



THE YEMEN TREND

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RESEARCH . ANALYSIS . ADVISORY

The Yemen Trend is a monthly digest that highlights Yemen's key economic and humanitarian trends and political and military developments, providing context and analysis where necessary in order to facilitate informed discussion deeply rooted in the facts.

Executive Overview

The battle for Hodeidah city has prompted a push for the renewal of political negotiations, driven largely by concerns that a disruption to traffic through the port would deepen the humanitarian crisis. The long-anticipated operation began on June 13. A week of clashes brought the airport under the control of UAE-led forces, before the pace of fighting was reduced in an attempt to provide UN Envoy Martin Griffiths time to work out a deal. The UAE and Hadi government insist on an unconditional Houthi withdrawal from the port and city, while the Houthis have said they will accept the UN taking a “lead role” in managing the port if there is a governorate-wide ceasefire. After three visits to Yemen in as many weeks, on June 28 Griffiths said he would “like to get the parties together within the next few weeks, at the very latest.”

Hodeidah port, although operating at reduced capacity, remained open the entire month. However, a food security monitor warned that a drastic reduction in port operations at Hodeidah would risk pushing Yemen into famine (IPC Phase 5). Should the battle for Hodeidah result in a sustained interruption to imports, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network estimates it will take three to four months before famine sets in, given there are currently around two months of food stocks in-country. Meanwhile, UN OCHA said cholera is at the top of their list of concerns. Hodeidah was one of the epicenters of what last year became the largest cholera outbreak in modern history, and as Yemen currently passes through the rainy season, conflict-related activities in the city of roughly 600,000 are disrupting its water supply and sanitation.

President Hadi visited the UAE on the eve of the Hodeidah operation, where he met with Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan before returning to Aden, where he stayed for the remainder of the month. The visit was far more cordial than the president’s last trip to the UAE in February 2017, and followed a similarly rare visit by Interior Minister Ahmed Al-Maisari, one of Hadi’s most outspoken allies. This signals a potential thawing of the feud between the Hadi government and the UAE, which could have further reaching implications across the country.

Timeline

- June 2-5** UN Envoy visits Sana'a in attempt to avoid attack on Hodeidah city
- June 03** Vessel being used by WFP targeted after leaving Hodeidah port, culprits unknown
- June 12** President Hadi meets the UAE's Sheikh Zayd Al-Nayhan in Abu Dhabi
- June 13** UAE-led operation on Hodeidah port city begins, centered around the airport
- June 14** President Hadi returns to Aden, where he remains for rest of the month
- June 16-19** UN Envoy visits Sana'a again, Houthis voice support for UN management of Hodeidah port
- June 27** UN Envoy visits Aden, President Hadi calls for full Houthi withdrawal from Hodeidah

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

Hodeidah port remained open throughout June, although with reduced import levels.

“While vessels continue to berth and discharge at Hodeidah, overall numbers of vessels arriving at the port remain well below those during the same period in the previous two months,” the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) [said](#) on June 20. “In particular, only four to five vessels have been at anchorage awaiting a berth compared to roughly four times as many in the same period in April or May.” The Houthi-controlled Yemen Red Sea Ports Cooperation, which administers Hodeidah port, reported throughout the month that it was accepting vessels. On June 27 Houthi-aligned Transport Minister Zakariya Al-Shami gave a [statement](#) from the port dock, alleging that the coalition is hindering shipments to the port.

A vessel used by the WFP to deliver aid to Hodeidah was attacked on June 3,

while waiting for permission from the coalition to leave the off-shore anchorage area after having offloaded at the port. The WFP [said](#) “both the crew and vessel are safe, with no injuries or obvious damage to the vessel.” The attackers were not identified, and unlike several attacks on civilian vessels believed to have been carried out by the Houthis in recent months, the group was not as aggressively accused of responsibility.

Fact Box

In early June UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande [said](#) “in a prolonged worst case, we fear that as many as 250,000 people may lose everything – even their lives.” Later in the month, her office said in a [press statement](#) that a quarter of all children in Hodeidah already suffer from acute malnutrition, and “if nutritional support from humanitarian partners is disrupted, it risks the lives of almost 100,000 children.”

According to statistics released earlier this year, 22.2 million people in Yemen require some form of humanitarian assistance. 17.8 million of these require food assistance, 8.4 million of whom are severely food insecure. Around 600,000 people are estimated to live in and around the port city of Hodeidah.

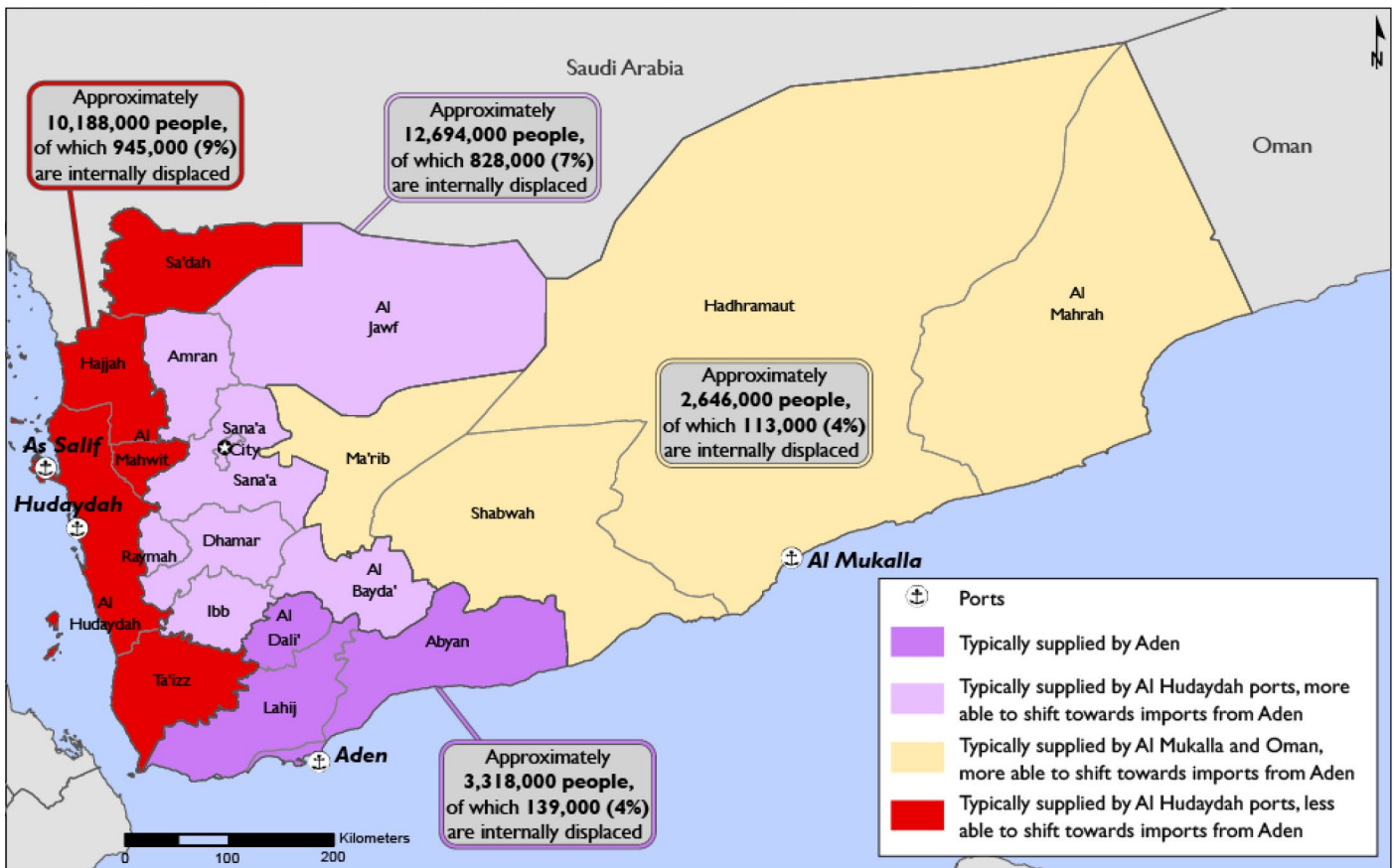
Famine is a possible scenario if imports drastically decline through Hodeidah,

the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) said in a [food security alert](#) issued June 15. “In a worst-case scenario, any conflict that could significantly disrupt port operations or destroy port facilities risks driving Yemen into Famine (IPC Phase 5),” although given the port itself has not been further damaged or disrupted, the famine scenario has not yet begun. “Current stock levels in Yemen are likely enough to satisfy approximately two months, but most likely no more than three months, of national need,” the food security monitor estimated. It would therefore take three to four months before IPC Phase 5 would be likely to set in if imports are cut or drastically reduced through Hodeidah and Salif for an extended period.

“Starvation of civilians as a method of war is a war crime and was condemned by the Security Council in resolution 2417 of 24 May 2018. It seems that the first test of this resolution is Yemen: the Yemeni port of Hodeidah is a lifeline for the delivery of aid and the Coalition’s air strikes can kill many more people over time through famine and hunger when damaging such civilian infrastructure.”

Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide ([source](#))

The figure below shows which governorates are more reliant on Hodeidah port for their food supply. The governorates in red – particularly the IDP and malnourished populations within them – are most likely to be hit hardest from potential disruptions to port activity.



Source: FEWS NET analysis of information from the Food Security Cluster, Task Force on Population Movement, 16th Report, other partners, and FEWS NET monitors. Note: This reflects a coarse analysis of potential changes in trade at the governorate level. The source of staple foods may not be uniform at the sub-governorate level.

“Of all the things we are worried about, cholera is top of the list,” UN OCHA [said](#) on June 21. The agency said Hodeidah was one of the epicenters of what last year became the largest cholera outbreak in modern history, and that an “unstoppable outbreak” could arise from even a relatively small deterioration. “If the water system in just one neighborhood breaks down, and if nothing can be done to immediately address the situation, cholera could spread with lightning speed,” Relief Chief Lise Grande said. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) [said](#) the Houthis “have been very active in Hodeidah, digging trenches and building barricades, [and] deploying troops near civilian areas such as residential zones, hospitals, and hotels, which is very worrying.” Both MSF and the WHO stated that the digging of trenches damaged the water and sewage system, with the latter [stating](#) this has resulted in “endangering the water supply for large neighborhoods, further exacerbating cholera risk to communities in the area.”

This compounds the already heightened risk of cholera transmission due to the ongoing rainy season, which typically lasts from mid-April to late August. There is a fear humanitarian efforts will not be enough to protect against the consequences of

the fighting, and not only in Hodeidah. On June 11, an airstrike hit a cholera treatment center in Abs area of Hajjah governorate. [According](#) to MSF, which administers the center, there were no casualties because the building was newly constructed and had not begun operating yet. The Saudi government [blamed](#) MSF for “failure to update their coordinates per standard procedures,” but MSF confirmed that they had provided the coalition with the center’s coordinates 12 times prior to the attack, and that there were three large logos displayed on the roof of the building.

An Amnesty International report details import impediments imposed by both parties. The report, [Stranglehold](#), says that between July 2016 and October 2017, 96 percent of Yemen’s monthly food import requirements were being met, but since November 2017 this figure has dropped to 68 percent. The coalition carries out inspections itself despite the existence of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), often delaying shipments, and it has ignored UN Security Council requirements that it submit incident reports. Meanwhile, the Houthis are blamed for stalling and restricting aid distribution activities on in-country. “Several aid workers described incidents in which

government workers from a ministry under Houthi control had conditioned approving projects or movements on monetary payments and incidents in which Houthi fighters have extorted bribes at checkpoints," the report says.

The UN released its annual report on children and armed conflict. In Yemen, monitors verified the killing or maiming of 1,316 children, 51 percent of the time being the result of airstrikes. They also verified 842 cases of child recruitment, two thirds of which was by the Houthis, the rest being mostly the Security Belt Forces (UAE-aligned) and Yemeni Armed Forces (Hadi-aligned). "In Yemen, a significant decrease in the number of attacks on schools and hospitals by the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen and preventive measures that have been put in place have led to its delisting for that violation," the report states. The spokesman of the coalition [said](#) it "rejects the claims made in the UN Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict regarding violations attributed to the Coalition, which are based on inaccurate information provided by unreliable sources."

However, rights groups condemned the report as going easy on Saudi Arabia. The children's rights advocacy director at Human Rights Watch [said](#) "the idea that the Saudi-led coalition has taken effective measures to protect children is pure fiction," and the group's Yemen researcher [pointed out](#) that this year the UN uses the term "the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen," rather than the "Saudi-led coalition" as it was the year prior. Furthermore, the UAE, which created the Security Belt Forces and itself carries out airstrikes, is not mentioned in the report.

Humanitarian organizations faced a host of additional challenges throughout June. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) pulled 71 international staff out of the country, [announcing](#) on June 7 that its "current activities have been blocked, threatened and directly targeted in recent weeks, and we see a vigorous attempt to instrumentalize our organization as a pawn in the conflict." Meanwhile, a coalition airstrike in close proximity to an NRC facility in Sana'a damaged it, and the organization [demanded](#) an investigation be conducted. Finally, international staff of the UN relocated to Sana'a ahead of the Hodeidah city operation, but national staff remained in the city, [according](#) to UN OCHA Yemen head Lise Grande.

France co-hosted a humanitarian conference with Saudi Arabia on June 27. Leading up to the conference, which was announced during Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's visit to Paris on April 10, there was heavy skepticism from humanitarian organizations. Nearly 30 humanitarian and rights organizations [wrote](#) to President Macron voicing concern over the credibility of the event given Saudi Arabia's participation in the conflict. "It's difficult to understand that France would co-organize an event with one of the parties to the conflict, which is right now attacking civilians and at the same time trying to present itself as a key humanitarian actor," the advocacy manager for CARE France [said](#) following the beginning of the operation on Hodeidah city. "The Saudis and UAE are heavily funding the UN humanitarian response plan. But it's a completely schizophrenic position. For us, France would lose all its credibility if it maintained the conference." Originally planned as a ministerial-level conference, in the end the meeting was [downgraded](#) to a closed-door meeting with international experts.

Relatedly, the same day as the Hodeidah city operation began, Saudi Arabia and the UAE [announced](#) the launch of what it termed "a comprehensive, multi-faceted plan for the protection of civilians in Hodeidah and surrounding areas. However, the International Rescue Committee [said](#) "the so-called 'relief' plan announced by the Arab coalition in Yemen must be seen for exactly what it is; a justification to launch an attack that will have catastrophic consequences."

Political Developments

President Hadi returned to Aden after a visit to the UAE. On June 12 Hadi met with Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and supreme commander of the UAE's armed forces, along with several senior Emirati officials, [according](#) to state media WAM. The visit was portrayed far more positively than his last visit, in February 2017, when tensions were running high following a clash over Aden airport. The president [returned](#) to Aden on June 14. In an [article](#) for the UK's Telegraph paper the same day, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash opened with the following statement: "The Arab Coalition is responding to a request from Yemen's President to

liberate the Port of Hodeidah and return it to the control of the country's legitimate government."

Interior Minister Ahmed Al-Maisari, who is one of Hadi's most outspoken allies, likewise returned to Aden after a surprise visit to the UAE weeks prior. Though overshadowed by the start of the Hodeidah city operation, their return – and the relative quiet of the UAE-aligned Southern Transitional Council (STC) – appears to be indicative of a larger shift in strategy and a thawing of the UAE-Hadi feud.

The Houthis agreed to UN management of the port, their opponents demand a full withdrawal.

After travelling to Sana'a twice and meeting President Hadi in Aden, by the end of June UN Envoy Martin Griffiths expressed optimism that talks between the warring parties will resume, saying "I'd like to get the parties together within the next few weeks, at the very latest." In an [interview](#) with the UN News Center on June 28, the envoy said the Houthis agreed to have the UN play "a lead role" in managing the port, dependent on a ceasefire in the governorate. He declined to offer additional details on what the UN's role would be. "We're close to understanding exactly how we can deal with the linked issues of Hodeidah and a restart of political negotiations, and I think the next few days will get us to the point of being able to come out quite clearly and openly to say when, how, and with whom we can do this," he said.

Throughout the month each sides' stated positions remained fixed: The Houthis agreed to have the UN monitor the port, which would effectively move UNVIM onshore and keep them in control of the port city; while the UAE firmly called for the Houthis to fully withdraw from the city, a stance the internationally recognized government also voiced. The major developments in the political track were as follows:

- Martin Griffiths travelled to Sana'a twice in June. His first trip was from June 2 to 5, where he [met](#) Supreme Political Council president Mehdi Al-Meshat, in addition to Hisham Sharaf and Abdul Aziz Bin Habtour, the Sana'a based foreign minister and prime minister in the Houthi government. "I had very productive meetings with senior leaders of Ansarallah and the General People's Congress on my vision for the peace process which I will discuss with the Security Council later this month," Griffiths [said](#)
- When the operation on Hodeidah city began, Griffiths released another [statement](#) saying "Further military escalation will have serious consequences on the dire humanitarian situation in the country and will have an impact on my efforts to resume political negotiations to reach an inclusive political settlement to the conflict in Yemen." On June 15 the UN Security Council issued a vague statement urging "all sides to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law," which came instead of a failed [proposal](#) to explicitly demand a ceasefire around the port city, which the US and UK rejected. The EU presented stronger language after meeting Martin Griffiths later in the month, via its Council [conclusions](#) on June 25: "The EU calls on all parties to cease the present escalation, exercise restraint, work urgently towards a nationwide ceasefire and engage constructively with the UN"
- Martin Griffiths returned to Sana'a from June 16 to 19, where he met with Prime Minister Bin Habtour and President Al-Mashat. Al-Houthi shortly after [announced](#) the group welcomed the proposal by Martin Griffiths to hand the port over to the UN, saying "We welcomed a supervisory, technical and logistical role of the United Nations on the port of Hodeidah." Reuters [reported](#) similarly, saying the plan would have funds from the port placed in the Aden-based Central Bank of Yemen and used to pay public salaries.
- During Griffith's trip to Sana'a, Anwar Gargash [demanded](#) the Houthis' unconditional withdrawal from the area, saying "there can be no conditions in any offers to withdraw... if the rebels wanted to set conditions, they should have thought of that a year ago." The foreign minister [reaffirmed](#) his call for an "unconditional withdrawal from Hodeidah city and port" on July 1, stating the UAE has paused its campaign "to allow enough time for this option to be fully explored."

- The envoy met President Hadi in Aden on June 27 for a one-day meeting. [Al-Arabiya](#) and [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) reported that Hadi demanded a full Houthi withdrawal from the port. The same day, Foreign Minister Khaled Alyemany [called](#) for a total withdrawal of the Houthis from Hodeidah city, and for security forces belonging to the Yemeni interior ministry to be deployed in the city, based on the argument that the safe passage of maritime traffic and imports to Yemen could not be guaranteed while the Houthis are present. The following day, the envoy [met](#) with the Houthi delegation, led by Mohammed Abdulsalam, in Muscat.

Military and Security Developments

The operation to retake Hodeidah city slowed toward the end of the month. The first week of the battle, which [began](#) on June 13, was heavily concentrated on Hodeidah airport, as the main landmark situated between the anti-Houthi forces and the city center. Starting June 16 the coalition and Western media [reported](#) the capture of the airport, but Houthi spokesman Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti spoke from inside the airport [that day](#) as well as several [days later](#), and airstrikes on the airport were [reported](#) after June 16. The Guardian [stated](#) the airport was captured on June 19, while the Associated Press [reported](#) on June 20 clashes continued on one of the runways, away from the main building.

After the airport was mostly secured, anti-Houthi forces did not make a concerted push into the city proper. "We don't want to move further than the airport," UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash was [quoted](#) as saying late on June 19. "The smart thing is to push hard on the perimeter, not enter the city, and say to the UN, 'Go back and get a better deal,'" he said. On July 1, Gargash [wrote](#) they continue exerting pressure on the perimeter of the city but the coalition "has paused the advance on the city & port on June 23 for a week to allow the UN envoy to secure an unconditional withdrawal from Hodeida." UN OCHA [reported](#) that "since 22 June fighting has somewhat decreased in Hodeidah city as well as in Zabid and Bayt Al Faqiah districts," and the WHO similarly [reported](#) a decrease at this time.

Warnings were given prior to the launch of the operation. On June 9, the UK government [said](#) the UAE informed it that a three-day grace period was being given for the UN and its partners to leave the city. Following a closed-door Security Council meeting on June 11, it was reported the UAE had given the UN less than 48 hours to reach a [ceasefire](#) with the Houthis. Prior to this, on June 6 the coalition reportedly dropped leaflets on the city urging residents to "revolt" against Houthis ([leaflets](#) were also dropped in April 2017).

Several fronts in Hodeidah governorate south of the city remained active, as the Houthis attempted to cut off points along the main coastal road to Hodeidah city and maintain their hold over the parallel interior road. "During the first week of June, clashes broke out behind the current frontlines, in Al-Jah in Bayt Al-Faqih, as supply lines to the coastal offensive were disrupted, hampering the progress of offensive forces in Al-Durayhmi," [according](#) to the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project (CIMP), which falls under the UNHCR-led Protection Cluster Yemen. "The attempts to push through Al-Jah in Bayt Al-Faqih suggests a strategy to advance eastward and inland on a second axes along the other main north-south road in the governorate," CIMP said, pointing out that urban centers in the governorate have largely been avoided.

Hundreds were reported to have been killed in Hodeidah governorate in the first half of June alone. During the first two days of the month, 52 dead bodies recovered from coast were [recorded](#) in Aden. On June 11, AP [wrote](#) the fighting "has killed more than 600 people on both sides in recent days, security officials said." On June 15, the AP [reported](#) "at least 280" people were killed by the third day of the operation that began on June 13. No clear statistics were reported later in the month.

The US and UK neither explicitly supported nor condemned the operation. At the beginning of June, the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) that State Secretary Mike Pompeo asked for a "quick assessment of the UAE's plea for assistance such as surveillance drone flights" to support the battle for Hodeidah port city. By mid-June, the Guardian [reported](#) that "The UAE said the US had rejected its request for intelligence, minesweeping and airborne reconnaissance assets for the Hodeidah attack." Days before the operation began, Secretary of State Pompeo issued a [statement](#) that neither

supported or opposed the offensive. The case appeared similar for the UK. "The UK government is believed not to support an attack on Hodeida, but ministers have not explicitly warned the Saudis off," the Guardian [reported](#). "They did issue an explicit warning the last time an attack was considered, two years ago, however."

The US and coalition agreed "that UAE forces overseeing military operations won't enter the port in the near-term" to enable the UN envoy to progress diplomatic efforts, the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) on June 3, adding "but there is broad concern that Yemeni forces aligned with the Saudi-led coalition will act on their own." Relatedly, The Washington Post [wrote](#) in early June that the UAE had agreed not to attack the city, but that "the UAE says it has no control over the Yemeni government forces that it has trained and assisted." However, reporting from the ground indicated the UAE maintains strong control over the Yemeni fighters. "More than a half-dozen field and brigade commanders acknowledged taking their orders from the UAE, including from Emirati senior officers stationed on the Red Sea coast," the Intercept [reported](#). Indicating that the UAE military was directly involved in the assault on the port city from the beginning, four Emirati troops were [killed](#) and a UAE military vessel was [struck](#) by Houthis on June 13, the first day of the operation.

The Houthis fired ballistic missiles on at least five regions (provinces) in Saudi Arabia, killing three Saudi civilians. These included: an attack on Yanbu in Madinah region on [June 5](#); Najran region and Khamis Mushait of Asir region on June [June 8](#); Jizan region on [June 9](#), which Saudi Arabia confirmed killed three Saudi nationals; Jizan region again on [June 10](#) and [June 17](#); Saudi Aramco in Abha city of Asir region on [June 19](#); and two missiles launched over the capital Riyadh on [June 24](#), which were intercepted over the city, leaving debris in residential areas but no casualties. Apart from the attack that killed three citizens, all other missiles are believed to have either been intercepted or landed in the desert.

Recommended reading and viewing:

- For deeper analysis centered on the offensive on Hodeidah city, see [Yemen: After Hodeidah](#), by the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), and International Crisis Group reports released [days before](#) and the [week after](#) the operation was launched.
- [A report](#) by the Associated Press details alleged mass sexual torture in at least five UAE-controlled prisons in Aden. "In the prisons, they are committing the most brutal crimes," a Yemeni commander in Riyadh is quoted as saying. "Joining ISIS and Al-Qaida became a way to take revenge for all the sexual abuses and sodomization. From here, the prisons, they are manufacturing ISIS."
- [Women as Peacebuilders in Yemen](#), a report examining the role women in Yemen play in conflict prevention, peace, and stability. The report focuses on the governorates of Marib, Taiz, and Lahj, and the research was implemented by Social Development Direct (SDDirect) in partnership with the Yemen Polling Center (YPC) and Marie-Christine Heinze.
- In a [short piece](#) for The National, an Egyptian photojournalist provides insight into one of the frontlines in Al-Bayda, an often ignored governorate, but one which local anti-Houthi fighters view as the key to reaching Sana'a.

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