa and a deputy minister of foreign affairs. In a statement following the meeting, Russia's foreign ministry [voiced](#) its support for "broad national dialogue that takes into account the interests of all main political forces in the country." Typical of meetings between Houthi and Russian representatives, the sides voiced support for ending the blockade, reaching a durable ceasefire, and "fighting terrorism."

**On December 10 parliament gave a [vote of confidence](#)** to Prime Minister Abdul-Aziz Bin Habtoor's National Salvation government, cementing the legitimacy of the Houthi/Saleh political apparatus within the Sana'a-based system. A week earlier, the new cabinet ministers convened on December 3 and agreed on a [general program](#) moving forward in the "political, economic, social, cultural, security, military and media" sectors, which they presented to the parliament for debate and approval.

**Vice President Ali Mohsen arrived in Marib city on December 1,** where he is expected to remain based as he leads the fight against the Houthi/Saleh alliance in key battlefields in Marib, Sana'a, and Al-Jawf. Coinciding with his arrival, at the beginning of December the 37th Armored Brigade in Hadramout began [moving heavy arms](#) to Marib city. Weapons were reportedly also taken from Mahra governorate on order from Ali Mohsen. On December 26 the media center of the Armed Forces, which represents the troops under Hadi's sphere, [announced](#) they had made gains in the crucial district of Nehm, Sana'a. With the help of coalition airstrikes, the army reportedly captured Sarhan village and a number of other locations. Though further progress on the Nehm front could pave the way for an assault on the capital, Houthi/Saleh forces have recovered from losses in Nehm before. Hadi forces advanced in Nehm to within 40 kilometers of the capital in February 2016, prompting a soldier involved at the time to [say](#) "we are now on the road to Sana'a... victory will be at hand very soon."

**Reinforcements were sent to the Red Sea coast,** including tanks and katyusha rocket launchers, by the Hadi government as the president arrived in Aden. According to AFP, the assault was [ordered](#) ahead of Hadi's meeting with Ould Cheikh. The focus appears to be on Dhubab district of Taiz governorate, which lies 30km north of Bab Al-Mandeb and less than 50km south of the port city of Mocha. Beyond its importance as a transit route between these two locations, Dhubab district is vital for its proximity to marine traffic. Radar sites in Dhubab district were [targeted](#) by American Tomahawk cruise missiles on October 13 following missile attacks from the area on US and UAE vessels. The district has changed hands multiple times. It was taken by Houthi/Saleh forces in their push south in early 2015, retaken by government forces in October 2015, and then taken back again by Houthi/Saleh fighters in February 2016.

**In Shabwa governorate major gains were made by Hadi forces.** At the beginning of December it was announced that hundreds of Yemeni troops – who had been recruited in Shabwa and trained in Hadhramout by UAE forces – [took control](#) of the southern coast of the governorate. The strategic port city of [Belhaf](#) was taken from AQAP, who have long used Shabwa as a stronghold, and on December 5 the militants retaliated by blowing up the pipeline linking the gas-rich Marib governorate to the Belhaf export terminal. A few days later, near the key Houthi-controlled city of Bayhan in northwest Shabwa a key road was [cut off](#) by Hadi-aligned forces which was allegedly being used as a smuggling route into Marib. Hadi forces [captured](#) several areas of nearby Usaylan district, leaving Bayhan the last district in Shabwa held by the Houthi/Saleh alliance. Thousands of mines are slowing their advance, but Hadi forces from Marib and other district in Shabwa were [converging](#) on Bayhan and had pushed into parts of the district by the end of December.

**On December 13 Reuters broke the news that the US had blocked an arms deal** with Saudi Arabia, [quoting](#) an Obama administration official as saying “we’ve decided not to move forward with some foreign military sales cases for air-dropped munitions, PGMs (precision-guided munitions).” The State Department’s notification of the potential sale to Congress occurred in [November 2015](#), and lists over 17,000 bombs in a deal valued at the time to be worth \$1.29 billion. Reuters, along with other major news outlets, quoted anonymous US officials, all citing worry over the high civilian casualties, but no official statements were made.

In a [press briefing the same day](#), White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest side-stepped questions about the deal and said the review of military assistance to Saudi Arabia ordered by President Obama was still ongoing “in light of the high rate of civilian casualties” and efforts are being refocused to enhance Saudi Arabia’s “border security and their territorial integrity.” The review was ordered immediately following the October 8 funeral hall bombing, and by the end of December no details had been made public. However, at a joint [press conference](#) with Saudi Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir on December 18, US Secretary of State Kerry voiced his support for the deal, which he emphasized was delayed by standard bureaucracy, and added “I

think it’s on track now and I think we’re moving in the direction that we wanted to.”

According to Aviation International News (AIN), the same day Reuters broke the news claiming the deal was blocked, on December 13 the first US F-15SA fighter jets [arrived](#) in Saudi Arabia’s King Khalid Air Base – part of a massive order of 154 new or upgraded planes. The same anonymous officials told various outlets the US will continue mid-air refueling of coalition jets, step up intelligence sharing on the Saudi-Yemeni border, and move ahead with the deal [requested](#) on December 8, 2016, for 48 military helicopters in total valued at \$3.51 billion. The same day, Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that two of the deadliest coalition bombings, including on the funeral hall in Sana’a on October 8, used US bombs, many of which were sold after American munitions were implicated in civilian deaths in Yemen.

**British parliamentarians urged Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson** to suspend licenses for arms exports to Saudi Arabia in a [letter](#) dated December 14, prompted by the news that the US had halted a major deal. The same day, when British Prime Minister Theresa May was [asked](#) in the House of Commons, “What will it take for the UK to adopt an ethical foreign policy when it comes to Yemen,” and quoted with the US official’s claims in the Reuters article, May sidestepped the question, instead saying Saudi Arabia is an ally and Saudi “intelligence has saved potentially hundreds of lives here in the UK.”

Amid continued calls by advocacy groups for the UK to halt sales to Saudi Arabia, the Guardian [reported](#) on December 18 that Britain’s defense secretary had already seen a report by the UK government that Saudi Arabia has been using cluster bombs made in the UK. The next day, writing “in response to allegations by Amnesty International,” the state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) [admitted](#) for the first time the kingdom’s use of cluster bombs in the ongoing war. The SPA said there was “limited use” of the munitions, and that “it decided to cease the usage of the UK-manufactured BL-755 cluster munitions.”

Whatever Saudi Arabia’s strategy was in making the announcement – perhaps to get ahead and control the narrative, or they had simply run out of the

British variety, last delivered in 1989 – two points were largely absent from coverage of the issue:

- First, international media carried quotes about the “limited” nature of their usage by Saudi officials and the British defense minister, who was forced to [admit](#) that UK-manufactured cluster bombs had been used. No mention was made of the [documented](#) instances of cluster bombs being dropped in residential areas, including in the capital Sana’a.
- Second, the announcement clearly implies only the UK-manufactured BL-755 cluster bombs will not be used, and in no way suggests Saudi Arabia has stopped using other types of cluster munitions. Human Rights Watch has documented seven types of cluster bombs being used in Yemen, and [found](#) that the coalition used Brazil-made cluster bombs in Sa’ada governorate as recent as December 6, killing at least two civilians and injuring six others.

**Saudi officials said more than 500 citizens have been killed in the war**, the BBC [reported](#) from Najran region – a figure that would not include Yemenis or other foreign workers killed in the south of the kingdom. In contrast, following the killing of a Saudi soldier in a border post attack on December 25, AFP said “he was the latest of at least [111](#) Saudi soldiers and civilians to be killed” since the country began its campaign in Yemen. Relatedly, the BBC said Saudi authorities have recorded 37 ballistic missiles crossing the border into Saudi territory between June 6, 2015 and November 26, 2016.

**Hadi government officials were removed and replaced by locals** affiliated with the resistance forces in many resistance-held areas of Taiz governorate. In mid-December the Middle East Eye [spoke](#) to the de-facto new manager of Al-Shamayteen district of Taiz. Known as Abu Hamza and a local leader of “Hasm”, a Salafi group, he said Hadi had been redirecting taxes from Taiz to Aden and had done little to support resistance forces. Resistance forces took control of the government district office in Al-Turbah, the district capital and an important city linking Taiz city to Aden, as well as several ministry buildings. The leader of the Hasm Brigades in Taiz, which stands for resolve or decisiveness, is a Salafi from Shabwa governorate named Adnan Rozaiq.

**The Islamic State conducted two major suicide bombings** in Aden in December, killing over 100 soldiers and injuring more than 130 in the same location, eight days apart. On December 10 the group [claimed](#) responsibility for an attack on Al-Sawlaban military base, on the outskirts of Aden city, that killed as many as 50 soldiers and injured around 70 while they were gathered to receive their salaries. On December 18 the Islamic State claimed responsibility for [another](#) suicide bombing, this time as soldiers gathered to collect their salaries near Al-Sawlaban camp outside the home of Colonel Nasser Sarea, head of special security forces in Aden. At least 52 soldiers were killed and 63 others wounded while they waited to receive their salaries.

Days after the first bombing AQAP released a statement denying responsibility. “At the request of the Ba Kazem tribe, which lost many of its sons in the attack, we are issuing this statement to prevent anyone trying to... sow discord between the tribes and their sons, the warriors of Ansar Al-Sharia”, AFP [quoted](#) the group as saying (Ansar Al-Sharia is a localized rebranding of AQAP). At least as early as 2010 a connection between the Ba Kazem tribe and Al-Qaeda was apparent, with Al-Qaeda fighters reportedly offering to [dig a well](#) for members of the tribe in return for shelter in Shabwa governorate. In 2014, the Ba Kazem tribe served as a [mediator](#) between AQAP and the government in Abyan. The Houthi/Saleh push south in 2015 likely solidified an alliance between AQAP and the tribe to defend its territory.

**US Central Command (CENTCOM) claimed** it killed 28 “terrorists” in nine strikes on AQAP targets in Yemen between September 23 and December 13, presumably carried out by drone. The December 13 strike “killed three AQAP operatives in Marib,” according to CENTCOM, and [four](#) according to Reuters. AFP [reported](#) another drone strike on December 20 killed three alleged AQAP militants in Shabwa. A [third](#) drone strike, again reported by AFP, on December 29 killed AQAP militant Jalal Al-Sayyidi and his guard in Al-Baydha governorate. Al-Sayyidi was the “emir” of Lawder, a town in the neighboring governorate of Abyan which has been held by AQAP at various points over the last five years.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- [Yemen's Forgotten War: How Europe Can Lay the Foundations for Peace](#), a paper by Adam Baron for the European Council on Foreign Relations provides background on the war and policy recommendations for the EU in Yemen.
- Writing from Sana'a for the Washington Post, Sudarsan Raghavan looks at how the war has destroyed Yemen's [small but vital middle class](#).
- A piece in the Middle East Eye, [Women play growing role for anti-Houthi forces](#), profiles some of the women in Taiz who have joined the resistance. MEE also wrote about how residents in Taiz living in "liberated" areas are experiencing [looting by advancing popular resistance forces](#).
- A literature review titled [Women's Role in Peace and Security](#) examines the role, impact, and social norms of women's participation in Yemeni politics.
- A well-sourced article in the Jamestown Foundation's Terrorism Monitor, [Islamic State in Yemen](#), discusses the group's rise and strategy, arguing it is likely to expand its reach in Yemen regardless of whether a peace deal is reached. A Guardian article, [A more dangerous long-term threat: Al-Qaeda grows as Isis retreats](#), offers a contrasting view.

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