



THE YEMEN TREND

MAY
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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

Throughout May attention remained on Hodeidah, where UN monitors have been seeking to implement the Hodeidah Agreement reached during the Sweden Consultations in December. The Houthis unilaterally redeployed their forces from the three ports of Hodeidah governorate between May 11 and 14, in a move that was verified by the UN and lauded as a critical first step in the implementation of the agreement. However, the move was heavily criticized by the Yemeni government as a sham and counter to what was agreed upon. “I can no longer tolerate the violations committed by the special envoy, which threaten prospects for a solution,” President Hadi said in a letter to the UN Secretary-General, who responded that he maintains confidence in his envoy, Martin Griffiths.

As the first set of redeployments were completed, delegations from the two warring parties met separately with the Office of the Special Envoy in Amman from May 14-16 in an attempt to reach consensus on the economic provisions contained in the Hodeidah Agreement. However, the talks made little progress, as both parties remained set on managing port revenues through their respective Central Bank of Yemen headquarters. Meanwhile, the WFP threatened a phased suspension of its aid delivery in Houthi-controlled areas unless the group follows through on agreements to improve its conduct. The relief body accused Houthi leaders of diverting aid and preventing it from selecting and verifying aid recipients autonomously.

As the Houthi redeployments were wrapping up and political negotiations were beginning in Amman, the Houthis launched cross-border drone attacks on an oil pumping station and other targets inside Saudi Arabia. In apparent response, an intense coalition bombing campaign was carried out in Sana’a that left dozens of civilians dead and injured. Meanwhile, fierce clashes continued in Al-Dhale’a governorate, blocking off the preferred route between Sana’a and Aden. As a result, OCHA reported it is taking trucks carrying humanitarian supplies about four times longer to travel between Aden and Sana’a, and costing humanitarian agencies 60 percent more.

Timeline

- May 02 US lawmakers fail to override presidential veto, US military support for the coalition to continue
- May 09 A silo in the Red Sea Mills in Hodeidah is struck by gunfire
- May 11 Houthis initiate a unilateral military redeployment from Hodeidah's three ports
- May 14 Head of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) visits Hodeidah to verify Houthi redeployment
- May 14 Houthi cross-border drone attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure force oil pipeline shutdown
- May 14 The warring parties meet in Amman to discuss economic provisions of the Hodeidah Agreement
- May 15 Special Envoy briefs the UNSC on the Houthis' redeployment
- May 16 Saudi Arabia launches series of deadly airstrikes in Sana'a, in apparent retaliation for Houthi drone attack
- May 20 President Hadi sends letter to UN Secretary General, accusing UN envoy of "violations" in Houthis' favor
- May 20 WFP threatens to suspend food aid in Houthi-controlled territories

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

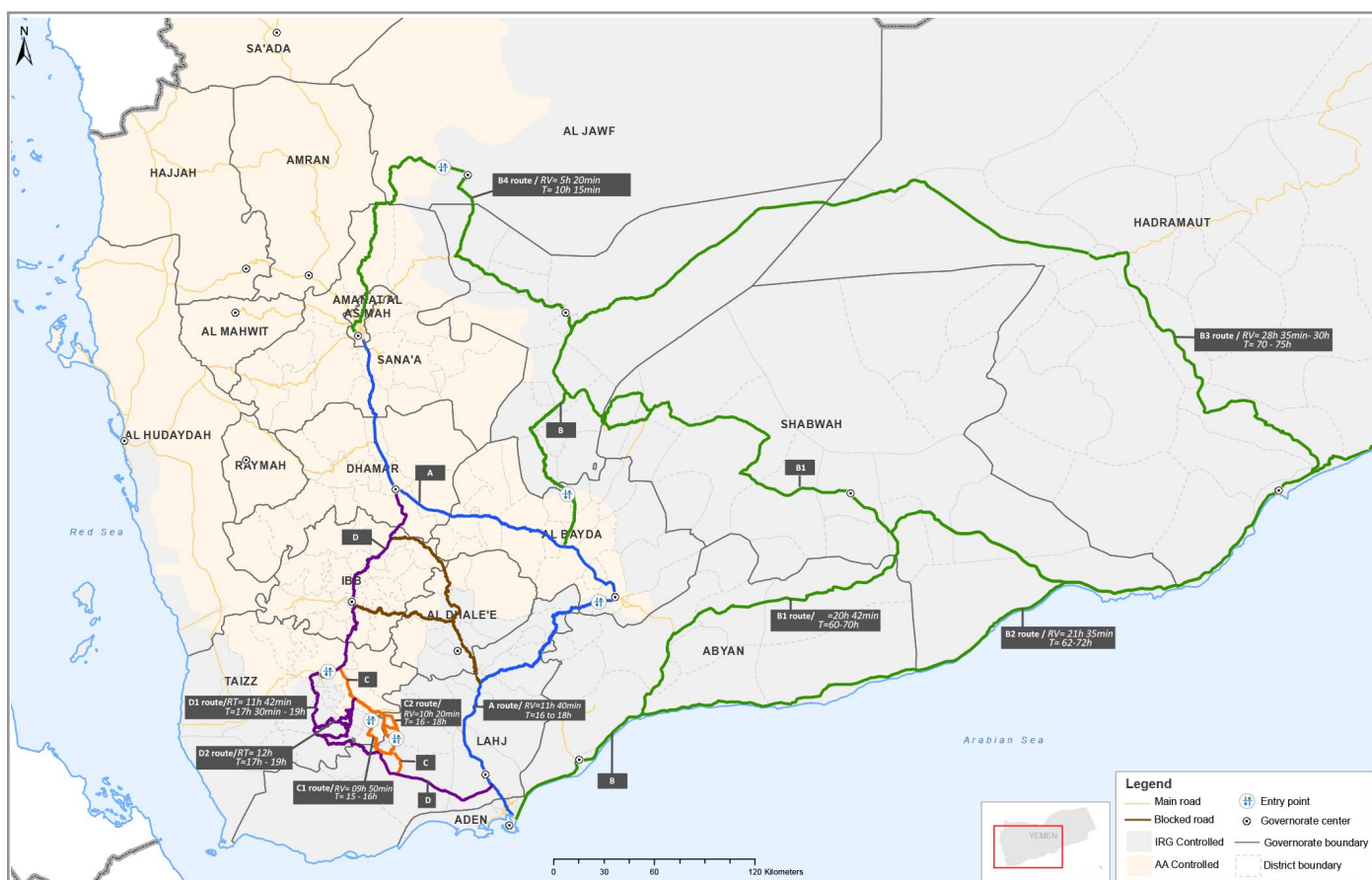
WFP warned it will suspend aid in Houthi-controlled territory if the status quo remains, accusing the Houthis of continuing to prevent the unhindered delivery of aid. “Our greatest challenge does not come from the guns, that are yet to fall silent in this conflict – instead, it is the obstructive and uncooperative role of some of the Houthi leaders in areas under their control,” the World Food Programme [said](#) on May 20. The relief agency accuses the group of infringing on its autonomy to select and verify aid recipients, most importantly through the implementation of a biometric registration system; as well as blocking aid convoys and diverting aid. The head of the WFP, David Beasley, sent a letter to the Houthi leadership [saying](#) if the “biometric exercise is not carried out as agreed, WFP will be left with no option but to suspend food distributions in the areas controlled by Ansarullah, the Houthis.”

The WFP head [said](#) that up to \$15 million worth of food was not ending up in the hands of intended beneficiaries. “What we’ve calculated is it could be anywhere from 5 to 10 percent [of aid going missing], but we don’t know for certain because we don’t have the monitoring system in place,” Beasley said.

“This is our dilemma.” An official with the Houthi government denied the allegations. The Sana’a-based deputy foreign minister, Hussein Al-Ezzi, told CNN that “mistakes happen sometimes” but that there was no systematic effort to steal aid.

Road travel times and costs have increased markedly between Sana’a and Aden, as a result of fighting in Al-Dhale’a governorate. Clashes at the Qa’atabah front in Al-Dhale’a, as well as in neighboring areas of the governorate, have resulted in heavy [casualties](#) and the closure of the preferred route between Yemen’s two main cities. “The closure of these routes has slowed down the delivery of humanitarian supplies, with trucks carrying humanitarian supplies taking more than 60 hours to travel between Aden and Sana’a, which is about four times longer than used to be the case,” OCHA [reported](#) in May. “It now costs humanitarian partners on average 60 per cent more to transport humanitarian supplies from Aden to Sana’a and other northern governorates.”

The map below shows the routes (in brown) in Al-Dhale’a that are blocked due to fighting.



Source: UN OCHA Issue 8 (7-20 May 2019)

The Red Sea Mills in Hodeidah sustained gunfire on May 9, following a brief visit by a UN team to the wheat storage facility for the first time since February. The UN did not identify the source of the gunfire, but WFP Herve Verhoosel [said](#) that one silo containing wheat was hit with gunfire. “Damage to humanitarian food stocks, whether deliberately targeted or as collateral damage, is unacceptable,” he [told](#) reporters. Access to the mills – which store enough wheat to feed 3.7 million Yemenis for one month – remains tenuous as the UN tries to recover food aid stashed at the facility, which is likely spoiling.

A majority of the stocks are believed to be usable but UN officials have called it a “race against time” to recover the wheat and distribute it. February marked the first time humanitarian workers were able to reach the mills since September 2018 when intense fighting made the journey to facility unsafe. Verhoosel [appealed](#) for sustained access to the site, saying that additional trucks and machinery were needed at the mills in order to begin distributing wheat.

A UN team is trying to reach an oil tanker at risk of rupturing off Hodeidah’s coast. In his May 15 Security Council [briefing](#), UN Humanitarian Coordinator Mark Lowcock said that the warring parties have agreed to let a UN team access the site, which sits offshore of the Ras Issa port. Officials fear the oil tanker, which has not received any maintenance in four years could explode, potentially spilling over 1 million barrels of oil in the Red Sea. “Just to give you a sense of the scale of the problem, that is four times as much as was spilt in the Exxon Valdez disaster 30 years ago,” Lowcock said.

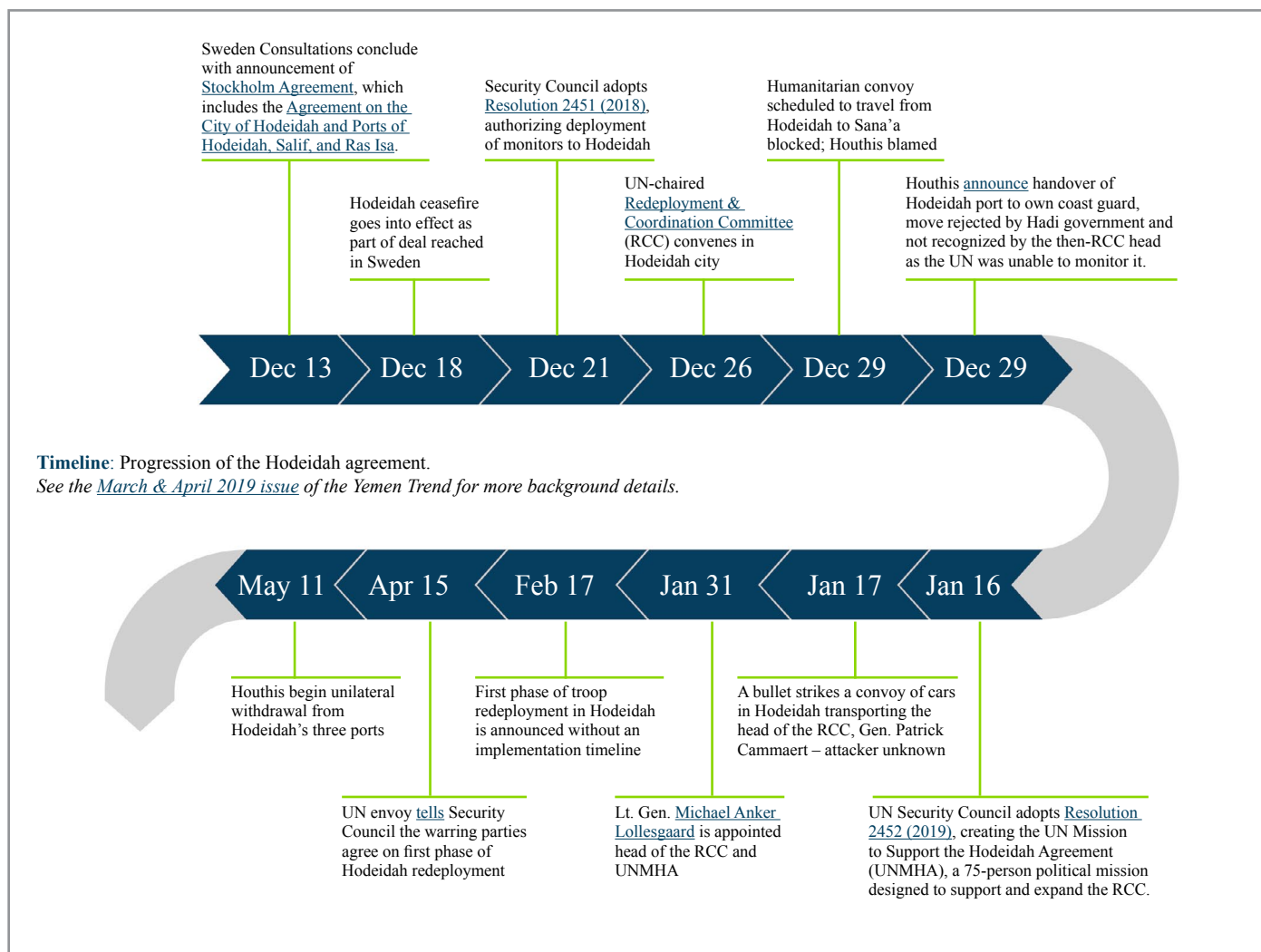
Migrants are being detained in conditions “unfit for human habitation,” resulting in at least 14 deaths at the beginning of May. IOM [said](#) the migrants died of complications of acute watery diarrhea. They had been confined at a military camp in the Lahj governorate along with almost 1,500 other people kept in “deplorable” conditions, IOM officials [said](#). The agency said it first became aware of the mass arrest of about 5,000 migrants at the end of April who were being detained in Aden, Lahj and Abyan governorates at camps in “cramped buildings, not fit for human habitation.”

According to the agency’s director of operations and emergencies, the camps “at best, have only limited access to basic services or protection.” IOM [reported](#) that migrants held in Lahj have since been released, although it’s not clear if the camp has been closed. In an effort to reduce the number of persons at these camps, IOM [offered](#) a voluntary return flight for over 2,000 migrants held at a stadium in Aden. However, the Yemeni government and authorities with the Coalition have delayed permission for the flights to take off. IOM [estimates](#) that about 2,500 migrants are housed at the Aden stadium with new arrivals daily.

Political Developments

The Houthis unilaterally redeployed their military forces from Hodeidah’s ports, in a move that drew strong criticism from the government and praise from the international community. The Houthis transferred control of the ports to coast guard personnel under their control over the period May 11 and 14, in what they [referred](#) to as a “unilateral step” by the “army and popular committees,” and as “a move that had already been agreed upon with the United Nations.” The chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), Lt. General Michael Lollesgaard, [confirmed](#) the withdrawal on May 14. “UN teams have been monitoring this redeployment which has been executed, partly as agreed by the Yemeni parties in the concept of phase one,” Lollesgaard said, acknowledging it was only a first step to implementing the peace deal reached six months ago in Stockholm.

Before phase one is fully completed, which entails the redeployment of government and coalition forces from the city’s outskirts, “we need to finalise phase two and the question of the local security forces,” Lollesgaard [told](#) reporters. The [Hodeidah Agreement](#) stipulates the redeployment of military forces but does not make mention of which security personnel the locations should be handed over to. It only states more generally that the “security of the city of Hodeidah and the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Issa shall be the responsibility of local security forces in accordance with Yemeni law.”



The Houthi redeployment and UN support for it was widely condemned by the government. By backing the unilateral move by the Houthis, and in [referring](#) to the “handing over of the security of the ports to the coast guard” without first conducting a review of the list of coast guard employees, the UN was accused of legitimizing the Houthis’ control over the port via the security forces it controls. Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani [alleged](#) that the handover was to “a number of militia leaders” and compared it to the Houthis’ prior announcement on December 29 of handing over the port to their own armed men.

Furthermore, the special envoy’s remarks to the Security Council on his May 15 were strongly criticized. “I am grateful to Abdel Malik Al-Houthi for his commitment and to Ansar Allah for following through on their promises. It shows their seriousness and commitment to implement what was agreed in Stockholm,” Martin Griffiths told the [briefing](#). “And my appreciation goes to them for being the first to redeploy their forces as originally agreed,” he said, adding that the UNMHA mission “confirmed that

Ansar Allah was fully compliant throughout the withdrawal and that they were very cooperative.” Al-Eryani [called](#) Griffith’s comments to the Security Council an “unprecedented deception and disinformation to the international community, UN and the SC.”

President Hadi said the UN envoy’s actions “threaten prospects for a solution,” in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “I can no longer tolerate the violations committed by the special envoy, which threaten prospects for a solution,” the letter is [quoted](#) as saying. In the five-page letter, the president accused Griffiths of working in favor of the Houthis [and](#) being ignorant of the complexities of the conflict, “especially the ideological, intellectual, and political elements of the Houthi militias and their fundamental rejection of the principles of democracy and the peaceful rotation of power.” In a written response, Guterres [told](#) Hadi the UN was working hard to uphold its impartiality, while also saying that he and Griffiths took the concerns outlined in the note “very seriously.”

UN-mediated talks over Hodeidah port revenues were held in Amman from May 14-16. Houthi and government representatives met separately with a team from the Office of the Special Envoy in Jordan to “discuss implementation of the economic provisions of the Hodeidah Agreement reached in Sweden in December 2018,” [according](#) to the UN. This included discussions on the management of port revenues from Hodeidah, Saleef, and Ras Issa ports, and the use of the revenue for public salary payments in Hodeidah and nationally.

The meetings [failed](#) to arrive at agreement, with a core issue of contention being the continued division of the Central Bank of Yemen, with the internationally-recognized CBY in Aden and the Houthi-controlled CBY in Sana’a. Reuters [quoted](#) a government delegation spokesperson as saying “[the Houthis] insistence to divide the Central Bank and its revenues and to send the port revenues to Sanaa means they decided to fail the talks,” while a Houthi delegation member said revenues should be kept in the Hodeidah branch, which falls under the Sana’a administration’s authority, and be placed in a special account under international supervision.

Military and Security Developments

The Houthis launched drone attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure on May 14. Saudi Arabia was [forced](#) to temporarily shut down a state-run oil pipeline after two oil pumping stations were struck on May 14 by drones [claimed](#) by the Houthis. The Houthis launched a series of other attacks using explosive-laden drones in Saudi Arabia throughout the month, including targeting an airport and military installation in the southwestern Jizan at the end of May, preceded by two other drone launches reportedly on [May 23](#) and [May 26](#), with Saudi officials [confirming](#) the May 26 attack. The repeated assaults [have raised concerns](#) about the Houthis increasingly advanced use of drones for warfare.

The coalition launched a heavy bombing campaign in Sana’a on May 16, in apparent response to the Houthi cross-border drone attack on its oil infrastructure. [According](#) to CARE, 19 airstrikes left seven dead, including four children. In total, OCHA [reported](#), more than 70 civilians were killed or wounded.

Outside Hodeidah, fighting raged at several key frontlines around Yemen. In Al-Dhale’a, heavy clashes at the Qa’atabah frontline and neighboring areas of the governorate resulted in significant casualties. In the first two days of the renewed campaign to push the Houthis out of Qa’atabah district, at least 120 deaths on either side were [reported](#). Meanwhile, [clashes](#) on the outskirts of Taiz city heightened in May, coupled with indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas by the Houthis. An airstrike in Taiz governorate on May 25 killed at least seven children, [according](#) to the UN.

The Senate failed to nullify Trump’s veto of the resolution to end US involvement in the Yemen war. In a [vote](#) on May 2, lawmakers were unable to rally the two-thirds majority necessary to override the president’s veto, meaning the US is to continue providing logistical and intelligence assistance to the coalition. Congressional backers of the anti-war legislation say they will continue to push the issue. “The next step is to try to look to the appropriations process to cut off the funding for this war, to stop the sale of weapons to the Saudis and to pull out any U.S. personnel that are helping them in this disastrous campaign,” [said](#) US Senator Chris Murphy.

Recommended reading:

Journalistic articles

- Yemeni researcher Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen tackles Amnesty International says the [Prolonged detention and torture of 10 journalists illustrates risks faced by media workers](#) in Yemen.
- A video explainer from the Wall Street Journal breaks down how [Armed Drones Are a Growing Threat from Rebels in Yemen](#).
- An opinion piece in The New Humanitarian, [The Hodeidah smokescreen: A real peace deal requires Yemeni buy-in](#), argues that the reported unilateral pull out by Houthi forces in Hodeidah is not yet cause for celebration, as root issues still remain unaddressed.

Longer reports

- A white paper by the Rethinking Yemen's Economy project addresses [The Essential Role of Remittances in Mitigating Economic Collapse](#), stating “it is incumbent on GCC states, and Saudi Arabia in particular, to allow Yemeni expat workers an exemption from the current labor nationalization campaigns, at least in the mid-term.”
- A policy brief providing evidence from an impact evaluation of Yemen's Cash for Nutrition Program sheds light on the question: [Does “Cash Plus” Work for Preventing Malnutrition?](#) The research was conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute in coordination with the World Bank and the Social Fund for Development.
- The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) released two briefs, one on [Shabwah and Hadhramawt](#) and another on [Socotra and Mahrah](#), as part of a three-part analysis series exploring the fragmentation of state authority in Southern Yemen.



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