



# “WE LIVED DAYS IN HELL”

Civilian Perspectives on the Conflict in Yemen

CENTER FOR  
**CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT**  
RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.



---

# “We Lived Days in Hell”

## Civilian Perspectives on the Conflict in Yemen

---

**RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.**

---

Copyright © 2016  
Center for Civilians in Conflict  
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover photo: AFP/Getty Images/Mohammed Huwais

A boy stands amidst the rubble outside a destroyed house on November 14, 2016 on the outskirts of Sana'a. The house was destroyed by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes two days earlier

[civiliansinconflict.org](http://civiliansinconflict.org)

# Organizational Mission

The mission of Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is to improve protection for civilians caught in conflicts around the world. We call on and advise international organizations, governments, militaries, and armed non-state actors to adopt and implement policies to prevent civilian harm. When civilians are harmed we advocate for the provision of amends and post-harm assistance. We bring the voices of civilians themselves to those making decisions affecting their lives.

## Acknowledgements

This report was researched and authored by Nadwa al-Dawsari, expert on Yemen and consultant with CIVIC. Local researchers helped with research across five governorates in Yemen. Sahr Muhammedally, Senior Program Manager for MENA and South Asia, edited the report. Marla Keenan, Program Director; Federico Borello, Executive Director; and Christopher Allbritton, Communications Manager, provided additional review. CIVIC intern Bénédicte Aboul-Nasr provided research assistance and assisted in production. Dena Verdesca designed the report and prepared it for publication.

CIVIC would like to thank all those individuals and organizations, who assisted with the research in Yemen, and all the people who agreed to share their stories and views with us. CIVIC also would like to thank Peter Salisbury, Helen Lackner, and Iain Smailes for providing valuable feedback on early drafts of the report.

This project is funded by ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) with resources provided by the German Federal Foreign Office.





Map No. 2647 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS  
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/yemen.pdf>

# Table of Contents

Glossary	vii
Executive Summary	1
Recommendations	4
Methodology	6
Background	6
Humanitarian Issues	8
Key Players in Yemen	0
Patterns of Civilian Harm	11
Snipers and Shelling of Civilian Areas	11
Coalition Airstrikes	14
Displacement Due to the Conflict	18
Enforced Disappearance and Ill-Treatment	20
Caught in the Crossfire	22
Landmines	23
Taiz Siege and Impact on Humanitarian Aid	25
Civilian Perceptions of Security Actors and the Conflict	27
A Divided Nation	27
The Hadi Government	29
Houthi-Saleh Forces	30
Saudi-Led Coalition	30
Local Governorate Authorities	31
The Resistance Fighting the Houthis	32
UN-Led Peace Talks	33
Security Sector Reform and Impact on Civilian Protection	37
Oversight of Security Forces and Recruitment	38
Lack of Requisite Training	39
Problems with Pay and Lack of Equipment	41
Civilians' Needs and Expectations	43
Acknowledgement, Reconciliation, and Post-Harm Assistance	43
Strengthening the Justice System	45
Oversight and Disarmament of Armed groups	46
Conclusion	49

# Glossary

AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AVM	Anti-vehicle Mine
APM	Anti-personnel Mine
DOD	United States Department of Defense
DOS	United States Department of State
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
HRW	Human Rights Watch
JIAT	Joint Incidents Assessment Team
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ISIS	Islamic State (also referred to as 'ISIL' or 'IS')
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LMN	Local Monitors Network
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NMAC	National Mine Action Committee
OCHA	Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SJC	Supreme Judiciary Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
YEMAC	Yemen Executive Mine Action Center
YER	Yemeni Rial
YFT	Youth Foundation for Transparency
YTO	Youth Transparency Association



*Children play in a neighborhood in Taiz destroyed by shelling in June 2016. (Ahmed A. Basha)*

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“There is no civilian protection. There are only frontlines, battles, and clashes.”  
—Yemeni man in war-torn Taiz.*

For more than two years, civilians in Yemen have been navigating survival amid airstrikes, sniper attacks, landmines, forced displacement, famine, and economic hardships. Fighting between ground forces on one side and the overwhelming use of air power on the other has taken a devastating toll on the population in a country long considered to be the least developed in the Middle East and one of the poorest in the world.

Violence spread across Yemen when Houthis—a Zaydi-Shia group—took over Sana’a, the capital, in September 2014 with the help of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh’s forces. Fighting escalated when a Saudi-led coalition intervened militarily in March 2015 to reinstate the internationally recognized government of President Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi. The United Nations (UN) estimates at least 10,000 have been killed, 37,000 injured, and more than 3 million displaced. Over 80 percent of Yemen’s 27.4 million people need humanitarian assistance. Famine, especially in rural areas, has increased: 7.6 million people suffer from severe food insecurity and almost 2 million are malnourished. As of December 2016, parties to the conflict have not respected UN-led ceasefire agreements.

This report documents patterns of civilian harm inflicted by all sides, examines civilian perceptions of the various parties to the conflict, the need to professionalize security forces, and highlights civilians’ needs and expectations in terms of protection and assistance to rebuild their lives and communities. The report provides some recommendations to all parties to the conflict and the international community, including on key elements needed for an inclusive peace process that could help end the cycle of violence.

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) conducted research in Sana’a, Aden, Taiz, Hadramout and Mareb governorates and met with civilians, governors, security and military officials, armed group leaders, as well as community and civil society leaders.

Civilian harm, as described by civilians in this report, includes death, injuries, and destruction of property, as well as displacement and forced disappearances. All parties to the conflict in Yemen are responsible for civilian harm and have failed to take necessary precautionary measures to minimize civilian harm when engaging a military target. In some cases, reports indicate that civilians were deliberately targeted.

What remains constant across the territory is the inability for civilians to get any recourse from any of the armed actors. A 46-year-old man from Majzer, Mareb said, “We would meet with [the] party that caused us harm and they would apologize, but blame the other side for what happened. I don’t trust anyone. All sides are criminals and they have no conscience whatsoever.” When asked what civilians did to protect themselves during the conflict, many civilians said they left their homes. “We just ran from one neighborhood to another. It’s all we could do,” said a 43-year-old woman from Aden. In Sana’a, civilians said that they either moved to safer areas or stayed in ground floor away from windows, especially when they heard coalition fighter jets. “We could only flee from one place to another. There is no safe place,” said a 55-year-old man.

From the beginning of the conflict, Houthi-Saleh forces have engaged in shelling of civilian residential areas, medical facilities, schools, and other civilian infrastructure, causing many civilians in Taiz and Aden to flee. Civilians in both cities reported deliberate sniper attacks against civilians, accusing the Houthi-Saleh forces of engaging in this practice

**‘I don’t trust anyone. All sides are criminals and they have no conscience whatsoever.’**

On the other side, Saudi-led coalition strikes caused deaths, injuries, and the destruction of schools, medical facilities, and businesses in governorates in which CIVIC conducted research, echoing findings of other international and Yemeni organizations. According to the United Nations, the coalition is responsible for 60 percent of the civilian casualties since it intervened in March 2015. Civilians living in Sana’a, like their fellow

citizens in Aden and Taiz, concluded that they were deliberately targeted. “Saudis did not observe any law or values,” said a 40-year-old woman in Sana’a. “They bombed civilians. They killed humans, trees, and even animals did not escape their aggression,” she added. The coalition has investigated some allegations of civilian harm, and for some incidents acknowledged mistakes and failures of personnel to follow rules of engagement (ROEs). It is unclear, however, whether anyone was held accountable for these acts, and whether the coalition instituted any changes to prevent the recurrence of such instances.

Our research also documented incidents of forced displacement of civilians, as well as forced disappearances and ill treatment of journalists and opponents by the Houthi-Saleh forces. Civilians have also been arbitrarily detained by Yemeni Elite Forces— who are trained by the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—in Hadramout governorate on suspicion of being affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

While the fighting has stopped in Aden and some districts in Mareb, returning civilians are facing threat from landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Yemeni organizations are struggling to keep up demands of clearance due to limited staffing capabilities, equipment, and budget gaps and need urgent assistance to facilitate the safe return of civilians.

Civilians note that security in parts of Aden has improved since Houthi-Saleh forces were pushed out and there are increased patrols by new security forces. Some of these security forces are former local resistance forces—consisting of civilians, local tribesmen, and southern separatists— who coalesced to fight the Houthis, and are now being integrated into security and military forces in Aden, Hadramout, Mareb, and Taiz. However, civilians expressed concern about oversight of these forces and their lack of discipline and professionalism and want those not formally integrated into national security forces to be disarmed. Security officials acknowledged the need to professionalize and train these forces on how to operate effectively and safely amongst a civilian population. While these forces were given limited trainings by some coalition members, trainings focused primarily on combat tactics. Government and security officials also admitted that there is a lack of proper command and control over forces technically under Yemeni government authority, because some are trained, equipped, and supervised by members of the Saudi-led coalition. This has created gaps in government oversight.

The impact of the conflict on civilian lives in terms of loss, psychological trauma, and humanitarian suffering is high and has exacerbated regional divides and worsened tensions between and within local communities and tribes, with most southerners claiming they want secession from the north.

Despite the deep divisions and different narratives on the responsibilities for the war, most civilians agreed on their deep distrust of both the Hadi government and the Houthi-Saleh alliance. Civilians in the north blame the Saudi-led coalition for the destruction it has caused.

Yemenis view the Hadi government as disconnected from Yemen and describe it as the “runaway government” as it has yet to fully return to Yemen. Expressing skepticism at peace talks, a civilian from Sana’a said, “If they [referring to Hadi, Houthis, Saleh] had Yemen’s interests in their heart they would have reached a solution by now.” A 55-year-old man from Sana’a suggested that for peace talks to work, the Saudis should halt airstrikes and “deport” Hadi’s government back to Yemen. Civilians from Taiz and Mareb said that no peace could be accomplished unless Houthi-Saleh forces withdraw from and stop shelling these governorates.

Across the board, civilians do not want Yemen’s current political figures to take part in the country’s future and many want to see them brought to justice. Civilians demand an uncorrupt and effective government, and functioning justice and security institutions.

Ultimately, for the war in Yemen to end, a unified government—and its international backers— needs to reestablish trust with its own people. It can start by beginning to protect civilians from harm from all sides, address grievances that led to violence by involving local communities in the peace process, and to rebuild the country by putting the needs of civilians first.

## Recommendations

### ***To all Parties to the Conflict***

- Ensure adherence to international humanitarian law during the conduct of all security operations.
- Respect ceasefire agreements initiated by the United Nations Peace Envoy and agree on a joint ceasefire monitoring mechanism overseen by the UN.
- Ensure a peace process that addresses local grievances across Yemen. The process must include local political leaders, civil society, women, and youth groups—not just current elite officials. Participation of women and local leaders will signal recognition of local grievances, and their roles in governance and security arrangements that will follow signing of any deal.

### ***To the Government of Yemen***

- Return to Aden permanently, prioritize the return of essential services in Yemen, and work with local authorities across Yemen to improve security and ensure civilians return to areas clear of landmines and UXO.
- Work with local authorities and civil society groups to develop a mechanism to receive and process civilian complaints of harm incurred during the conflict. Planning for post-harm assistance that will include financial assistance, vocational training, and medical and trauma assistance to conflict-affected communities should begin now and be transparent. Ensure women's and civil society's participation in the development of post-harm assistance programs.
- Ensure the enlistment of resistance fighters into security forces is transparent and not based on regional or tribal preferences. Seek assistance for scenario-based trainings on international humanitarian and human rights law, civilian protection, civilian-military cooperation, and community policing. Investigate allegations of civilian harm attributed to resistance forces and hold persons accountable.

### ***To the Houthi De Facto Authorities in Sana'a***

- De-escalate the conflict and allow unhindered humanitarian access to civilians and in areas under siege, such as Taiz.
- Investigate allegations of civilian harm attributed to Houthi-Saleh forces and hold persons accountable.

### ***To the Saudi-Led Coalition***

- Review current rules of engagement, guidance, and targeting procedures to ensure adherence to IHL and best practices to minimize civilian harm. Such practices include:
  - o Issue new guidance to commanders in the coalition to ensure adherence to IHL, in particular principles of distinction and proportionality, and emphasize the need to minimize civilian harm (including assuming the presence of civilians in buildings). Hold accountable those who do not follow this guidance.
  - o Create a no-strike list—or revise the current no strike list—to include schools, hospitals, clinics, and civilian infrastructure that are protected from attack under IHL.
  - o Engage with humanitarian actors in Yemen to improve information sharing within the coalition on grid coordinates of hospitals and clinics.

- o Ensure battle damage assessments take into account civilian deaths, injuries, and damage to homes and infrastructure. Use the data for in-depth analysis assessments to create an effective lessons-learned process that feeds into new guidance and scenario-based trainings to prevent future civilian harm.
- Investigate all allegations of civilian harm, including from international and Yemeni organizations.
  - o In cases of wrongdoing or failure to follow rules of engagement, hold persons accountable and make public the outcomes of investigations and accountability measures. Compensate civilians for wrongful death, injuries, and property damage.
  - o In cases of accidental or incidental harm, make amends in the form of apologies and monetary payments. Ensure any monetary payments are made transparently and with input from communities and families affected.
- Ensure accountability of Yemeni forces trained, funded, and advised by the coalition by investigating allegations of abuse attributed to such forces in Yemen.
- Review training programs for Yemeni military and security forces and include trainings on international humanitarian and human rights law, and scenario-based trainings on civilian protection.

***To the United Nations***

- Ensure participation of local leaders, including women and civil society, in the current negotiations to promote a genuinely inclusive peace process.
- Explore options with the Government of Yemen and Houthi authorities on UN support for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed groups.
- Undertake a thorough assessment and mapping of landmines/UXO contaminated areas, and existing Yemeni organizations' demining efforts. This will allow planning a coordinated strategy for demining and UXO clearance, and promotion of risk awareness programs in Yemen.

***To Donor Partners, the United States, and the United Kingdom***

- Condition any support, including arms sales, to the Saudi-led coalition on affirmative steps taken to implement policies to prevent civilian harm.
- Financially support UN and local civil society efforts to undertake landmine and UXO clearance and risk awareness activities.
- In coordination with the Government of Yemen and local authorities, support efforts to restructure and improve the professionalism of current police and military forces, as well as support trainings on international humanitarian and human rights law, scenario-based civilian protection trainings, civilian-military relationship, and community policing.
- Provide assistance to rehabilitate courts and prisons and help with justice reforms. Functioning courts and prisons are key to improving the security situation and building confidence in the government.

## Methodology

This report is based on field research in Yemen undertaken between August and November 2016. Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) interviewed 71 civilians including 35 women and 36 men and conducted eight focus group discussions in which 95 civilians participated including 46 women and 49 men. Four of these focus group discussions were female only. CIVIC also interviewed 25 local authority figures and government officials, 16 security and military officials, 14 local armed groups leaders, and three members of armed groups. In addition, dozens of community and civil society leaders, as well as representatives from international organizations active in Yemen were interviewed.

Local researchers, who were trained and supervised by a CIVIC consultant, conducted most of the interviews. The researchers came from the same areas they worked in and were aware of the sensitivities. Through their connections, they were able to reach a wide range of local actors. A CIVIC consultant conducted additional interviews in Aden during the first two weeks of October 2016. CIVIC sought a diverse sample of interviewees in terms of gender, age, and geographic location. The interviews were semi-structured, with a questionnaire identifying topics to discuss in each interview, but also included an emphasis on follow-up questions to clarify or provide more detail about a person's experience.

The report is not a survey intended to provide statistically significant results or conclusions. CIVIC seeks to build on the critical quantitative work that others have undertaken, providing more detailed civilian views on the conflict, on security actors in Yemen, and on the main priorities for responding to civilian harm and avoiding a repetition of such violence. The focus was also not on documenting individual violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, but rather on identifying the main patterns of civilian harm by the parties to the conflict.

For the security and privacy of both civilian and military interviewees, CIVIC has withheld names and identifying information throughout the report.

This report focuses on patterns of civilian harm as described by civilians, mainly in frontline areas where there has been intense fighting between the Houthis backed by military units loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh on one side and local fighters backed by forces loyal to the Government of Yemen and the Saudi-led coalition. These areas include Aden, Taiz and Mareb. The report also focuses on Mukalla, where clashes between al-Qaeda and coalition-backed southern forces took place. In addition, the report includes interviews with civilians in Sana'a which has been heavily bombarded by the coalition since March 26, 2015. Therefore, this report does not claim to capture all civilian harm patterns across Yemen.

## Background

In 2011, after a year of popular protests that were part of the so-called "Arab Spring," Yemen's longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh, was forced from office and ceded power to his deputy Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi. Since then, he has allied with Houthi forces, a Zaydi-Shia group that emerged in Saada governorate in the north in the 1990s and fitfully fought Saleh's government from 2004–2010. On September 21, 2014, Houthi forces, backed by forces loyal to Saleh, easily took control of Sana'a.<sup>1</sup> In the following months, the allied Houthi-Saleh forces pushed into several other parts of the country, stormed President Hadi's home killing 11 of his bodyguards, and placed him and his cabinet under house arrest, prompting the resignation of Hadi and the entire cabinet in January 2015.<sup>2</sup>

1 Historically divided, the current Yemeni state has been rocked by internal tensions since the unification in 1990. Before 1990, Yemen was divided between the former Yemeni Arab Republic, also known as North Yemen and traditionally US- and Saudi-backed; and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), known as South Yemen and supported by the USSR until its collapse. Ali Abdullah Saleh, ruled the Yemeni Arab Republic from 1978 to 1990, and the reunified Republic of Yemen from 1990 until his ouster in 2011. Zachary Laub, "Yemen in Crisis," Council on Foreign Relations, April 19, 2016, <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/yemen-crisis/p36488>.

2 Mohammed Ghoari and Yara Bayoumy, "How the Houthis drove Yemen into a political vacuum," Reuters, February 11, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-hadi-idUSKBNOLF0AD20150211>

In early February 2015, the Houthis dissolved the parliament and announced a so-called “constitutional declaration”<sup>3</sup> while advancing into the south and key central provinces. This marked the beginning of a bloody civil war and prompted foreign military intervention. On March 26, 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of 10 countries<sup>4</sup> launched a military campaign primarily consisting of airstrikes to reinstate president Hadi to power and reverse the Houthi-Saleh coup.<sup>5</sup> A UN-led peace process has so far failed to resolve the conflict. Three rounds of peace talks between Hadi’s government and the Houthi-Saleh alliance were conducted in June 2015, December 2015, and April-August 2016 to no avail.<sup>6</sup> On November 28, 2016, the Houthis and Saleh formed a new government; a process that was described by the UN envoy as a “new and unnecessary obstacle to peace in Yemen.”<sup>7</sup>

The current conflict can be traced in part to concerns about a 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement. The agreement aimed to ease the political tension following the 2011 youth-led protests and established a two-year period of political transition from the Saleh government. It failed, however, to address the drivers of Yemen’s conflict or represent the demands of all parties, and only reshuffled the existing political elite arrangements, largely ignoring the demands of the dissatisfied protestors. Youth, southerners, and the Houthis were not represented when the deal’s terms were negotiated and signed. Although Saleh stepped down, he was allowed to remain politically active; he retained the presidency of the General People’s Congress (GPC), Yemen’s largest parliamentary party, and maintained control over most of the armed forces including the best equipped and trained security units.

According to the deal, Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi, Saleh’s vice president, became the new president after running in uncontested elections in February 2012. From its inception, the transition government—comprising a 50-50 split between Saleh’s GPC and opposition parties who were the country’s political elite—was caught in an internal power struggle. Living conditions deteriorated, the economic situation worsened, violent conflict spread, and the political process faltered.<sup>8</sup>

A key part of the roadmap for the political transition brokered by the GCC and backed by the international community was the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), in which 565 representatives from political parties and other groups including the Houthis, youth, and women participated. But the NDC collapsed as the delegates failed to resolve disputes over the distribution of power.<sup>9</sup>

---

3 Ahmed Al-Hajj The Associated Press, “After Takeover, Yemen’s Shiite rebels Criticized Over ‘Coup,’” The Associated Press, New York Times, February 7, 2015, <http://www.sitrib.com/home/2153208-155/after-takeover-yemens-shiite-rebels-criticized>.

4 The coalition includes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Senegal, and Qatar. The level of involvement of Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, and Pakistan is not clear. The Saudi-led coalition receives logistical and intelligence support from the United States.

5 President Hadi managed to escape from Houthi captivity two weeks after he was put under house arrest and fled to the southern city of Aden. He withdrew his resignation and announced Aden as the temporary capital of the country. By mid-March 2015, the Houthis and their ally Saleh had sent forces into the South and Aden, and on March 19, 2016, Yemen Air Force fighter jets—now controlled by Saleh and the Houthis—bombed the presidential palace in Aden where Hadi was staying.

6 Nadwa Al-Dawsari, “Finding a New Approach to Yemen Peace Talks,” Atlantic Council, May 3, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/finding-a-new-approach-to-yemen-s-peace-talks>; see also, Al Jazeera, “Yemen Peace Talks in Kuwait End Amid Fighting,” August 7, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/yemen-peace-talks-collapse-fighting-intensifies-160807042106210.html>.

7 UN News Center, “Formation of Houthi government ‘complicates search for peaceful solution’ to Yemen crisis – UN envoy, November 29, 2016, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55673#.WEbjSTKZPow>.

8 Helen Lackner, “Yemen’s ‘Peaceful’ Transition from Autocracy: Could it have Succeeded?” International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), March 2016.

9 Stephen W. Day, “The ‘Non Conclusion’ of Yemen’s National Dialogue,” Foreign Policy, January 27, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/27/the-non-conclusion-of-yemens-national-dialogue/>; for more discussion on Yemen’s NDC see Erica Gaston, “Process Lessons Learned in Yemen’s National Dialogue,” United States Institute of Peace, February 2014, [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR342\\_Process-Lessons-Learned-in-Yemens-National-Dialogue.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR342_Process-Lessons-Learned-in-Yemens-National-Dialogue.pdf).

Shortly after the conclusion of the NDC, a presidential committee established by President Hadi decided on a new federal structure dividing Yemen into six regions.<sup>10</sup> This process lacked sufficient debate and inclusion and was protested by many, including the southerners who wanted a North-South arrangement; and the Houthis who thought the six-region federation confined them to a resource-poor, and landlocked region.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the failure of the government to improve living conditions for Yemenis gave the Houthis space to mobilize. It came as a surprise to many in Yemen that the Houthis did so in alliance with Saleh, against whom they had fought six wars between 2004 and 2010. This alliance was primarily concerned with defeating a common enemy—Islah, the largest opposition party in the country. Islah had backed youth protests against Saleh,<sup>12</sup> thus gaining considerable power after the Arab Spring.<sup>13</sup> The alliance has proved surprisingly durable, and its focus shifted from the eradication of Islah and control of Sana'a to taking over the entire country by 2015.

The transition process that started in late 2011 failed to address local grievances and previous conflicts. It focused mainly on compromise between elites and prioritized security concerns over people's economic needs and demands for political reform.<sup>14</sup> The failure of the political transition process led to the escalation of violence. The current war now further aggravates internal tensions and exacerbates local grievances.

## Humanitarian Issues

Before 2014, the Republic of Yemen faced challenges on several fronts including food and water scarcity, widespread poverty and economic stagnation, high population growth, severe urban-rural imbalances, and female illiteracy. The ongoing conflict has worsened these difficulties. UN agencies in October 2016 estimated that since March 2015, more than 7,000 people had been killed and another 37,000 wounded.<sup>15</sup> Of Yemen's 27.4 million people, an estimated half live in areas directly affected by the conflict, and about 18.8 million need humanitarian assistance—including 10.3 million who are in acute need.<sup>16</sup>

More than 7 million people suffer from severe food insecurity, and almost 2 million are malnourished or starving, particularly in rural areas. This includes 1.3 million children, of whom 320,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition.<sup>17</sup> Since January 2014, 3.27 million people have been internally displaced (IDP) in a country lacking camps to accommodate IDPs.<sup>18</sup> Without relatives to assist them, these people become effectively homeless. Moreover, Yemen's already weak economy and basic social services are now collapsing. Fourteen million Yemenis—including 8.3 million children—cannot access health care services because of chronic drug shortages, unpaid salaries, and conflict-related destruction.<sup>19</sup>

---

10 Al Jazeera, "Yemen to Become Six-Region Federation," February 10, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/yemen-become-six-region-federation-2014210124731726931.htm>

11 Helen Lackner, "Yemen's 'Peaceful' Transition from Autocracy: Could it have Succeeded?" IDEA, March 2016.

12 Islah is the largest opposition party in Yemen. It is a coalition of tribal and Islamist groups, although tribal factors and figureheads often superseded Islamic ones.

13 Charles Schmitz, "The Houthis' Rise and Obama's Legacy in Yemen," Middle East Institute, November 4, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/houthis-rise-and-obama-s-legacy-yemen>.

14 Peter Salisbury, "Yemen: Stemming the Rise of Chaos State," Chatham House, May 25, 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/yemen-stemming-rise-chaos-state>.

15 Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Yemen: Humanitarian Needs 2017," November 28, 2016, <http://ochayemen.org/hno-2017/#homepage>.

16 OCHA, "Yemen: Crisis Overview," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/yemen/crisis-overview>.

17 World Bank, "Yemen Overview," October 1, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>.

18 OCHA, "Yemen: Key Figures," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.unocha.org/yemen/>.

19 World Bank, "Yemen Overview," October 1, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/yemen/overview>.

More than 3 million children cannot attend school, with more than 1.8 million additional children dropping out since the beginning of the conflict. 1,600 schools remain closed because of insecurity, physical damage, or their use as shelters for IDPs. Violence and security concerns have also negatively affected aid delivery in Yemen.<sup>20</sup>

## Key Players in Yemen

**The Government of Yemen led by President Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi:** The government has been in exile in Riyadh since March 26, 2015. It made several attempts to relocate to Aden in 2016, but its presence in Yemen remains limited and largely symbolic. The Prime Minister and several ministers relocated to Aden for short periods of time over the past year but the government still operates mainly in Riyadh.

**The Houthi Authorities in Sana'a:** Controlled by the Houthi-Saleh alliance, consisting mainly of the GPC, the ruling party during Saleh's time, and loyalists to the Houthis (Houthis officially use the name Ansarullah). In addition to the capital city of Sana'a, this authority controls the governorates of Sana'a, Amran, Dhamar, Saada, Hodeidah, Ibb, and parts of Hajja, Taiz and al-Jawf governorates.

**Local Governorate Authorities:** Present at the governorate and district level. Local authorities have historically been marginalized and underfunded. The influence of local authorities and their ability to govern varies from one governorate to another. They work with informal actors, sometimes with support from the coalition and Hadi government forces, to improve security. When the Hadi government collapsed in January 2015, support to local authorities stopped.

**The Resistance:** When the Houthis advanced into al-Baidha, Taiz, Mareb and the south, local civilians, tribes, and southern separatists took up arms and fought to defend their territories. In urban areas, such as Taiz and Aden, most of them had no experience in fighting or how to handle weapons. These groups became widely known as "the resistance" and are often referred to in international media as "pro-Hadi" or "Saudi-backed" forces. Given the widely-used term, these forces will be referred to as "the resistance" in this report.

---

20 Ibid.



*Civilians gather in front of a home destroyed in a coalition airstrike in Sana'a on November 13, 2016. (Mohamed Yasin)*

---

## PATTERNS OF CIVILIAN HARM

Civilian men, women, and children have borne the brunt of harm since the civil war began in September 2014. It only got worse with the March 2015 Saudi-led intervention. The United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 7,000 people have been killed and another 37,000 injured since the entry of the coalition into the conflict.<sup>21</sup>

Civilian harm patterns, as described by civilians for this report, include death, injuries, destruction of property, forced disappearances, forced displacement from shelling, airstrikes, and sniper attacks in Aden, Mareb, Mukalla, Taiz, and Sana'a. All parties to the conflict in Yemen are responsible for civilian harm and have failed to take necessary precautionary measures to minimize civilian harm when engaging a military target. In some cases, reports indicate that civilians were deliberately targeted.

### *Snipers and Shelling of Civilian Areas*

From the beginning of the conflict, Houthi-Saleh forces have been implicated in attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including shelling civilian residential areas, medical facilities, schools, and other civilian infrastructure. Civilians in Aden and Taiz blamed the Special Forces (also known as Central Security) and Republican Guard forces—both still loyal to Saleh—for launching attacks. In Aden, clashes took place between Central Security troops stationed in the city and forces loyal to Hadi on March 19, 2015. Civilians said that when Houthi-Saleh forces pushed into the city later in the month, Central Security forces joined them.

According to a 30-year-old woman from Aden, Central Security forces attacked civilians there using Katyusha rockets, mortar shells, heavy arms, machine guns and hand grenades when the resistance took up arms against the Houthi-Saleh forces. A 28-year-old man from Aden said, “The Central Security tanks bombed civilian neighborhoods in Aden in March 2015 at the beginning of the war. They indiscriminately killed women and children, bombed civilian facilities including water pumps, power plants and health facilities.”<sup>22</sup>

21 OCHA, Twitter Post, November 16, 2016, 8:38 AM, <https://twitter.com/OCHAYemen/status/798882864557342720>.

22 CIVIC interview, Aden, September-October 2016.

In Taiz, the Central Security forces also aided Houthi-Saleh forces' entry into the city and attacked civilian neighborhoods. In March 2015, soldiers from Central Security opened fire and used snipers without warning on peaceful protesters, which left at least seven dead and 83 injured in two separate incidents.<sup>23</sup>

Many civilians in Aden and Taiz complained of snipers, accusing the Houthi-Saleh forces of carrying out these attacks. According to the UN Panel of Experts for Yemen, in 2015, Houthi-Saleh forces used snipers positioned atop buildings to target people seeking safety, medical care and food.<sup>24</sup> According to a statement from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 42 civilians were killed in Taiz during the second half of August 2015 as a result of sniper attacks and shelling by the Houthis.<sup>25</sup> Civilians in both cities said that Houthi snipers took over tall buildings including key hotels, and targeted civilians. Many believed that these attacks were deliberate to spread fear and force local fighters, who picked up arms to resist the Houthis, to surrender.<sup>26</sup> In a November 2016 report, Mwatanah Organization for Human Rights, a Yemeni NGO, documented 32 cases of random shelling between April 2015 and March 2016 in Taiz. The report blamed Houthi-Saleh forces for much of the shelling attacks in residential neighborhoods, which resulted in deaths and injuries of civilians. The same report attributed one shelling case to the resistance.<sup>27</sup>

### 51-Year-Old Man, Taiz

*I own a building in Alhaseb in Beer Basha. At the beginning of the war, because of the intense clashes in Alhaseb I moved with my wife and daughters to my other house in the De Lux neighborhood where I work. My daughter in law, brothers, and nieces also moved in from their homes and stayed with us in my house. On August 23, 2015, I was with my family in one of the rooms around 10:30 PM when a rocket landed in my house. I regained consciousness when people were digging me out from the rubble. Two of my daughters and three of my nieces were killed and two other nieces lost their legs. The entire third floor and part of the second floor were completely destroyed. As for my other building in Alhaseb, the first floor was looted, the second and third floors were destroyed by mortar shells and my safe in which I have my money, gold, gold watch, and an expensive jambiah (traditional dagger) all worth about 30 million YER (US \$100,000) was looted. I lost family, my home, and my income. I now live in a rented home when I used to own two buildings. I used to be well off and now I am barely making it.*

*The rocket was a Katyusha from Houthi forces. They bombed our area heavily. I did not submit any complaint. I don't know any authority, which receives complaints. The Hadi government doesn't seem to care and the support from humanitarian organizations is limited. Those in government are corrupt and care only about their own personal interests. The local authority is not effective in this city.<sup>28</sup>*

23 Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Yemen: Houthis Use Deadly Force Against Protesters," April 7, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/07/yemen-houthis-use-deadly-force-against-protesters>.

24 United Nations Security Council (UNSC), "Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014)," January 26, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/73](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/73).

25 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Press briefing notes on Yemen and Chad," September 1, 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16367&LangID=E>.

26 CIVIC interviews, Aden and Taiz, September-October 2016.

27 Mwatanah Organization for Human Rights, "Violations of International Human Rights Law in the Armed Ground Conflict in Taiz," November 2016, <http://www.mwatanah.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Executive%20Summary%20-Chapter%20from%20Hell-%20Taiz.pdf>.

28 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

## 36-Year Old Female Activist's Brother Killed on April 7, 2015 in Aden<sup>29</sup>

*We lived in an indescribable horror. It was night and there was no light except the one coming when Katyusha rockets fell like rain from all over on us. Our neighbors sought refuge in our home on the ground floor and we all crowded in the living room. My mother didn't stop crying as if she knew what was coming, the catastrophe that was about to happen. I went to my brother Ahmed's room to check on him. He came home early and was sleeping like a rock. It was his last sleep. My brother used to guard buildings in the neighborhood with his friends but he also volunteered to evacuate those who were injured to hospitals. His phone kept ringing while he was asleep. It was his friends wanting to tell him that a sniper killed one of them. My mom took away his phone and we told him in the morning. He left and never came back. A sniper killed him that day while [he was] trying to take another person who was shot to the hospital. His friends couldn't save him because snipers targeted anyone who approached injured ones. He was brave enough to risk his life and he laid there and bled to death. He could have been saved if snipers allowed people to help him. When we went to the hospital, the nurse was crying. She said he saved two people earlier in the day by bringing them to the hospital. But he died trying to save a third one.*

*It's been over a year. My brother was born in the 1994 war on Aden and killed in the 2015 war on Aden too. They lie when they tell you pain goes away with time. In my case, it keeps growing.<sup>30</sup>*

Sniper attacks along with heavy shelling of civilian neighborhoods prevented civilians from access to food and key survival needs such as water and health services. A 47-year-old man in Taiz recalls, "When the clashes started [at the] end of March 2015, our house was in the crossfire area and bullets entered many rooms. So, I sent my family to the countryside where it was safe and stayed in my house with my eldest daughter. We stayed on the ground floor because it was safer than [the] upper floors. Going outside was a suicide mission because of snipers. It was very hard to find a grocery store and was too risky to make the journey if there was any open."<sup>31</sup> A 29-year-old woman in Aden mentioned that they were unable to go to the grocery store for days because of the shelling and snipers. She was not even able to buy milk for her infant.<sup>32</sup>

Civilians, including women and children, were targeted and many trapped in conflict zones because of sniper attacks. A 37-year-old man from Taiz explained:

*When the resistance advanced to Thua'bat, Houthi-Saleh forces treated our neighborhood like a military zone despite the fact that it is heavily populated. They shelled and destroyed a lot of houses. They bombed my car and my grocery store. A sniper killed my father while he was praying fajr [morning prayers] on the third floor. I lost my home, my income, and my father. Our area was heavily under snipers' attacks. We couldn't visit neighbors or families because we were too worried to be killed by snipers. We lived days in hell.<sup>33</sup>*

Houthi-Saleh forces are also accused of shelling civilian areas, including busy markets. A 42-year-old woman in Taiz described how one of her sons, 17, was killed and her other son, 15, was paralyzed after Houthis shelled a mall in al-Masbah area in Taiz in September 2015. According to OHCHR, 18 civilians were killed and 68 injured on June 3 and June 8, 2016, when Houthis shelled several residential areas and markets in Taiz.<sup>34</sup>

29 CIVIC interview, Aden, October 2016.

30 CIVIC interview, Aden, November 2016. Army forces loyal to Saleh took Aden by force in 1994 to prevent secession of the south from Yemen and in 2015 Houthi-Saleh forces invaded Aden. Largely northern, forces both time were mostly composed of army units loyal to Saleh in 1994 and to Saleh and the Houthis in 2015.

31 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

32 CIVIC interviews, Aden, September-October 2016.

33 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

34 OHCHR, "Press briefing note on (1) Yemen and (2) Israel / occupied Palestinian territory," June 10, 2016, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20082&LangID=E>.

## The United States and United Kingdom

*The United States has backed the Saudi-led coalition and provided the coalition with logistical (including air-to-air fueling) support, intelligence sharing, and provided advice on “compliance with the law of armed conflict” and “best practices for reducing the risk of civilian casualties.”<sup>35</sup>*

*Since March 2015, the US has contributed \$327 million in humanitarian aid. The US is also the largest provider of arms to Saudi Arabia, and in November 2015 approved a \$1.3 billion sale to restock depleted munitions. But as the civilian death toll and humanitarian situation worsens, and in the wake of the October 2016 Saudi airstrikes on a funeral home in Sana'a, the US announced a review of security assistance to Saudi Arabia noting that “US security cooperation is not a blank check.”<sup>36</sup> On October 12, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said US assistance “is primarily logistical support. We do share intelligence with them, but the United States does not do targeting for them. The Saudis and their partners use some of the intelligence we have collected, but they make their own targeting decisions.”<sup>37</sup> On October 31, in a UN Security Council meeting on Yemen, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Samantha Power, called for a cessation of hostilities and an end to shelling and airstrikes.<sup>38</sup> In December 2016, the US decided not to move forward with foreign military sales for air dropped munitions to Saudi Arabia because of concerns about civilian casualties in Yemen. An official expressed concern at the “systemic, endemic” problems in Saudi Arabia’s targeting practices in Yemen.<sup>39</sup>*

*The United Kingdom also supports the Saudi-led coalition. According to the UK Defense Minister, “under a long-standing arrangement” with Saudi Arabia, British forces are providing training and advice “on best practice targeting techniques to help ensure continued compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL),” but do not have an operational role.<sup>40</sup> The UK has also sold £3.3 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia, but arms exports are “under careful and continual review” following increasing civilian casualties and the attack on the funeral home.<sup>41</sup>*

## Coalition Airstrikes

Since March 26, 2015, the Saudi-led coalition has killed and injured civilians, and destroyed public facilities, including bridges, factories, healthcare facilities, and schools. In January 2016, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen concluded that the targeting of civilians through airstrikes and treating the entire city of Saada and the region of Maran in Saada as military targets by the coalition violated the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution.<sup>42</sup> In a statement in March 2016, OHCHR said that the Saudi-led coalition

35 The White House, *Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States’ Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations*, p. 18, December 2016, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/Legal\\_Policy\\_Report.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/Legal_Policy_Report.pdf)

36 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest,” October 12, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/12/press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-10122016>.

37 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest,” October 12, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/12/press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-10122016>.

38 Ambassador Samantha Power, US Mission to the UN, “Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Yemen,” October 31, 2016, <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7520>.

39 Phil Stewart, “America ‘agrees to stop selling some arms’ to Saudi Arabia,” *The Independent*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-saudi-arabia-yemen-war-support-military-houthis-bombing-campaign-crisis-a7472546.html>

40 Emma Graham-Harrison, “British and US military ‘in command room’ for Saudi strikes on Yemen,” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/15/british-us-military-in-command-room-saudi-strikes-yemen>.

41 Adam Withnall, “Britain and US pile pressure on Saudi Arabia over Yemen Funeral Bombing,” *The Independent*, October 9, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-Sana'a-funeral-bombing-air-strikes-uk-arms-sales-us-saudi-arabia-coalition-latest-a7353231.html>.

42 UNSC, “Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014),” para. 129, January 26, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/73](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/73); “The Province of Saada Labeled as a Military Target,” *Yemen Times*, May 9, 2015, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1875/news/5082/The-Province-of-Saada-labeled-as-a-Military-Target>.htm.

is responsible for twice as many civilian casualties as all other forces put together.<sup>43</sup> Another UN report indicated that the coalition is responsible for 60 percent of deaths and injuries among children in the war.<sup>44</sup>

Some civilians interviewed by CIVIC in Taiz, Mareb, and Aden, said that airstrikes targeted these areas because Houthis used them. “We didn’t send our children to school because we fear the airstrikes would hit them. Houthis always camp in schools,” said a 40-year-old woman from Mareb. In some cases, civilians think that the coalition hit residential areas, homes, roads, farms, and public facilities even when there were no Houthis present.<sup>45</sup> Since the beginning of the war, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) facilities have been hit four times by airstrikes, leading to the deaths and injury of dozens of staff and patients.<sup>46</sup>

Serwah district in Mareb is one of the areas where the impact of airstrikes on civilians has been underreported since the coalition began bombing there in April 2015. Saleh, 51, who lost 11 family members in two separate airstrikes in September and December 2015, explained that he and his family were hit even though they stayed neutral and refused to take sides with either Houthis or the resistance.

*I was in Sana’a and was called to go back to Serwah for an emergency. As soon as I got into the area I ran into two men. They looked at each other. I heard one whispering to the other “should we tell him now?” I asked them what happened. They said they just buried 10 men. When they told me the names I was shocked. It was my brother, cousins, and brothers-in-law. All killed in an airstrike in December 2015, all civilians who had nothing to do with any party of this conflict. My brother was a sheikh and he resolved conflicts and tried to bring peace. They weren’t even in an area near the clashes. They were in an area that is more than 40 kilometers away from the conflict zone. The men were in a hangar chewing qat [a mild narcotic leaf that Yemenis chew, usually in the afternoon, as part of their daily socializing]. They thought they were far from danger when all of a sudden, a missile hit the hangar. Ten men died immediately and one was severely injured. The women were in a nearby house that was destroyed as a result of the airstrikes but they survived only to live as widows and orphans for the rest of their lives.<sup>47</sup>*

Saleh also lost his sister in a previous airstrike in the desert in September in 2015. “I have not recovered from her death as yet. We weren’t able to even find her remains. Everything was burnt so bad that we could not distinguish human parts from anything else.”<sup>48</sup>

In another incident, according to the Mareb Foundation for Media, a local organization that has been documenting air strikes incidents in Serwah, on October 29, airstrikes killed a family including father, mother, two sons and a nephew while they were collecting oranges in their farm in Wadi Habab. The area is over 30 km away from where Houthis and the resistance are fighting.<sup>49</sup>

43 OHCHR, “Zeid Condemns Repeated Killing of Civilians in Yemen Airstrikes,” March 18, 2016, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17251&LangID=E>.

44 UNGA, UNSC, Seventieth Session, “Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict,” Resolution A/70/836, April 20, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=s/2016/360&referer=/english/&Lang=E); see also HRW, “Yemen: Saudi-led Funeral Attack Apparent War Crime,” October 13, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/13/yemen-saudi-led-funeral-attack-apparent-war-crime>; and HRW, “Bombing Businesses: Saudi Coalition Airstrikes on Yemen’s Civilian Economic Structure,” July 10, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/10/bombing-businesses/saudi-coalition-airstrikes-yemens-civilian-economic-structures>.

45 CIVIC interviews, Mareb and Hadramout, September 2016.

46 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), “Yemen: Crisis update: September 2016,” September 27, 2016, <http://www.msf.org/en/article/yemen-crisis-update-september-2016>.

47 CIVIC interview, Mareb, October 2016. The first incident happened in September 2015 and the second in December 2015

48 CIVIC interview, Mareb, October 2016.

49 CIVIC interview with Hassan al-Zayedi, director of the Mareb Foundation for Media, a local organization that has been documenting airstrikes in Serwah since the beginning of the war, November 23, 2016.

In Hadramout governorate, where the Saudi-led coalition launched an operation to expel al-Qaeda from Mukalla city in April 2016, civilians complained that airstrikes targeted residential areas even when al-Qaeda was not present. Focus group participants mentioned the destruction of 70 houses and the displacement of 120 families because of airstrikes in late April 2016. In al-Shehr district, a female civilian said that a coalition airstrike on April 24 targeted the Security Department building and caused secondary explosions that destroyed more than 30 houses, ten cars and injured about a dozen civilians. “Ansar al-Sharia [an offshoot of AQAP] were not there because they knew the coalition was coming. They left in the blink of an eye just like they took over Mukalla in [the] blink of an eye,” she said.<sup>50</sup>

Airstrikes have also hit local businesses. A 39-year-old man from Jawl Mas’hah neighborhood in Mukalla city said that the coalition destroyed his factory and all the equipment on April 24, 2016 with three airstrikes. The factory had opened in January 2016. According to him al-Qaeda was not present in the area. A 55-year-old woman whose home in Mukalla, Hadramout, was damaged by the coalition said, “They knew al-Qaeda already left and they know al-Qaeda was not here in the first place. Al-Qaeda was in the Judiciary Compound, and they are also in big hotels in Mukalla.”<sup>51</sup>

The Sana’a Chamber of Commerce and Industry alleges that coalition airstrikes damaged or destroyed at least 196 business establishments between March 26, 2015 and February 17, 2016.<sup>52</sup> The Chamber did not report on Houthi or allied forces’ alleged use of economic sites for military purposes.

## Response of the Saudi-Led Coalition to Allegations of Civilian Harm

*In February 2016, in response to widely reported civilian casualties, the Saudi-led coalition established a committee to investigate allegations of civilian harm and adherence to IHL.<sup>53</sup> A Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) was created to examine civilian casualties. The JIAT consists of 14 members with military and legal expertise from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Republic of Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>54</sup> In an August 4, 2016, press statement, the JIAT responded to eight incidents, explaining the coalition’s initial investigation results in eight paragraphs. The conclusions ranged from blaming aid groups for not sharing humanitarian aid coordinates with the coalition, to recommendations that families file official documents for “compensation” to the Reparations Committee, to finding no fault of the coalition.<sup>55</sup>*

*On August 2016, a coalition airstrike hit Abs Hospital—supported by MSF—in Hajja governorate killing 19 and injuring 24. The hospital was partially destroyed.<sup>56</sup> A December 2016 JIAT investigation into the strike concluded that coalition forces “shelled” a moving vehicle that carried Houthi members in the city of Abs and that vehicle was next to a building that did not have signs indicating it was a hospital.<sup>57</sup> MSF refuted the JIAT conclusion and announced that that GPS coordinates of all MSF operations, including Abs Hospital, were provided to the coalition every*

50 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

51 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

52 HRW Human Rights Watch, “Bombing Businesses: Saudi Coalition Airstrikes on Yemen’s Civilian Economic Structures,” July 10, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/10/bombing-businesses/saudi-coalition-airstrikes-yemens-civilian-economic-structures>

53 7 Days UAE, “Coalition sets up a Committee to look at Yemen Operations,” February 1, 2016, <https://7days.ae/coalition-sets-committee-look-yemen-operations>.

54 Saudi Press Agency, “Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) on Yemen Responds to Claims on Coalition Forces’ Violations in Decisive Storm Operations,” August 5, 2016, <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1524799>.

55 Ibid.

56 MSF, “Yemen: Airstrike on MSF-Supported Hospital Kills at Least 11, Wounds At Least 19,” August 15, 2016, <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/yemen-airstrike-msf-supported-hospital-kills-least-11-wounds-least-19>.

57 Saudi Press Agency, “Official Spokesman of Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) Issues Statement,” December 6, 2016, <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1567351>.

three months since July 2015 and on August 10, 2016—10 days prior to the strike—and that the building had a large logo painted on its roof.<sup>58</sup> According to MSF, four of their facilities have been struck since coalition strikes began.<sup>59</sup> The JIAT spokesman said that “the coalition forces are to apologize for the unintentional error, provide appropriate assistance to those affected, and launch investigation with the persons in charge of the incident to look into whether they have violated the accredited rules of engagement and take appropriate action as regards the incident.”<sup>60</sup>

Then, following an October 2016 strikes of a funeral home that killed 140 people,<sup>61</sup> the “JIAT examined all related documents ... and assessed evidence, including the rules of engagement (ROEs) and the testimonies of concerned personnel and those involved in the incident.”<sup>62</sup>

The JIAT concluded that “intelligence was incorrect” that armed Houthi leaders were at that funeral home location in Sana’a. A close air support mission was approved to target the location without obtaining approval from command and “without following the coalition command’s precautionary measures to ensure that the location is not a civilian one that may not be targeted. A coalition aircraft in the area carried out the mission, which resulted in several deaths and injuries.”<sup>63</sup>

The JIAT concluded that in accordance with coalition regulations, “action must be taken against those who caused the incident, and that compensation must be offered to the families of the victims. Moreover, coalition forces must immediately review their rules of engagement (ROEs) and update their procedures to ensure adherence in future.”<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to the statements from the JIAT, a spokesperson from the Saudi-led coalition, Maj. Gen. Ahmed Asseri, laid the blame on the conflict entirely on the Houthis and denied that the coalition inflicted suffering on civilians. He said only facilities connected to the war effort had been hit. Asseri said that the air campaign halted rebels’ advance, destroyed 90 percent of Houthi rockets and aircraft, and pressured them to join talks aimed at ending the war.<sup>65</sup> “This is primarily the responsibility of the rebels, who have displaced Yemen’s legitimate government and who are impeding the flow of humanitarian supplies,” Asseri said.<sup>66</sup>

The coalition’s efforts to investigate allegations of civilian harm should continue, but it is clear from their own investigations that much more is needed to prevent civilian harm. The coalition needs to undertake a thorough review of ROEs on the use of force, and procedures to prevent such incidents—especially in populated areas where the risk of harm to civilians and civilian structures is high—and command guidance to ensure adherence to IHL and ROEs. The coalition must examine its no-strike lists, targeting procedures, intelligence sources that feed into targeting, trainings on civilian casualty prevention, improve coordination with humanitarian actors, and review use of force approval processes. Moreover, any investigation and accountability measures undertaken for failure to follow ROEs, as admitted by the JIAT, must be made public.

All parties to the conflict must adhere to IHL and ensure that all feasible precautions are taken to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects when engaging a military target. The second- and third-order effects on civilians from the destruction of factories and schools, or when medical facilities are struck denying essential care, must be considered by a commander prior to the use of force. Bringing the Houthis to the negotiating table by destroying Sana’a and Saada cannot result in a lasting peace.

58 “MSF, Yemen: MSF Says Saudi-led airstrike on Abs Hospital Cannot be Justified as ‘Unintentional error,’” December 9, 2016, <http://www.msf.ca/en/article/yemen-msf-says-saudi-led-airstrike-on-abs-hospital-cannot-be-justified-as-unintentional-0>

59 MSF, “Yemen: Airstrike on MSF-Supported Hospital Kills at Least 11,” August 15, 2016.

60 Saudi Press Agency, “Official Spokesman of Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) Issues Statement,” December 6, 2016, <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1567351>.

61 Nadia Khomami, “Airstrikes on Yemen funeral kill at least 140 people, UN official says,” The Guardian, October 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/08/saudi-led-coalition-airstrike-hit-yemen-funeral-officials-say>.

62 Saudi Press Agency, “Official Spokesman of Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) Issues Statement,” December 6, 2016, <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1567351>.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ben Hubbard, “US Fingerprints on Attacks Obliterate the Economy,” The New York Times, November 13, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/14/world/middleeast/yemen-saudi-bombing-houthis-hunger.html>.

66 Ibid.

## Displacement Due to the Conflict

**‘We just ran from one neighborhood to another. It’s all we could do.’**

More than three million Yemenis have been displaced by the war, most of whom are still unable to return to their homes according to a joint report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).<sup>67</sup> Almost all civilians interviewed experienced displacement at some point during the war.<sup>68</sup> Intense shelling and bombing of civilian neighborhoods in Taiz, Aden, Mareb and Mukalla caused many civilians to abandon their homes.

When asked what they did to protect themselves during the conflict, many civilians said they left their homes. “We just ran from one neighborhood to another. It’s all we could do,” said a 43-year-old woman from Aden.<sup>69</sup> In Sana’a, civilians said that they either moved to safer areas or stayed on the ground floor away from windows, especially when they heard the sound of coalition fighter jets. “We could only flee from one place to another. There is no safe place,” said a 55-year-old man.<sup>70</sup>

Shelling forced many civilians to leave their homes in search of a safer place even when that journey was itself a high risk. “My neighborhood became extremely unsafe because of the constant shelling,” said a 30-year-old woman in Aden. “The trip was very dangerous but our best option was to leave, so we did. We drove under shelling and sniper shooting. We squeezed under car seats and we could hear bullets and shells flying around.”

The journey to safety is dangerous as there are no safe corridors for civilians. Some civilians were killed while trying to escape. On May 6, 2015, 120 people died including at least 40 civilians while trying to flee Aden by a boat that was struck by Houthi shelling.<sup>71</sup>

Civilians who fled their homes most of the time left all their belongings behind and rushed out. A 29-year-old woman in Aden who described her journey said, “We were shaking with horror when we left our house. The shelling was intense. We didn’t take anything with us, not our money or gold or even clothes. We just ran.”<sup>72</sup>

Even those who relocated to other areas weren’t always lucky. Some civilians mentioned that they had to move several times to different locations such as from Qalo’ah to Khor Maksar and from Khor Maksar to Enamaa within Aden or from Serwah and Majzer districts to the city of Mareb in Mareb governorate. Some civilians in Aden fled to Mukalla city in Hadramout and to Sana’a. Others left for other governorates or to the countryside.<sup>73</sup>

67 UN News Centre, “More than 3 million displaced in Yemen – joint UN agency report,” August 22, 2016, [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54725#.WE7dz\\_krLIU](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54725#.WE7dz_krLIU).

68 CIVIC interviews, Sana’a, Aden, Taiz, Hadramout and Mareb, August-October 2016.

69 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

70 CIVIC interview, Sana’a, August, 2016.

71 Mohammed Mukhashaf and Mohammed Ghubari, “120 die in Yemen as Houthis take key Aden district,” Reuters, May 6, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0NR0QH20150506>

72 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

73 CIVIC interviews, Aden, Taiz and Mareb, September-October 2016.

## 35-year-old woman from Taiz—“You can’t cheat death.”

*In May 2015, my husband and I decided to take our five children and leave our house ... because it was a clash zone and was becoming extremely unsafe for us. We left despite the risk because the place was full of snipers. At the beginning, we stayed with my family for six months but the place was too small for all of us and so we rented a small apartment in Adharbah, which was a safe area at that time. On March 17, 2016, we were at home chatting and all of a sudden we heard a huge explosion and then smoke and fire were coming out of the living room in which my husband, daughter, and son were sitting. The rest of my girls were in a different room. I don’t remember what happened exactly at that moment. I was in shock and then I heard another shell land nearby. So, I ran looking for my little boy and I found him covered in dust and blood with shrapnel in several parts of his body. My husband and daughter were killed instantly. I suffered burns in my body and face and sustained shrapnel in several parts of my body too. Two rooms were destroyed. My little boy still suffers in his left eye as a result of the incident. The neighbors told me it was a Katyusha rocket from Alhawban, an area that Houthis control.<sup>74</sup>*

Civilians in Taiz and Mareb were forced out of their homes. According to a local leader, in Serwah district in Mareb governorate, Houthis blocked roads between villages within the district, forced people out and looted civilians’ homes.<sup>75</sup> A 30-year-old man explains how Houthis forced him out of his home to use it as a military base:

*The shelling continued so we decided to move the women and children into safer areas and we men stayed to guard the house so that no one can loot it. All of a sudden we found ourselves surrounded by 50 Houthi armed men. They wanted to use our house because it overlooks Aljahmaliyah, an important clash zone. They raided the house breaking the doors while we were inside. They were searching everything. Then they took us, my brothers and I, and put us in jail, where we were held for a week. During that week, they turned the house and the entire area into a base. They only let us out of jail after they forced us to sign a commitment that we won’t come back to the house.<sup>76</sup>*

In November 2016, forced displacement took place in al-Dhabah village in Taiz governorate. Civil society organizations have documented 867 members of 175 families who were forcibly displaced by the Houthis from their village in early November. A woman in her late 40s who was forced to flee the village told the Youth Transparency Association (YTA), that Houthis had been abducting men and some children for three days, and threatening to slaughter women who didn’t leave their homes.<sup>77</sup>

In the village of al-Dhabah, Houthis forced men out. According to the Local Monitors Network (LMN), witnesses said the Houthis didn’t want to see any “ISIS” in the village—referring to the Islamic State group. ISIS is a term Houthis use widely to describe their opponents without any evidence to support the claim.<sup>78</sup> LMN documented witnesses recounting that Houthis entered the village the morning of November 1 and used a megaphone to warn villagers that they’ll shoot and arrest any man in sight after sunset of that day.<sup>79</sup>

Forced displacement has also been attributed to the resistance. A civilian man in Taiz mentioned how the resistance forced him to leave his home, “When the resistance advanced in Thua’bat [in Taiz] they asked me to leave my house, which is four-stories tall. I tried to resist, but they insisted so I left to a nearby neighborhood. A few days later, there was intense fighting near my house. All of a sudden I heard a huge explosion. My house was blown up entirely. I can’t possibly explain how sad it was to see that happening.”<sup>80</sup>

74 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

75 CIVIC interviews, Mareb and Taiz, September 2016.

76 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

77 Hawban is an area under the control of Houthis just on the outskirts of Taiz. The information and testimony were collected by the Watch Team of the Youth Transparency Association, a local NGO that has been documenting war crimes in Taiz.

78 This case was documented by video by the Watch Team, of the Youth Transparency Association, a local NGO that has been documenting war crimes in Taiz.

79 Local Monitors Team is a local NGO that has been documenting human rights violations during the war in Taiz. For more information, see <http://ldn-taiz.org>.

80 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

Displaced civilians in all governorates experienced separation with loved ones with men usually sending their families to a safer area while taking the risk of staying in their houses to guard them from potential looting. Displaced civilians lost their homes, assets, businesses, their jobs, and other income sources. A 55-year-old man in Sana'a said he suffered two heart attacks after his house was severely damaged in a coalition airstrike in May 2016, "My house is now a home for animals. I lost my income and I am staying in a rented apartment," he said.<sup>81</sup>

### *Enforced Disappearance and Ill-Treatment*

Since Houthis took over the capital, Sana'a, many political opponents and journalists have disappeared. Amnesty International documented 60 cases that "reveal a pattern of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances by the Houthis in Sana'a, Ibb, Taiz, and Hodeidah between December 2014 and March 2016."<sup>82</sup> Amnesty reported that those targeted include political opposition figures, human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and others. Many have been held incommunicado for prolonged periods, suffered torture and other ill-treatment, and been denied access to a lawyer or their family.<sup>83</sup>

Mwatanah, the Yemeni NGO, documented 13 cases of journalists allegedly taken by the Houthis between March and October 2015.<sup>84</sup> As of December 2016, their whereabouts are unknown.<sup>85</sup> CIVIC interviewed a family member of one of the abducted journalists who mentioned that his brother was rounded up along with nine other journalists in Sana'a in June 2015. "We weren't allowed to know anything about him," the brother said. "We asked people who had connections with the Houthis and after a lot of asking around they told us he had been moved around several jails in Sana'a including the counterterrorism jail." The family member told CIVIC that after several attempts through connections, Houthis allowed the father to visit his son for about half an hour. The victim told his father that he and other detainees had been tortured by hanging from their hands, were subject to electric shocks, and kept in solitary confinement for 21 days. Detainees were also psychologically tortured as they were told that they are being housed in areas where the coalition can potentially strike."<sup>86</sup>

In October 2015, Houthis abducted 34 activists who were in a hotel in Ibb, Taiz, as they were planning a peaceful march with the slogan "A drop of water can save more lives than a gun barrel or a bullet." The march was undertaken to pressure Houthis to break the siege and bring water to the city.<sup>87</sup> As of December 2016, the fate of at least one of these activists remains unknown.

In Mukalla, Hadramout, reports of disappearances and ill treatment of persons detained by the Yemeni Elite Forces—counterterrorism forces trained and mentored by the UAE—are emerging and warrant investigations. AQAP was pushed out of Mukalla in April 2016 by the Elite Forces, UAE military, and with assistance from US Special Operations Forces. According to relatives of victims CIVIC spoke with, detainees taken by Elite Forces are kept in prison cells created in al-Rayan International Airport in Hadramout. UAE officers are present at al-Rayan airport and relatives believe that they are aware of the situation.

---

81 CIVIC interview, Sana'a, August 2016.

82 Amnesty International "Yemen: Spree of arbitrary arrests, disappearances and torture by Houthi forces," May 18, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/yemen-spree-of-arbitrary-arrests-disappearances-and-torture-by-houthi-forces-to-persecute-opponents/>.

83 Ibid.

84 Mwatanah Organization for Human Rights, "Houthi Authority: A Dark Era in History of Yemen Press," October 2015, <http://mwatana.org/en/21102015438>.

85 CIVIC interview with a Yemen Journalists Syndicate, November 2016.

86 CIVIC interview, November 2016.

87 HRW, "Yemen: 3 Months Since Houthis 'Disappear' Protesters," January 16, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/16/yemen-3-months-houthis-disappear-protesters>.

## A physician abducted by Houthis from his home in Taiz in August 2015 and released in May 2016.

*On August 5, 2015, at 3 PM, Houthi armed men dressed in military uniform and plain clothes stormed my home in Taiz. They broke my eye spectacles, twisted my arm and took me into their car where I was kept for about an hour while they frightened and threatened my wife, searched my house and looted money and valuable things. Some looted items are of high sentimental value that I inherited from my great grandfather. I was then blindfolded and handcuffed and taken to buildings near Taiz airport. They made me stand facing the wall, blindfolded and my wrists tightly handcuffed. Then they interrogated me for five hours, from 7 PM to 12 midnight. Silly, stupid questions, and threatening remarks. I slept without food.*

*After that, they locked me up until next evening. At 9 PM, August 6, I was driven to Sana'a, guarded by six Houthi armed men who were chewing qat and chanting zamil [a traditional form of Yemeni singing Houthis use to increase morale of their fighters and supporters]. We arrived at the National Security HQ in Sana'a before dawn. Cold, tired, and hungry, they asked me to lie on the floor of a corridor with my eyes still blindfolded and wrists handcuffed. The following evening, I was interrogated again and ordered to lie again on the floor of the corridor. They were rude and abusive.*

*The following day, I was driven to the National Security Jail in Saref just outside Sana'a. I was put in cells that had no or very dim light. No air, no sun. Space was so tight, the cell barely fit a small mattress. It was cold and humid. In the corner, there was a hole curtained by a one-meter cement blocks, where the inmates respond to call of nature while others hear and smell, wash, clean their clothes and bodies and drink water from the tap. During my custody, I was moved between 15 cells. I was in a cell sometimes with one inmate, and in other times with eight. In some cells, the lack of air and odor was suffocating.*

*Food would come through a window trap in the metal door of the cell that never opens. Beans in the morning and evening, and rice and potatoes for lunch. Threads of chicken on weekdays and tough meat on Thursday and Fridays. Bread was inedible. Inmates always asked for more but got nothing and were always hungry.*

*I lost weight, grew a very long beard and mustache, but could not know how I looked because I did not see my face for ten months. We were not allowed to know any news or to ask about anything. My family was denied to visit me or to know where I was held.*

*I first knew about my family about three months after my abduction. I was allowed to phone my family three times during the entire time while in custody. That is how I knew that they themselves had become displaced and that I had become a grandfather.<sup>88</sup>*

Local NGOs say that some detainees are tortured to death. A local Salafi leader, Mohamed Awadh Barahmah, and his two brothers were allegedly taken from their home in Mukalla in mid-May 2016 by the Elite forces. Two days later, the body of Barahmah was found in a local hospital with signs of torture.<sup>89</sup> In another case, popular soccer player Lutfi Juma'an Bafateem was abducted in mid-June by Elite Forces and found dead days later with torture marks on his body. Witnesses say that Bafateem was abducted after an argument with one of the Elite Forces soldiers.<sup>90</sup>

88 CIVIC interview, Canada, November 2016. Abdulqader al-Gunaid, the physician abducted, moved to Canada after the Houthis released him.

89 Shaab Online, "Death of Shabwa resistance leader days after detained by Elite forces in Mukalla City," May 6, 2016, <http://www.shaabonline.com/news-yemen/2016-05-16/48828>.

90 Almasdar Online, "Death of Ahli Club Player after tortured by Government Forces in Mukalla," June 17, 2016, <http://almasdaronline.com/article/82402>.

In early November 2016, Elite Forces in Mukalla detained the general secretary of the Local Council of Ghail Bawazir district while he was attending a funeral. Eyewitnesses told CIVIC that a pickup truck with men dressed in Elite Forces uniform burst into the funeral uninvited and arrested him in front of his 4- and 8-year-old sons without explaining any charges. His family reached out to the Elite Forces, but was given differing responses. Sometimes they're told he is in custody and sometimes they are told he is not.<sup>91</sup>

## Parents of an Abducted Civilian in Mukalla

### *The father told CIVIC:*

**My son is an electrician. When al-Qaeda was here he did some electrician work for them. Everybody did service when al-Qaeda was here, shopkeepers, vendors, and restaurants, everyone dealt with them. My son is not the exception. He was just making a living for his family. Al-Qaeda was the authority here and he was doing work for money just like everyone else did.**

**They [Elite Forces] came here at midnight and took him away. They told him they were military intelligence and then took him to al-Rayan airport. It's been six months now. They do not allow us to see or talk to him. They didn't even charge him with anything or tell us what was his charge.**

**We are not allowed to call or see him? Where are human rights? Why don't they try him in a court? At least they should allow us to talk or see him. People are suffering. Our neighbor died because Elite Forces detained her son too. She didn't know anything about him. They told her he is being tortured. She died of stress and sadness. And they lie to us. I call the governor and he also lies. He calls and promises that my son will be out tomorrow, next week, and then nothing happens.**

**The mother also spoke with CIVIC. "If my son is guilty they can hang him, but if he is innocent they need to let him out. But we need to know." She said. "We are so shocked. This is very strange to Yemen and to Hadramout. Even under the previous regime and their corrupt security forces things like these never happened. We've never seen this level of abduction and terrorizing of people before," she said. "The governor and regional commander have no control. They can't do a thing. I call the UAE officer based in al-Rayan airport and everyday he promises to release my son but he lies. He's been saying this forever and nothing happened."<sup>92</sup>**

## Caught in the Crossfire

On the frontlines, civilians found themselves caught in between the Houthi-Saleh forces, the resistance, and coalition airstrikes. Civilians in Mareb, Aden and Taiz believe airstrikes target residential areas if they suspect the presence of Houthi fighters or, in the case of Hadramout, al-Qaeda. Likewise, Houthis often bomb homes if they suspect resistance presence. Civilians in Mareb, Taiz, and Aden reported airstrikes targeting homes used by Houthis, causing loss of life, and extensive damage to nearby homes in many cases.<sup>93</sup>

A 46-year-old man from Magzer, Mareb, described how he was affected:

*Because of the raging battles between Houthis and resistance in Magzer district, my family and I moved to al-Safra'a area and when the battles spread to al-Safra'a we fled to Mareb city. My two-story building house in Hosoon Aal Homaidhah was blown up by the Houthis because resistance*

<sup>91</sup> CIVIC interviews, Mukalla, November 2016.

<sup>92</sup> CIVIC interview, Mukalla, November 2016.

<sup>93</sup> CIVIC interviews, Taiz, Mareb, and Hadramout, September-October 2016.

*fighters were in the houses near it. I also lost 20 goats in that bombing. My other house in al-Harishah in Magzer was also bombed by an airstrike because Houthis were near that house. We were caught in [the] crossfire. Houthis shelled us from the front and legitimacy [“legitimacy” is a word commonly used to describe Hadi’s government and loyal forces] from behind. We survived a lot of horror and we saw death many times. They [are] all responsible. Houthis bombed my house with a mortar shell and the coalition bombed my other house with an airstrike.”<sup>94</sup>*

Civilians tried to communicate with both parties, Houthis and forces loyal to Hadi, but to no avail. “We would meet with [the] party that caused us harm and they would apologize, but blame the other side for what happened,” said a 46-year-old man from Majzer district in Mareb. “I don’t trust anyone. All sides are criminals and they have no conscience whatsoever. They claim to fight for God, but they only fight for their own interests.”<sup>95</sup>

In al-Zonouj neighborhood, a contested area in Taiz, a male civilian described how his house was damaged when the coalition hit a Houthi location on a hill nearby. Houthis then took over his house and turned it into a base. When the resistance advanced and pushed the Houthis out of that area, Houthis bombed the area and the house was destroyed. A 20-year-old woman from Mareb described the agony civilians have suffered, “We are caught between the two: airstrikes from the skies and Houthi retaliation on the ground. They care less about us civilians.”<sup>96</sup>

In areas that had intense clashes such as Mareb and Taiz, some civilians couldn’t tell what party caused them damage because they had fled. “Since the war started we don’t know who caused us harm,” said a 50-year-old man from Majzer district in Mareb. “We don’t know who stole our assets. Arms such as Katyushas, BMP vehicles [a Soviet-designed infantry fighting vehicle], mortar shells, anti-aircraft, AK-47, you name it. All weapons were used against us.”<sup>97</sup>

## Landmines

Landmines used by Houthi-Saleh forces in areas where they lose control—mainly Taiz, Aden, Mareb, Dhalee, Abyan, Lahj and Shabwa governorates—have been responsible for killing and injuring many civilians according to public reports.<sup>98</sup> It is estimated that Houthis planted approximately 150,000 landmines in Aden, Lahj and Abyan when they were pushed out of the south in July 2015.<sup>99</sup> It has been difficult to find official records of casualties, but some local NGOs have documented hundreds of cases in Mareb, Taiz, and Aden. A local NGO in Taiz recorded 69 deaths and 93 injuries in landmine-related incidents between March 2015 and September 2016.<sup>100</sup> Another local NGO in Mareb in July 2016 recorded 46 deaths from landmines explosions including 14 children and one woman, and 75 injuries including 25 children and nine women since the beginning of the war.<sup>101</sup> Both NGOs recorded names and contact information of victims and their families. On November 1, 2016, two girls, ages 19 and 7, were severely injured in a landmine explosion near al-Dhabah village in Taiz.<sup>102</sup>

---

94 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

95 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

96 CIVIC interview, Taiz and Mareb, September 2016.

97 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

98 HRW, “Yemen: New Houthi Landmine Use,” November 18, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/18/yemen-new-houthi-landmine-use>; see also HRW, “Houthi Landmines Claim Civilian Victims,” September 8, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/08/yemen-houthi-landmines-claim-civilian-victims> and HRW, “Yemen: Houthis used Landmines in Aden,” September 5, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/05/yemen-houthis-used-landmines-aden>.

99 Iona Craig, “Yemeni Rebels Mining Civilian Areas,” IRIN, August 19, 2015, <http://newirin.irinnews.org/yemen-houthi-aden-mines-war-crimes-iona-craig/>.

100 Humanitarian Center for Rights and Development, Human Rights Violations in Taiz during 2015, 2016, a statement published on December 10, 2016.

101 Statistics by Protection Organization for Civil Orientation, Mareb, 2015, 2016

102 This case was documented by video by the Watch Team, of the Youth Transparency Association, a local NGO that has been documenting war crimes in Taiz.

Local officials from the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center (YEMAC) said that 41 areas in Taiz—39 residential and two public roads—are littered with landmines. Thirty-seven of these areas are highly contaminated<sup>103</sup> with landmines.<sup>104</sup> Six out of the 14 districts of Mareb are highly contaminated. Landmines, including anti-personnel mines (APM) and anti-vehicle mines (AVM), some locally made, were laid in densely populated areas near homes, roads, farms, schools, and public facilities. On August 9, 2016, 11 civilians, including seven children, were killed and another four injured in an AVM explosion in Hanna valley, west of Taiz, according to the YTA, a local NGO. Women in Serwah, Mareb, said women had lost legs in landmine explosions while attending to livestock, farms or doing daily chores.<sup>105</sup> “Serwah is full of landmines,” said a female participant in the Serwah focus group discussion. “An old woman was killed in a landmine explosion while she was tending her goats.”<sup>106</sup>

Local officials in charge of landmine clearance operations mentioned that about 10,000 landmines were extracted in Aden and 35,000 in Mareb since July 2015.<sup>107</sup> These do not include unexploded ordnance (UXO) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In Taiz, landmine survey and extraction has been slowed by the war because heavy shelling and intense clashes are still ongoing in the governorate.

Landmine extraction teams are facing major difficulties as they operate with limited capacity and budget. In Aden and Mareb, YEMAC indicated they are understaffed and lack basic equipment to survey contaminated areas and dispose of landmines safely.<sup>108</sup>

YEMAC in Aden covers Aden, Lahj, Dhalee, Abyan, Hadramout and Taiz governorates and YEMAC in Mareb covers Shabwa and I-Jawf. Officials mentioned that they are understaffed with only 379 team members; they need 1,200.<sup>109</sup> Centralization including budget cuts from YEMAC headquarters in Sana’a and international NGOs insisting to work through the Sana’a office has been cited as a major obstacle in Aden.<sup>110</sup> Tensions are high between YEMAC Sana’a, which is under Houthis control, and YEMAC branches in Aden, Mareb and other governorates outside their control. This affects access to resources, information systems and efficiency. Landmine extraction teams do not have all resources necessary for landmine clearance.

In Aden, 12 YEMAC teams were killed and another 38 injured during 2015 and 2016 because they lack either proper equipment or training.<sup>111</sup> YEMAC Aden and Mareb officials indicated an urgent need to survey contaminated areas, hire and train additional personnel, personal protection equipment, mine clearance equipment, and salaries for field teams.<sup>112</sup>

The head of YEMAC Aden said 16,727 landmines in Meyoon<sup>113</sup> — a populated island in Aden— have been collected by the team, but can’t be destroyed because they lack the equipment, budget, and personnel.<sup>114</sup> A highly contaminated area north of Aden airport has been marked with signs warning of landmines, but landmine clearance has yet to be undertaken for the reasons noted above.<sup>115</sup>

A concerning trend is that civilians are now collecting and, in some cases, extracting landmines and selling them. When Jabal Hadeed, a major army weapon storage, was looted in Aden, many civilians took landmines. In al-Maafer, Taiz, where about 1,500 landmines are believed to have been laid, a local NGO

---

103 Landmine contamination refers to the spread of landmines in a specific geographic area.

104 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016.

105 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

106 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

107 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden; CIVIC interview with YEMAC official, Mareb, October 2016.

108 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden; CIVIC interview with YEMAC official, Mareb, October 2016.

109 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016.

110 Ibid; CIVIC interview with YEMAC official, Mareb, October 2016.

111 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016.

112 Ibid; CIVIC interview with YEMAC official, Mareb, October 2016.

113 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016. Meyoon island is known as Perim in English.

114 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016. Ibid.

115 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016. Ibid.

reported that even women and children extracted landmines for profit.<sup>116</sup> The director of YEMAC in Aden stated that he and his team bought more than 180 landmines from civilians in Bab al-Mandab to help reduce civilian possession of landmines.<sup>117</sup>

## *Taiz Siege and Impact on Humanitarian Aid*

Since September 2015, Houthi-Saleh forces have besieged Taiz, blocking supply routes and obstructing the entry of urgently needed humanitarian aid into the city, leaving civilians in dire need of drinking water, food, medical treatment, and other life-saving assistance, according to a statement by the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Watch documented 16 incidents between December 31, 2015 and January 9, 2016 in which “Houthi guards at checkpoints prevented civilians from bringing items into the city, including fruit, vegetables, cooking gas, vaccination doses, dialysis treatment packets, and oxygen cylinders, and confiscated some of these items.”<sup>119</sup>

As of December 2016, the main routes connecting Taiz with cities like Sana’a, Aden, and Hodeidah via paved roads are closed. Civilians going in and out of Taiz have to take rugged, alternate roads that usually require a four-wheel drive car to navigate. A 29-year-old civilian said it used to take him 15 minutes to go to the Ta’awon park in al-Hawban and he only had to pay YER 200 (US \$0.7) for public transportation.<sup>120</sup> The trip now takes seven hours through rough roads and costs at least YER 5,000 (US \$16.7). The trip can sometimes be much longer due to the unreliability of dirt roads. A 56-year-old man explained how it used to take him 15 minutes to go to his hometown just outside Taiz. Now, not only does he have to take a long trip to get home, but in September he and seven female family members were stuck in an isolated area for 12 hours when the road was cut off by floods.<sup>121</sup>

The siege has further aggravated the separation from loved ones that people experience. A 46-year-old male civilian who sent his family to Ibb at the beginning of the war said he used to see them every day as it was only an hour drive. Now he can see them only every six months because the trip takes more than seven hours and is expensive. Dirt roads that connect with the countryside are even more unreliable.<sup>122</sup> The siege affected people’s access to food and basic services. According to the World Food Program’s Market Situation Update of November 2016, Taiz along with Saada, had the highest food prices in the country.<sup>123</sup>

Houthi armed men at main checkpoints blocked civilians’ cars from entering the city, forcing them to walk for hours, sometimes denying access to individuals who needed urgent health care.

According to the Youth Foundation for Transparency (YFT), a Taiz based human rights organization, on July 25, 2016, Houthis initially blocked kidney failure patients from entering the city where they were due for their dialysis for an entire day. This included a 28-year-old man who was later allowed to enter by foot and walked about four kilometers just to get to the hospital. On the same day, a female kidney failure patient in her 50s said she had to use an alternative road and walked through villages to get to the city for her treatment. She described how she made the trip despite warnings that she might get shot by snipers. “People in villages where we walked through told them [the Houthis] to let us pass because I have kidney failure,” she said.<sup>124</sup>

---

116 Against Mines National Organization Report, April 21, 2016.

117 CIVIC interview with YEMAC director, Aden, October 2016.

118 OCHA, “Under-Secretary-General For Humanitarian Affairs And Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien Statement on Yemen,” November 24, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator-stephen>.

119 HRW, “Houthis Block Vital Goods into Taiz: Food, Medical Supplies Confiscated from Civilians,” January 31, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/31/yemen-houthis-block-vital-goods-taizz>.

120 CIVIC interview, Taiz, October 2016.

121 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

122 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

123 World Food Program, “Yemen Market Watch Report,” Issue no.7, November, 2016, [http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp289352.pdf?\\_ga=1.226687838.2113263813.1473989967](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp289352.pdf?_ga=1.226687838.2113263813.1473989967).

124 Testimonies were collected and documented on video by the Youth Foundation for Transparency (YFT), Taiz, Yemen. CIVIC interview with the director of YFT, Taiz, November 2016.



*Civilians survive in a neighborhood damaged by shelling in Taiz in July 2016. (Ahmed A. Basha)*

---

# CIVILIAN PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY ACTORS AND THE CONFLICT

## *A Divided Nation*

Civilian perceptions of the main security and conflict actors reflect the high polarization across regional and sectarian lines caused or exacerbated by the war. In general, civilians were divided between southerners who oppose the North based on old grievances from the 1994 civil war, civilians from Taiz and Mareb who oppose the northern elite as represented by the Houthi-Saleh forces, and civilians from Sana'a who reject Hadi's government and the Saudi-led coalition. In Mareb and Taiz, civilians were further divided over support for Hadi's government. At its heart, Yemen's conflict is about critical issues regarding the legitimacy and legacy of the key actors.

Civilians in Aden express a strong anti-North sentiment with many describing the war as the second one on the South by the North.<sup>125</sup> The war reinforced southerners' grievances and the feeling that they have been robbed of their land, resources, country, and identity. Adenis blamed the Houthi-Saleh forces for destroying Aden and purposefully targeting civilians and infrastructure. Many said that Central Security Forces loyal to Saleh attacked civilian neighborhoods with heavy weapons, including infantry fighting vehicles, mortar shells, and other heavy weapons in addition to sniper attacks. They also accuse the Houthi-Saleh forces of intentionally damaging vital facilities such as water and power plants, increasing people's suffering—especially in the summer when Aden is extremely hot and humid. "What is between us and Houthis-Saleh is blood and we will never forget or forgive until we die," a female participant of a focus group discussion in Aden said. "They killed our sons, destroyed our city and forced us out of our homes."<sup>126</sup>

Southern flags cover Aden, adorning government buildings, homes, streets, and private property alongside patriotic and anti-North/Houthi/Saleh slogans.

---

125 North and South Yemen were separate countries until they united in 1990. In 1994 following years of political tension, Southern Leader Ali Salem Albeidh, then the Vice President of unified Yemen, went back to Aden, South Yemen's former capital, and unilaterally announced the secession of the south from North Yemen. Saleh then launched an offensive to prevent secession and his army invaded Aden. The war lasted three months in the summer of 1994. Southerners have been marginalized ever since and the 1994 war has increasingly become seen by many southerners as a Northern invasion to the independent South. A southern movement, also known as the Southern Peaceful movement of Hiraq emerged in 2007 to protest oppression by the Sana'a government. When the government met their demands with suppression and excessive use of force in the late 2000s, southerners called for complete secession of South Yemen from North Yemen. See also, Stephen Day, "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Middle East Program, No.108, March 2010, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen\\_south\\_movement.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_south_movement.pdf).

126 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

In some cases, southerners' resentment against the North extends to ordinary northerners who live in the south. Some southern civilians accuse northerners living in the south of providing Houthi-Saleh forces with intelligence, helping them, and even picking up arms and fighting for them.<sup>127</sup> In the words of one 29-year-old woman:

*We now hate northerners. We want them to go back to their country. Enough is enough. They lived among us for many years. Many of them worked in grocery stores or shops. Others were simply street vendors. We treated them like brothers and we shared our food with them knowing they are away from their families. But when the war started they were the first to turn against us and kill our sons and children. They would give Houthis coordinates of some areas because they've been here long enough. So how do you want us not to hate them?*<sup>128</sup>

In general, civilians in the south felt a stronger bond with the Saudi-led coalition than with northern Yemenis, even blaming the Houthi-Saleh forces for instigating the war and for inviting the coalition airstrikes. "I still blame the Houthis. No airstrikes would have happened if they hadn't started this war in the first place," said a 40-year-old woman in Aden whose husband and son were injured and whose house was severely damaged by an airstrike in July 2015. At least three Adeni civilians whose homes were damaged by airstrikes said it was "by mistake" and instead blamed the Houthi-Saleh forces.<sup>129</sup>

Most southerners want an immediate and unconditional secession from North Yemen, but there are divisions even within the Southern movement. For instance, many civilians from Hadramout want an independent state of their own, separate from both any North and South Yemen. In Mareb and Taiz, which are predominantly Shafi'i/Sunni, civilians want the dominance of the Saleh and the Houthis to end. Although the conflict is not sectarian per se, it is turning into one as both sides now use sectarian propaganda to mobilize fighters.<sup>130</sup>

The war ripped apart Yemen's social fabric and cut to the core of local communities and tribes, particularly Taiz and Mareb, where civilians fear that revenge killings and violent disputes will continue for a long time even if the war stops. "Sometimes people within the same neighborhood fight on both sides and this will lead to revenge killings in the future," a 45-year-old man in Taiz said. A civilian in Mareb mentioned an incident where local tribesmen allied with the Houthis established a checkpoint in the Murad tribe's territory.<sup>131</sup> Some anti-Houthi Murad members wanted to lift the checkpoint, leading to clashes that left six tribesmen dead.<sup>132</sup>

The current war further undermined the already weak tribal structure that has helped mitigate conflicts in the past. "Before the war, a man would seek the protection of his tribe or another tribe. Now the tribe cannot even protect itself let alone provide protection to its members," said a 32-year-old man in Mareb. Civilians in Taiz and Mareb also cited rising tensions between local people and those who claim to be Hashemite, because some of them sided with the Houthis, even though many fought against the Houthis or stayed neutral.<sup>133</sup>

---

127 CIVIC interviews, Aden and Hadramout, September-October 2016.

128 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

129 CIVIC interviews, Aden, September-October 2016.

130 Zaydi is a branch of Shia Islam. Zaydis make about one third of the Yemeni population and live in the northern highlands. Shafi'i is one of four schools of Sunni jurisprudence and Shafi'is live mainly in the lowland, east and Tehama west of the country. Zaydi northerners ruled North Yemen for roughly 1,000 years under the Imamate until it was overthrown in 1962. When Saleh came to power in 1978, he ruled the country by appointing family and close relatives/tribesmen, mainly from the Zaydi north, to key government and military positions. He extended his influence through a patronage network of local leaders across the country who he co-opted into his General People Congress (GPC) party. Both the imams and Saleh marginalized the more populated and geographically larger Shafi'i/Sunni areas.

131 Murad is one of the five main tribes in Mareb.

132 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

133 CIVIC interviews, Taiz and Mareb, September-October 2016. Hashemites, or Sayyids, claim to be descendants of Prophet Mohammed. Under the Imamate, a religious theocracy, Sayyids ruled Yemen for roughly 1,000 years until their overthrow in 1962. Many locals opposed to the Houthis associate Sayyids with the Houthis because Houthi leaders and most influential figures come from Sayyid/Hashemite families.

The following sections summarize civilian perceptions of the parties involved in the war:

## *The Hadi Government*

Since March 2016, and particularly after the Saudi-led coalition launched their aerial campaign against the Houthi-Saleh forces, Hadi's government has been operating from Riyadh. The prime minister and some cabinet members attempted to relocate to Aden in mid-September 2015, but left shortly after bombs targeted a hotel housing Yemeni government officials and a military base.<sup>134</sup> The prime minister and some cabinet members attempted again to Aden in June and September 2016,<sup>135</sup> but each time only stayed for a few days or a few weeks.<sup>136</sup> As of December 2016, the president, prime minister, and key ministers still operate mainly in Riyadh. Thus, government presence has been largely symbolic and, so far, the government has made limited efforts to re-establish security or improve services in the areas it holds. Aden, the temporary capital of the country as claimed by Hadi and his government, is largely run by the local

authority with some support and involvement from United Arab Emirates particularly in maintaining security.

**'They left us to die while they are enjoying air-conditioned hotel rooms in Riyadh.'**

Civilian perceptions of Hadi's government were largely negative in the five governorates in which CIVIC conducted research. Respondents accused the

government of being useless, corrupt, and Hadi and his ministers of being self-serving and abandoning their responsibility to live a luxurious life in Riyadh. "Government? What government?" said a 42-year-old woman in Aden where extreme power shortage led to deaths last summer. "They left us to die while they are enjoying air-conditioned hotel rooms in Riyadh."<sup>137</sup>

While some civilians recognize that the Hadi government is legitimate, there is intense frustration with how the government is disconnected from Yemenis. "They live in a parallel world," said a 30-year-old woman in Mukalla. Many civilians said they lacked faith and trust in the government, "I don't trust this government," a 42-year-old woman in Taiz said. Several civilians, including a 40-year-old woman from Mukalla, describe it as the "run away government."<sup>138</sup>

Civilians in Sana'a and Mareb affected by airstrikes expressed deep resentment towards the government. "This government ended the day it invited the war," a 50-year-old man from Majzer district in Mareb said.<sup>139</sup> Civilians in Sana'a overwhelmingly blamed Hadi for the war by inviting Saudi "aggression" in the form of an aerial campaign and questioned his government's legitimacy. "If they were honest in their claim to be legitimate, why didn't they present an example to prove it in Aden?" said a 44-year-old man from Sana'a.<sup>140</sup> Aden, announced by Hadi as the temporary capital in February 2015, was retaken from the Houthis in July that year. However, as of December 2016 the entire government of Yemen has not returned to the city permanently.

134 Al Jazeera, "Coalition troops killed after attack in Yemen's Aden," October 6, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/gulf-coalition-troops-yemen-die-aden-attack-151006101407323.html>.

135 Mohammad Al Qalisi, "Yemeni government makes permanent return to Aden," The National, June 6, 2016, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/yemeni-government-makes-permanent-return-to-aden>.

136 Gulf News, "Yemen government marks 'permanent' return," September 22, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/yemen/yemen-government-marks-permanent-return-11900688>.

137 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

138 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

139 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

140 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

## Houthi-Saleh Forces

With the exception of Sana'a, civilians' attitude towards Houthi and Saleh forces was extremely negative. Civilians in Aden, Taiz, Mareb, and Hadramout viewed the Houthi-Saleh forces as the instigators of the war.<sup>141</sup> "I blame the Houthis. No airstrikes would have happened if they hadn't started this war," said a 40-year-old woman in Aden whose husband and son sustained injuries and whose house was severely damaged by an airstrike. "If Houthis didn't enter our land, none of this would have happened, and coalition fighter jets wouldn't have bombed us," said a woman from Majzer district in Mareb. A 35-year-old civilian in Aden whose house was destroyed and who sustained serious head injuries and lost his job as a result said he still blamed the Houthi-Saleh forces. "The coalition came here to help us and they bombed my house by mistake. I hold the Houthis and Saleh responsible for all of this."<sup>142</sup>

### **'What peace when the coalition is killing us, abducting our sons, and bombing us?'**

In Sana'a, however, civilians had a favorable view of the Houthis compared to Hadi's government, the resistance, and the coalition. Civilians said they widely appreciated the fact that Sana'a was safe and controlled by only one armed group, unlike other cities where different armed groups emerged and there is active fighting. Civilians said that "popular committees," a term used by the Houthis to describe their irregular forces, guarded public facilities, and kept roads safe. "It is safe here in Sana'a. We don't see any

serious security problems. The only problem we have is the airstrikes," said a 55-year-old man in Sana'a.<sup>143</sup> Other civilians, however, described how Sana'a has become unsafe for civilians especially those who dare to criticize Houthis. The brother of a detained journalist said he relocated to Mareb and his parents left Sana'a for the countryside in Dhamar after Houthis abducted his brother.<sup>144</sup>

## Saudi-Led Coalition

Civilians in Sana'a, Mareb, and Hadramout governorates expressed deep resentment against the Saudi-led coalition particularly, but less so in Taiz and Aden. Many in Sana'a have been killed, injured or suffered property destruction by coalition airstrikes, and civilians blamed the coalition for unjustifiably isolating Sana'a by closing down Sana'a International Airport. Civilians commonly used the word "Saudi invasion" or "Saudi aggression" to describe the coalition's military campaign in Yemen.

"Saudis did not observe any law or values," said a 40-year-old woman in Sana'a. "They bombed civilians. They killed humans, trees—and even animals did not escape their aggression," she added.

Saleh from Serwah Mareb said, "We don't know what weapons they use. They burn anything they touch. Saudi aggression destroyed everything: rocks, trees, you name it." Saleh lost 11 members of his family in two separate airstrikes in Serwah district in Mareb.<sup>145</sup>

"Peace? What peace when the coalition is killing us, abducting our sons, and bombing us?" said a 45-year-old woman whose son was severely injured in an airstrike in al-Shehr district in Hadramout. "If I could, I would sue the coalition."<sup>146</sup>

141 CIVIC interviews, Aden, Taiz and Hadramout, September-October 2016.

142 CIVIC interviews, Aden, September-October 2016.

143 CIVIC interviews, Sana'a, August-September 2016.

144 CIVIC interview, Mareb, November 2016.

145 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

146 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

The coalition's closure of the international airport in Sana'a made life even harder for Yemenis in the northern parts of the country, particularly those who have health problems and need to travel abroad for treatment. On a trip from Aden to Amman, Jordan a CIVIC researcher met an elderly man in a wheelchair and on oxygen. His son, who accompanied him, told CIVIC they made the 10-hour trip from Sana'a to Aden just to fly to Amman. The older man had to wait five hours before the flight in the poorly managed Aden airport in extreme heat.<sup>147</sup> Another civilian in Sana'a said her mother's health condition worsened after a medical error. Her family was unable to evacuate her abroad because her condition wouldn't allow her to make the long road trip to Aden to take a flight to another country.<sup>148</sup>

Civilians in Hadramout, where UAE forces are present and actively involved in managing security in the governorate, also expressed disappointment and anger towards the unlawful detention and forced disappearance of civilians.<sup>149</sup> "Hadramis are so shocked. We were happy the Emiratis came. They are our brothers and we thought they'd help us. And now they've become a curse. They abducted our sons and disappeared them illegally and unfairly. They are abducting people right and left, raiding homes and terrorizing people. Meanwhile, they let al-Qaeda militants out. Everyone knows that in Mukalla," said the mother of a detainee who was disappeared by Elite Forces in Mukalla more than six months ago.<sup>150</sup>

### *Local Governorate Authorities*

In the absence of any meaningful national government presence, local civilian representatives became the only governing authority on the ground. In Sana'a, Aden, Mukalla and Mareb, local authorities are present. In Taiz, the governor is outside the country but some deputy governors and local officials are present. Some participants mentioned that the situation in Taiz is too much for the local authority to handle, especially with Hadi's government not providing much help.<sup>151</sup>

In Mareb and Aden, civilians held a mostly favorable view of their respective governors, although they remained frustrated with poor services. Some civilians in Aden spoke positively of the governor there and thought the local authority could be more effective, but that it lacks resources and support from the national government.<sup>152</sup> Several civilians in Majzer district in Mareb said they appreciated that the governor extended electric power into the district for the first time. Civilians in all governorates, however, said they were disappointed with the local authority for failing to provide enough support to IDPs and others affected by the war.<sup>153</sup>

In Mukalla, civilians indicated frustration with the local authority that, according to them, treated them with arrogance and refused to listen to their complaints. Several civilians affected by the war said that local authorities failed to document damages to civilian homes and property. Two civilians mentioned that local officials tried to force them to sign a receipt that they received compensation of YER 23,000 (US \$76) for damage to their homes. When civilians refused, they were offered YER 57,000 (about \$190). And when they still refused, according to a local male civilian and a female focus group participant, local authority figures told them they can go to court. "They want us to accept YER 23,000 (US \$76) when you need at least 15,000 (US \$49) just to fix one window. What would those who lost their entire houses do with that fraction of money they are offering?" said a female focus group participant. "They are twisting our arms. Telling us to take it or leave it. They know there are no functioning courts or a government [to address this] matter."<sup>154</sup>

Some civilians in Hadramout accused the governor of arbitrary arrests of those who oppose him. "The governor arrests anyone who dares to stand up to [him] or challenges him. Every day we hear a story of that sort," said a 55-year-old woman.<sup>155</sup>

147 CIVIC interview, Aden, October 2016.

148 CIVIC interview, Sana'a, November 2016.

149 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

150 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, November 2016.

151 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

152 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

153 CIVIC interviews, Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Mareb and Hadramout, August-October 2016.

154 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

155 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

## *The Resistance Fighting the Houthis*

In Aden, where the conflict ended in July 2015 and where civilians largely viewed the resistance positively, locals stated that they appreciated the sacrifice resistance fighters made to defend Aden and the South during the war. They said the resistance helped them guard neighborhoods and evacuate civilians from conflict zones. Civilians mentioned that they go to resistance leaders to help them resolve disputes or security incidents including physical assault and robbery. Many Adenis interviewed referred to the resistance fighters as “our sons.”<sup>156</sup>

In Taiz and Mareb where the war is still raging and where locals in certain areas were divided and fought with both sides, civilians had mixed feelings about the resistance. In Taiz, some civilians indicated that the resistance is defending the city from the Houthis. But they are frustrated because the war has dragged on for too long with very little progress; the coalition and Hadi’s government have failed to provide sufficient support to the resistance to achieve a military win. “If [the] resistance were given enough heavy weapons they would have pushed [back] Houthi-Saleh forces a long time ago,” said a 39-year-old man. Several civilians said that the resistance helps provide some security but it is not efficient. A female focus group participant mentioned that the resistance helped them move to safer areas. However, civilians overwhelmingly wanted to see an end to the presence of armed groups—resistance included—and the return of some form of formal order. In Taiz, some civilians accused the resistance of inviting Houthi shelling because they stationed themselves in residential areas. Others cited clashes among resistance groups that contributed to instability and lack of security. A woman who lost a son in a Houthi shelling in al-Masbah neighborhood in the city said that homes in areas controlled by resistance groups were looted.<sup>157</sup>

Civilians in Taiz complained about the emergence of several armed groups in the city, some with unknown allegiances. “Honestly we don’t even know who is who anymore. We don’t know who is resistance, who are the thugs and who are the armed robbers. Everyone is armed and everyone claims to be resistance,” said a male focus group discussion participant in Taiz. “There is no civilian protection. There are frontlines, battles, clashes and everyone is just busy with their frontline,” he added.<sup>158</sup> In some cases, armed men took advantage of the security vacuum to settle scores. A focus group participant mentioned an incident when armed men in Taiz stormed the house of a local official and looted his house, accusing him of being a Saleh supporter. “After investigating the case, it turns out that the leader of that armed group had a personal dispute with that local official,” the participant said.<sup>159</sup>

In Taiz and Aden, interviewees cited incidents of civilians killed by ricocheting bullets in resistance controlled areas. Firing bullets in the air can happen randomly but also to celebrate weddings, a practice that is prevalent in rural areas, particularly in northern Yemen, but is not common in either city. “When we leave our homes we don’t know if we will come back safe. We don’t feel safe even inside our own homes. Even in safer areas where there are no armed groups a ricochet can kill you,” said a 26-year old woman in Taiz.<sup>160</sup> According to a statement by the director of Aden’s Health and Population Office, 82 civilians have been killed or injured in the city as of August 2016 by ricochets. This death toll includes 14 children, five women, and one man.<sup>161</sup> Civilians in Aden protested daily during October 20–23, 2016, to demand that local authorities make serious efforts to address this problem.<sup>162</sup>

156 CIVIC interview, Aden, September-October 2016.

157 CIVIC interviews, Taiz and Mareb, September 2016.

158 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

159 CIVIC focus group discussion, Taiz, September 2016.

160 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

161 Hamdan Alaliei, “Dozens die in Yemen in returned bullets,” Alaraby Aljadeed, August 18, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/2016/8/18/من-مري-لا-ي-ف-ع-ج-ال-اص-اص-ر-ل-اب-اي-اح-ض-ل-ا-ت-ار-ش-ع/8>.

162 Yemen Media Center, “Day Four Protesting Against random bullets in Aden,” October 23, 2016, [http://yemen-media.net/news\\_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=24092](http://yemen-media.net/news_details.php?lang=arabic&sid=24092).

In terms of the spread of armed groups, currently Taiz can be compared to the situation in Aden after the war ended in July 2015. Locals in Aden cited similar issues with armed groups looting houses, abusing power, extorting local businesses and executing individuals. In Aden, the security situation has improved since May 2016, as the new security forces backed by the coalition took charge and began increased patrols across the city, as well as cracking down on criminals and extremist cells.<sup>163</sup>

In Mareb, civilians looked at the resistance from a tribal angle with many seeing its potential to instigate fighting among the tribes. Tribes in Mareb have always been armed and they know how to handle weapons so the spread of arms was not nearly as serious an issue as it was in the other governorates.

## *UN-Led Peace Talks*

Since June 2015, there have been three rounds of UN-led peace talks, the last of which lasted for more than 90 days in Kuwait. Under close UN sponsorship in Kuwait, the talks include representatives from Hadi's government in Riyadh and the Houthi/Saleh alliance in Sana'a. Other local actors were not involved. It ended without any breakthrough. Fighting continued and parties to the talks showed no willingness to compromise.

### **'Kuwait talks can go to hell.'**

Civilians in all governorates show an overwhelming lack of trust in the current peace process mainly because they believe that neither side represented has Yemen's and civilians' interests in mind. "Both sides are manipulating the talks. They are after power and wealth. They don't care about civilians. [They] only care about how to divide the cake," said a 35-year-old man in Mareb. "If they had Yemen's interests in their heart they would have reached a solution by now," said a 40-year-old woman in Sana'a. Civilians are critical of the fact that the talks involve only Yemen's traditional political elite, who are widely untrusted.

"We want real peace, not the peace of conferences and fancy hotels," said a 55-year-old woman in Mareb. Parties represented in Kuwait are not seen as credible by most civilians. "I want those in [the] Kuwait peace talks to go," said a 40-year-old woman from Mareb. "These parties are only interested in power and their own interests. I want to bring leaders from our communities instead. If those are represented in the talks, we will reach a solution."<sup>164</sup>

The majority of civilians, especially in Taiz, think the talks are a waste of time and money. Civilians in Aden, Taiz, Mareb and Hadramout feel disconnected from them. "We don't know what they did in Kuwait. We just hear that person X went and person X came back," said a 28-year-old Adeni man. "It's like we in Taiz don't count when it comes to these peace talks. Every time they announce a ceasefire fighting intensifies in the city," a 25-year-old woman in Taiz said.<sup>165</sup>

A 24-year-old Adeni man simply said: "Kuwait talks can go to hell."<sup>166</sup>

163 CIVIC interviews, Aden and Taiz, September-October 2016.

164 CIVIC interviews, Sana'a, Taiz, Mareb, Hadramout, Aden, August-October 2016.

165 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

166 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

in Taiz, Mareb and Aden, some civilians think that the peace talks are tailored to serve the Houthis and that ceasefire agreements give them the opportunity to recharge. In Taiz, civilians complained that shelling of the city intensifies during ceasefires. “Innocent civilians pay the price of the talks. Houthis and Saleh find in every ceasefire an opportunity to practice more killing,” said a male 45-year-old civil society leader in Taiz.

Civilians overwhelmingly agree that the current talks and the parties involved are not going to bring peace or end the violence because they are simply not interested in ending the war. Some civilians in Sana’a accused the Hadi government and the Saudis of ill intentions and of obstructing peace talks. A 55-year-old man said that for talks to work, the Saudis need to halt airstrikes and deport Hadi’s government back to Yemen. In Taiz, and Mareb, civilians said that no peace can be accomplished unless Houthis withdraw their forces and stop shelling these governorates. “[There is] no hope for reconciliation in Taiz if Houthi militia doesn’t leave our

**‘Maybe with years we can forgive them but we won’t forgive or forget if we are forced to stay with them. Yemen will be in conflict until doomsday if that happens.’**

land. They need to go so that we can resolve our differences here,” said a 46-year-old man from Taiz. “If Houthis leave Serwah, then there is a chance for things to improve,” a female focus group participant in Mareb said.<sup>167</sup>

In Aden, almost all civilians interviewed demanded an immediate secession from North Yemen as a pre-requisite for any

reconciliation or peace effort. “In order to reconcile with northerners, we need to be back [to the] two countries as we used to be,” a 29-year-old woman from Aden said. “Maybe with years we can forgive them but we won’t forgive or forget if we are forced to stay with them. Yemen will be in conflict until doomsday if that happens.”

In the oil-rich governorate of Hadramout, civilians there felt even more disconnected than civilians in other governorates from the talks. “We have nothing to do with these talks. What we want is education for our children, hospitals, water, electricity, sewage, and to be able to receive our salaries at the end of the month,” said a male focus group discussion participant there. As a necessary step to establish peace, civilians in Hadramout are split between wanting the secession of South Yemen and a secession of Hadramout from both North Yemen and South Yemen. Most favored a totally independent Hadramout. “We don’t want any reconciliation with anyone. Let’s just be Hadramout,” said a 55-year-old man. “We are tired of being used by North and South Yemen since 1967. They all have been feeding on us.”<sup>168</sup>

167 CIVIC interviews, Taiz, Mareb, September 2016.

168 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

## Security Forces In Yemen

*When Abdrabuh Mansoor Hadi became President, he inherited a deeply fragmented military partially controlled by political rivals and actors close to former President Saleh.<sup>169</sup> Saleh has retained control over a large portion of the military, which has been fighting to restore him to power. In these circumstances, Hadi's attempts to restructure the security and military forces, authorized as part the political transition, were met with strong resistance and insubordination by all parties involved.<sup>170</sup>*

*The NDC, noted above in the Background section, distributed its work among several subcommittees including those responsible for the military, security, and intelligence apparatuses. These subcommittees agreed on the necessity for the military to be professionalized and depoliticized, and that only the national government should have armed forces; the implementation of this however, has proved more complicated in practice.<sup>171</sup>*

*Hadi shuffled commanders and other members of the military and security sectors, rather than altering the basic power structures of the armed forces, ensuring that troop loyalties remained fragmented and unchanged.<sup>172</sup> Since 2011, the power struggles over the security sector has led to armed clashes between units and, ultimately, the Houthi-Saleh takeover in September 2014.<sup>173</sup>*

*Corruption within the military and security forces is rampant and estimates indicate that one-third of the forces are ghost soldiers who exist only on paper.<sup>174</sup> In 2015, Transparency International ranked Yemen the 154th most corrupt country out of 168.<sup>175</sup>*

*Before the war, Yemeni forces received US military and other security assistance from both the Department of State (DOS) and Department of Defense (DOD)'s Section 1206/2282 Train and Equip fund. The US provided Yemen's conventional armed forces modest amounts of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to service aging and outdated equipment, making the 1206 fund the major source of overt US military aid to Yemen. Section 1206 is designed to authorize equipment, supplies, or training to foreign national military forces engaged in counterterrorist operations. In general, "1206 aid aims to boost the capacities of Yemen's air force, its special operations units, its border control monitoring, and coast guard forces. 1206 funds have supported the Yemeni Air Force's acquisition of transport and surveillance aircraft. Since FY 2006, Yemen has received a total of \$401.326 million in Section 1206 aid."<sup>176</sup> In March 2015, however, the DOD announced that it had lost track of more than half a billion dollars in weaponry and equipment supplied to Yemen since 2007.<sup>177</sup>*

169 Sasha Gordon, "Mutiny in the Yemeni Military," Critical Threats, July 10, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-mutiny-yemeni-military-july-10-2013>.

170 Ibid.

171 Charles Schmitz, "Yemen's National Dialogue," Middle East Institute, March 10, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/yemens-national-dialogue>.

172 Chatham House, "Yemen: Key Players and Prospects for Peace Middle East and North Africa Programme Workshop Summary," November 17-18, 2015, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/events/2015-11-07-yemen-key-players-prospects-peace-meeting-summary\\_4.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/events/2015-11-07-yemen-key-players-prospects-peace-meeting-summary_4.pdf).

173 Yazid Sayigh, "Crumpling States: Security Sector Reform in Libya and Yemen," Carnegie Middle East Center, June 2015, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Paper\\_Yezid-Sayigh\\_crumbling\\_states.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Paper_Yezid-Sayigh_crumbling_states.pdf).

174 Khaled Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma," Yemen Times, February 11, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1754/opinion/3471/Yemen's-Insecurity-Dilemma.htm>. This also was reported in USAID, "Yemen Corruption Assessment," carried out by ARD Inc. on behalf of USAID, September 25, 2006, <https://yemen.usembassy.gov/root/pdfs/reports/yemen-corruption-assessment.pdf>.

175 Transparency International, "Corruption by Country – Yemen," 2016, <http://www.transparency.org/country/#YEM>.

176 Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Background and US Relations," Congressional Research Service, February 15, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>.

177 Craig Whitlock, "Pentagon loses track of \$500 million in weapons, equipment given to Yemen," The Washington Post, March 17, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-loses-sight-of-500-million-in-counterterrorism-aid-given-to-yemen/2015/03/17/f4ca25ce-cbf9-11e4-8a46-b1dc9be5a8ff\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5190d0ac1d6b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-loses-sight-of-500-million-in-counterterrorism-aid-given-to-yemen/2015/03/17/f4ca25ce-cbf9-11e4-8a46-b1dc9be5a8ff_story.html?utm_term=.5190d0ac1d6b).



*Civilians near the site of a home destroyed by a coalition airstrike in Sana'a in September 2016. (Mohamed Yasin)*

---

## SECURITY SECTOR REFORM AND IMPACT ON CIVILIAN PROTECTION

Security sector reform in Yemen is urgently needed not only to professionalize the forces but to improve civilian protection. International support to Yemen has largely been seen through a counterterrorism lens to support local efforts to defeat AQAP. The Saudi-led coalition, as well as the US and the UK, supporting the Hadi government must prioritize the rebuilding and professionalization of the army and police with proper training on international humanitarian and human rights law, community policing, best practices on civilian protection, and civilian-military relationship.

Currently, the military is divided into seven main geographic regions.<sup>178</sup> Army units in all these regions are involved in fighting the Houthis and forces loyal to former president Saleh. They are largely dependent on coalition support. Former security and police forces in the South have been dismantled as many soldiers who were loyal to Saleh either joined his forces or left the South.<sup>179</sup> In July 2015, Hadi decided to integrate thousands of resistance fighters in areas liberated from Houthis into the armed forces and they now constitute the bulk of the security forces. According to the security director in Aden, 90 percent of security forces leadership is former resistance fighters and only 10 percent are former security officers.<sup>180</sup> In Mareb, 65 percent of newly enlisted members are resistance and only 25 percent are former military/police. Local Mareb resistance fighters constitute about 30 percent of the police force there, with recruits from elsewhere in the country making up the rest.<sup>181</sup> Former military and security officers are providing some training to these new forces although they remain limited in capacity and resources.<sup>182</sup>

CIVIC interviews with local military and security leaders as well as with civilians reveal gaps in command and control, lack of comprehensive trainings of international humanitarian and human rights law, weapons usage, lack of discipline, and poor facilities and equipment.

178 Charles Caris, "Yemen Order of Battle," Critical Threats, February 23, 2015, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/caris-yemen-order-battle-february-23-2015>.

179 CIVIC interviews with local security officials, Aden and Hadramout, October 2016.

180 CIVIC interview with security director, Aden, October 2016.

181 CIVIC interview with security official, Mareb, October 2016.

182 CIVIC interviews with security and military officials, September-October 2016.

## Oversight of Security Forces and Recruitment

Interviews with civilians indicate a notable improvement in the security situation in 2016 in Aden. A new governor and security director, both widely respected figures in the city, were appointed in December 2015. In early August, the coalition, mainly UAE forces, helped organize southern resistance to launch a major offensive that expelled AQAP from most areas in the South. These efforts led to an improvement in

**Civilians in Aden, particularly women, said they felt much safer now.**

the security situation in the cities and on highways and limited the activities of extremist groups as well as curbed random crime and extortion by gangs. Civilians in Aden, particularly women, said they felt much safer now. “I used to go home before it gets dark because it was very unsafe,” said 24-year-old woman in Aden. “Now I can stay out until 10 PM and 10:30 PM. Aden feels safer now.”<sup>183</sup>

But while security is improving in some areas, the lack of proper command and control structures of the military and security forces, as well as oversight of forces and investigations of allegations of abuse attributed to some units, needs to be addressed urgently.

Current security forces are not working under a unified command and control structure fully controlled by the Hadi government. In Aden, for example, the Security Belt forces—the best-trained units—do not report to the Adeni security director, who manages the police force as well as the Special Forces responsible for counterterrorism operations.<sup>184</sup> While operationally they report to the security director, in practice, they follow orders from the UAE advisors funding, training and advising counterterrorism operations. Similarly, in Hadramout, the UAE is heavily involved in running counterterrorism operations through the Elite Forces with little coordination with military and local security forces.<sup>185</sup>

Such arrangements can affect operational effectiveness when reporting to different commanders. Likewise, oversight of forces and accountability are negatively affected when allegations of abuse are made. For instance, as noted above, in Hadramout civilians described cases of disappearances involving UAE-trained forces with local officials neither providing answers nor taking responsibility. “I went to the security director in Mukalla to ask him about my relative who was taken by the Elite Forces in October 2016 and he said that security does not interfere in army functions,” said a Hadrami man whose brother was detained by the Elite Forces.<sup>186</sup>

Recruitment into the military and security forces also affects civilian protection because the politicization of the various units can affect how they undertake tasks to protect civilians. In July 2015, Hadi issued a decree to enlist local resistance members into the armed forces,<sup>187</sup> but the application process lacked clarity and transparency. According to local leaders CIVIC interviewed, resistance members’ recruitment into the armed forces depended on their leaders’ connections with the coalition and Hadi’s government. Even among those recruited there exist discrepancies in salaries and training. A military officer and several resistance members interviewed complained that individuals who did not take part in the war were recruited while some real resistance members were excluded.<sup>188</sup>

183 CIVIC interviews, Aden, September-October 2016.

184 CIVIC interview with local security officials, Aden, October 2016.

185 CIVIC interview with security and army officers, Hadramout, September 2016.

186 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

187 Sky News Arabia, “Yemen: Integrating Resistance fighters into the Armed Forces,” July 28, 2015, <http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/763252/الي-ل-واق-م-رد-ن-مري-ل-ا>.

188 CIVIC interviews with military officer and resistance members, Aden, September-October 2016.

While the process of enlistment is widely known as the integration of resistance members into the armed forces, this is in fact a process to build military and police forces from scratch. “The term ‘integrating resistance into the military’ is misleading,” said a local journalist. “It gives the impression that we have armed forces when we don’t. Most of the military and police were from the north and when the war started they either left Aden or fought us.”<sup>189</sup> Now almost all security forces come from the areas they patrol, and so are widely perceived by people as legitimate, especially compared to Saleh’s former security forces. This could be an ideal opportunity for security reform, but could exacerbate local conflicts if not done transparently and impartially. Critically, these newly formed forces need training to perform their functions.

In Hadramout, several civilians indicated that the Elite Forces have been formed only from certain tribes, mainly the al-Katheeri, al-Hamoom, al-Say’ari, and al-Menhali tribes, and have excluded other tribes and social groups.<sup>190</sup> In Aden, several civilians said that current resistance units integrated into the security forces were selected based on regional, tribal, and/or political backgrounds, which could create problems in the future.<sup>191</sup> Additionally, many civilians and some security officials complained of individuals enlisted because of connections while some resistance fighters promised enlistments were rejected.<sup>192</sup>

### *Lack of Requisite Training*

The vast majority of forces currently performing security functions in Aden, Hadramout, Mareb, and Taiz are civilians who fought during the war and who have very little experience or training. Some received combat related training, but are being deployed as police.

In the last year, the UAE has been providing military training and ramping up its efforts in the fight against the Houthis and AQAP.<sup>193</sup> In July 2015 and again in January 2016, the UAE trained 4,000 Yemeni troops in Assab, Eritrea, as a “force to prevent lawlessness in Aden.”<sup>194</sup> The Emiratis have been training military and security forces, as well as other armed groups.<sup>195</sup> Since autumn 2015, the UAE has also coordinated the enrollment of locals in Aden into the military, and provided aerial training to Yemeni pilots at al-Anad base in the Lahj governorate.<sup>196</sup>

The training of military and security forces is primarily focused on military operations including the use of light and heavy weapons, such as mortars, tanks, and artillery. Groups received training programs ranging between 15 and 45 days. Former Yemeni officers trained some groups, whereas others were trained in Sudan, Eritrea, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The Security Belt received instruction by Emirati, Sudanese, and Jordanian experts for three months involving training in house raids, detentions, and interrogations.<sup>197</sup>

---

189 CIVIC interview with local journalist, Aden, October 2016.

190 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

191 CIVIC interviews, Aden and Hadramout, September-October 2016.

192 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016; CIVIC interview with military and security officials, Aden, Mareb and Taiz, September-October 2016.

193 Emirates News Agency, “UAE Armed Forces Concludes Training of New Batch of Members of Yemeni Resistance,” November 24, 2015, <https://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates/1395288404514.html>.

194 William Maclean, Noah Browning, and Yara Bayoumy, “Yemen Counter-Terrorism Mission Shows UAE Military Ambition,” Reuters, June 28, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-emirates-idUSKCNOZE1EA>.

195 Eleonora Ardemagni, “UAE’s Military Priorities in Yemen: Counterterrorism and the South,” Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), July 28, 2016, <http://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/uaes-military-priorities-yemen-counterterrorism-and-south-15573>.

196 Ibid.

197 CIVIC interviews with security officers, Aden, Hadramout and Mareb, September-November 2016.

With the exception of Mareb, security actors indicated that soldiers did not receive any training in IHL. About 700 new soldiers and police officers in Mareb received short training on policing and on the rights of civilians under Yemeni and international human rights law. The training was organized by two local NGOs and led by lawyers. Dozens of new and current officers were also trained by police officers on criminal investigations, how to handle suspects and protect their privacy and rights during investigations and the collection of evidence.<sup>198</sup>

Across the board, military and security leaders told CIVIC there is a great need for training the new forces. They cited issues with discipline, lack of skills, and training on handling weapons—especially resistance members currently in the force. “Unfortunately some new members like to show off by firing in the air, especially during weddings,” a military officer in Aden said. “This means they lack discipline and it means they need to be strictly trained to learn how to respect their weapon and use it only when they have to.”<sup>199</sup>

Incidents were reported of resistance members shooting their comrades by mistake while cleaning their guns, pretending to shoot them as a joke, but not realizing the guns were loaded, or unintentionally killing civilians by firing bullets in the air. A military official mentioned an incident in which a resistance member drove his car at night into a checkpoint where his friends were posted pretending to be a suicide bomber in an attempt to scare them. They shot him dead.<sup>200</sup>

Among military and security officers CIVIC interviewed, the desire to receive training both for themselves and for lower-ranking new recruits was high. They wanted training in combat, military law, IHL, evacuating civilians during fighting, and on the use of new weapons and tactics, as well as community engagement by military and police forces.<sup>201</sup>

Security officials in Aden and Hadramout indicated problems in distinguishing between suspected al-Qaeda members and civilians. That sometimes led to them arresting civilians. “I can’t distinguish between extremists or others. Only through their IDs [identification cards] or if I suspect [who] they are. If I see them nervous, for example. But then ordinary people do feel nervous sometimes,” said a security official in Hadramout. “I can’t distinguish. But we search everyone who doesn’t have an ID and if that person seems nervous or we feel suspicious, we arrest him and send him to al-Rayan airport to interrogate him,” said another security official in Hadramout.<sup>202</sup>

A security officer in Aden mentioned that training can help them distinguish between “extremists” and other groups. Most security officers interviewed, including the Aden security director, mentioned the need for training in intelligence and counterterrorism.<sup>203</sup> The Mareb security director said his units need courses in criminal investigation, modern interrogation methods, collecting evidence, as well as programs to engage civilians.<sup>204</sup>

---

198 CIVIC interviews with security and military officers, Mareb, September-November 2016.

199 CIVIC interview with military officer, Aden, September 2016.

200 CIVIC interview with military official, Aden, September 2016.

201 CIVIC interviews with security and military officials, Aden, Taiz, Mareb, and Hadramout, September-November 2016.

202 CIVIC interviews with security officers, Hadramout, September 2016. Local sources indicate that a detention center has been set up in al-Rayan Airport by the UAE after al-Qaeda was pushed out of Mukalla city in April 2016.

203 CIVIC interviews with security officials, Aden, Hadramout, Taiz and Mareb, September 2016.

204 CIVIC interview with security director, Mareb, November 2016.

## *Problems with Pay and Lack of Equipment*

Military officials cited problems with salaries that can affect retention and make the forces vulnerable to corruption. Many enlisted soldiers receive either stipends or no salary at all. And in many cases, even these stipends and salaries are delayed. Since the budget has been controlled by the Houthis in Sana'a, salaries were not paid to officers who pledged allegiance to Hadi or who fought against the Houthi-Saleh forces. According to the Aden security director, the coalition pays salaries for some officers but does not cover all enlisted soldiers.<sup>205</sup>

**'We need to arm all our soldiers. When you give guns to some and not everyone you create problems.'**

said he needed equipment to help with counterterrorism operations. Military officers said they needed equipment and arms for their members. "We need to arm all our soldiers. When you give guns to some and not everyone you create problems," said a military officer in Mareb. Military and security officials in Aden, Mareb and Hadramout requested the construction of proper training rooms and sites.<sup>207</sup> In Mareb, the security director said they need additional police stations, vehicles, communication system, and cameras for public facilities and places where civilians gather.<sup>208</sup> Others mentioned the need to establish a database to register names and information of enlisted soldiers to prevent duplication and corruption.<sup>209</sup>

Officials interviewed also raised concerns over a lack of equipment, which affects their operational effectiveness and troop morale. "We faced many challenges and suffered [a] severe lack of weapons, ammunition and information support. We made guesses and relied on luck," said a military officer in Aden.<sup>206</sup> Police stations lack cars, furniture, phones, and arms. Aden's security director

205 CIVIC interview with security director, Aden, October 2016.

206 CIVIC interview with military officer, Aden, September 2016.

207 CIVIC interviews with military officers, Aden, Mareb and Hadramout, September 2016

208 CIVIC interview with security director, Mareb, November 2016.

209 CIVIC interviews with military officers, Mareb, September 2016.



*Aljahmaliyah neighborhood in Taiz after a year of intense fighting and shelling, November 2016. (Ahmed A. Basha)*

---

## CIVILIANS' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

In all governorates, civilians wanted an immediate end to the war and for armed men to withdraw from communities. In Sana'a, they overwhelmingly wanted the airstrikes to stop and in Mareb and Taiz civilians wanted the Houthi-Saleh forces to withdraw their men and stop waging war on these two governorates.<sup>210</sup> Most said they wanted to see a credible government that cares about local citizens and the removal of old, corrupt regime elements that still control the decision-making. "We want to be safe with a government that is civil, that is not part of any of the current political parties. A government that is elected by the people," said a 35-year-old woman in Sana'a. "We don't want the same old, same old—when a minister dies his son takes over," said a 50-year old man from Sana'a.<sup>211</sup>

But civilians also had specific needs and expectations that should be addressed in order to rebuild communities and provide long-term stability and security for civilians.

### *Acknowledgement, Reconciliation, and Post-Harm Assistance*

Feelings of anger and resentment are prominent because of how civilians have been harmed during the conflict. People overwhelmingly worried that if the reconciliation process fails to address the deep grievances that exist, the likelihood of an escalation of violence is high. The majority of civilians interviewed by CIVIC thought the cycles of violence would only be broken if the immediate post-conflict period included an acknowledgement by the parties to the conflict of the harm they caused; removal of current leaders who were involved in the war; an inclusive peace process and locally-led reconciliation at the governorate and community level; and post-harm assistance addressing the urgent needs of people affected by the conflict.

Civilians overwhelmingly expressed a lack of trust in the current leaders involved in the peace talks. For them, these leaders need to step aside for reconciliation to work.<sup>212</sup> "If they are serious about reconciliation, current political actors need to retire and leave the stage for new blood. They only care about their own interests and their fight over power is what caused this war," said a 45-year-old man in Sana'a.<sup>213</sup> "Give the chance to new people to take over. Maybe those can bring peace." She added.

210 CIVIC interview, Taiz and Mareb, September 2016.

211 CIVIC interview, Sana'a, August 2016.

212 CIVIC interviews, Sana'a, Taiz, Aden, Mareb and Hadramout, August-October 2016.

213 CIVIC interview, Sana'a, August 2016.

“We don’t want Saleh or Houthis or Islah or Hadi,” said a 40-year old woman in Sana’a. “We want them all gone.”<sup>214</sup>

Many civilians wanted to see current political actors who took part in the conflict, including Saleh, Hadi, and the leader of the Houthis, Abdulmalek al-Houthi, tried for war crimes.<sup>215</sup> “I want Saleh and al-Houthi to be brought to justice. Saleh is behind all of this violence,” said a 40-year old woman from Aden.<sup>216</sup> “We want Hadi and his government to be brought to justice. We can’t possibly expect justice from them. They are war criminals,” said a 23-year-old man in Sana’a.<sup>217</sup>

**‘I want Saleh and al-Houthi to be brought to justice. Saleh is behind all of this violence.’**

In addition to demanding a more inclusive and representative peace process, civilians want to see locally led reconciliation efforts that address these emerging local conflicts, so they can be contained and eventually resolved. In Mareb, civilians wanted prominent tribal leaders to take the lead on such efforts. “Big sheikhs from Serwah and neighboring areas must lead an effort to resolve these conflicts. They should present guarantees to end hostilities,” said a 45-year-old woman in Mareb.<sup>218</sup> A male civilian in Mareb wanted to see political party representatives at the local level as well as community leaders, NGOs, and youth groups take part in such efforts.<sup>219</sup> “Tribal mediation can help with reconciliation.

Tribes are balanced and tribal sheikhs have experience resolving these local conflicts,” said a 51-year-old civilian from Sana’a.<sup>220</sup>

In addition, all civilians want some form of monetary assistance to compensate for the losses they suffered during the war. As described in the patterns of harm section, the conflict has caused death, injury, loss of property, and has had a severe impact on the economy. “What can possibly compensate me for losing my daughter and husband? Nothing! But at least I want to be able to repair my home that was destroyed in the war,” said a 35-year-old woman from Taiz.<sup>221</sup>

Civilians in Sana’a, Hadramout, Taiz and Aden said that they could no longer afford to send their children to education. “We just want this war to stop and to go back home so that I can go back to school like normal people,” an 18-year-old woman in Mareb said. Several civilians who owned businesses and property before the conflict said they are now struggling to afford the basic needs and some even fear there might be a day when they won’t be able to afford food. “In the past we wanted basic services and freedom. Now we are scared of famine,” said a displaced 42-year-old woman in Taiz.<sup>222</sup>

Civilians want assistance to help rebuild their homes so they can restart their lives. Many also wanted the government and coalition to provide immediate medical assistance to those injured during the war, including evacuating those who cannot receive sufficient medical treatment in Yemen because of a collapsed and failing health system.<sup>223</sup> Those who lost factories and livestock want financial assistance to recover for their losses. Others who lost breadwinners need alternative sources of income through job training targeted in that specific area.

214 CIVIC interview, Sana’a, August 2016.

215 CIVIC interviews, September 2016. This is a demand commonly expressed by civilians in Taiz, Aden and Hadramout.

216 CIVIC interview, Aden, September 2016.

217 CIVIC interview, Sana’a, August 2016..

218 Presenting guarantees is the main enforcement mechanism in the tribal justice system. It includes bringing influential individuals or material objects to ensure that parties to the conflict comply with decision of the mediators.

219 CIVIC interview, Mareb, September 2016.

220 CIVIC interview, Sana’a, August 2016.

221 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

222 CIVIC interviews, Taiz, Mareb and Hadramout, September 2016.

223 CIVIC interview, September 2016.

## *Strengthening the Justice System*

Civilians universally want a strong state and rule of law system in place, which they feel is key to any reconciliation effort.<sup>224</sup> The war has shattered existing court and security institutions. “I don’t trust any side now. I want to see institutions under which everyone is treated equally,” said a 24-year-old man from Taiz.<sup>225</sup> A 35-year-old woman from Hadramout said that for local reconciliation efforts to work, courts and the rule of law should be strengthened.<sup>226</sup> “I want a state with strong legal system that is enforced on everyone,” said a 45-year-old woman from Sana’a.<sup>227</sup>

The justice system, including prisons, courts and prosecutors’ offices’ infrastructure took a major hit during the conflict. As of December 2016, very little effort has been made to restore justice services across Yemen. Suspects detained on serious or petty crimes are thrown in jails in poor conditions and detained for long periods without charge. In some cases, children are detained in cells with adults. Inexperienced individuals, lacking proper training, are running prisons and conducting criminal investigations.<sup>228</sup>

Just like other major institutions, the justice system in Yemen is currently divided. When Houthis took control of Sana’a, they replaced the head of the Supreme Justice Council (SJC) and the attorney general. In Aden, Taiz, Hadramout and Mareb, the SJC is not seen as a legitimate entity. Judges are unable to send cases to the Supreme Court anymore because they don’t acknowledge the authority of the Supreme Court in Sana’a. Judges from the northern governorates who used to work in the south have left. The head of the Appeals Court in Aden said that appointing a new SJC by Hadi is necessary for the justice system to resume in liberated areas.<sup>229</sup>

In Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Hadramout, and Taiz, courts, prosecutors’ offices, police stations and prisons were either destroyed, damaged, or looted.<sup>230</sup> Courts are closed in Taiz. In Aden, for example, the Judicial Compound and the Appeals Court building were destroyed. Courts and prosecutors’ offices also suffer from lack of funding as operational budgets was suspended by the Houthis in April 2015, so nothing has been done to repair the damages or supply the courts and prosecutors’ offices with necessary equipment to operate.<sup>231</sup>

Some modest efforts have been made to revive the justice system. In Aden and Mukalla, a few primary courts recently opened, but they only handle personal status (which cover matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance), some commercial and other non-criminal cases. In Taiz, where battles are still raging, a group of lawyers and judges formed a Reconciliation and Arbitration Committee as a temporary measure to resolve legal disputes. The Committee has five members with four subcommittees composed of three members each. The subcommittees are staffed with individuals with legal backgrounds including judicial assistants, lawyers, and court personnel such as secretaries, as well as documentation and registration officers. These committees are not looking into criminal cases, but rather personal status and small commercial disputes.<sup>232</sup>

In Taiz, the criminal investigation building has been restored and is currently used as the premises for the security department and for criminal investigations. A temporary prison that can hold 50 people was attached to the building. But training and equipment for prison officials and the criminal investigation department is needed.<sup>233</sup>

---

224 CIVIC interviews, Aden, Taiz, Sana’a, and Hadramout, August-October 2016.

225 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

226 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

227 CIVIC interview, Sana’a, August 2016.

228 CIVIC interview with head of the Appeals Court, Aden, October 2016.

229 CIVIC interview with head of the Appeals Court, Aden, October 2016.

230 CIVIC interviews with lawyers and judges, Taiz, Aden, Hadramout, September-November 2016.

231 CIVIC interviews with head of the Appeals Court, Aden, October 2016; CIVIC interviews with lawyers, Taiz, Hadramout, Abyan, September-October 2016; CIVIC interview with Lahj governor, October 2016.

232 CIVIC interview with lawyer, Taiz, October 2016.

233 CIVIC interview with lawyer, Taiz, October 2016.

### *Oversight and Disarmament of Armed groups:*

Civilians in all governorates want to see professional police and military forces, and oversight of these forces to prevent abuses.<sup>234</sup> “I want a strong state with strong security that can protect me and my city,” said a 40-year-old woman from Taiz.<sup>235</sup> Civilians want to see a restructuring of police and army forces and to “clean them of former officers who have [a] track record in corruption and abuse of human rights,” said a 50-year-old man from Hadramout.<sup>236</sup>

Civilians in Taiz, Aden, and Hadramout, said that the unprecedented proliferation of arms, especially among young people has contributed to the deterioration of the security situation. They want to see immediate action to address this serious problem. They also want armed group to be disarmament including resistance groups that operate independently with no oversight. In Hadramout, civilians complained of home raids and illegal detention by armed groups that claim to work for the coalition. “The coalition gave arms to everyone. We don’t know who is army, who is police and who is resistance. Everyone is armed and everyone says they work for the coalition. They raid homes and detain people with no reason,” said a 48-year-old man from Hadramout.<sup>237</sup>

---

234 CIVIC interviews, Sana’a, Taiz, Aden, Mareb and Hadramout, August-October 2016.

235 CIVIC interview, Taiz, September 2016.

236 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.

237 CIVIC interview, Hadramout, September 2016.





*A local official and others check the site of a funeral home in Sana'a where 140 people were killed in a coalition airstrike in October 2016. (Mohamed Yasin)*

---

## CONCLUSION

As the armed conflict in Yemen rages, civilians have been paying the price with their lives, their health, and the destruction of their homes and schools. Over 80 percent of Yemenis need humanitarian assistance. The war has exacerbated internal divides and instigated conflicts at the community level. Efforts at a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities have yet to be realized as parties represented in the peace talks have so far failed to follow through with their commitment to ceasefire agreements.

Protecting civilians from harm means ending the war. While those efforts are being negotiated, parties to the conflict can review their current operations and undertake precautionary measures to prevent civilian harm and adhere to IHL. As civilians are returning to their homes in some parts of the country, urgent attention is needed to reduce civilian harm from landmines and UXO, and to develop comprehensive post-harm assistance programs reflecting community needs that can help reintegrate communities. Security sector reform with attention to training police and military units in international humanitarian and human rights law, civilian protection, and community engagement is needed to prevent revenge attacks, to thwart abuses, and to provide the necessary security for civilians.

Civilians mistrust and resent the Houthi-Saleh alliance, the Hadi government, and the Saudi-led coalition. Their perception of local governments and actors at the local level are more favorable, indicating a window of opportunity to build trust by including local actors in the peace process, which should be the venue to build legitimate institutions and a lasting peace.

Since 2011, the international community has tried to help end the conflict and provide support for a political transition. These efforts have failed because they did not respond to civilians' needs and grievances nor ensure they were genuinely represented in the political transition process. There is an urgent need to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and instead build sustainable peace and security by incorporating the perceptions of civilians and their needs to rebuild Yemen and ensuring their effective participation in the peace process and in governance. Such efforts are desperately needed to ultimately break Yemen free from its cycle of violence.

**RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.**

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT**

“We lived in Days in Hell” documents patterns of civilian harm in Aden, Hadramout, Mareb, Sana’a, and Taiz governorates, and civilian perceptions of the parties to the conflict. It reflects civilians’ needs and expectations in terms of protection and assistance to rebuild their lives and communities, gaps in trainings, and concerns about oversight of military and security forces. An immediate priority for all parties to the conflict is to agree to a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, and to begin to address the grievances that led to violence by involving local communities in the peace process.

## **ABOUT CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT**

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) works to improve protection for civilians caught in conflicts around the world. We call on and advise international organizations, governments, militaries, and armed non-state actors to adopt and implement policies to prevent civilian harm. When civilians are harmed, we advocate for the provision of amends and post-harm assistance. We bring the voices of civilians themselves to those making decisions affecting their lives.

**T** +1 202 558 6958  
**E** [info@civiliansinconflict.org](mailto:info@civiliansinconflict.org)  
[civiliansinconflict.org](http://civiliansinconflict.org)