



THE YEMEN TREND

**March
2017**

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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.

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Executive Overview

With as little as three months worth of food stocks remaining, tens of thousands of newly displaced, and sustained fighting in nearly half of Yemen's governorates, the humanitarian catastrophe continued to unfold in March. Attention remains fixed on Hodeidah, where a UAE-led offensive to capture the country's main port is anticipated. The escalation is expected to exacerbate what is already considered the largest humanitarian crisis on earth, but the Hadi camp sought to convince the international community it is a step made necessary by the Houthi/Saleh alliance's interference in food import and distribution. However, both sides are accused of weaponizing aid: Save the Children said the coalition is "killing children" by blocking vital supplies from the port, while Houthi/Saleh forces in Ibb were blamed for kidnapping aid workers and interfering in hospital operations, for example.

UN Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh toured several Gulf and European countries, including London where a meeting on March 13 convened the Quint – the foreign ministers of the US, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Like the previous meeting in February, no notable developments were announced and this is expected to remain the case in the coming months if the Hodeidah offensive goes forward. Coalition and Hadi-aligned figures signaled their intention to capture the port before entering a new round of negotiations, and the Houthi/Saleh alliance has not demonstrated its willingness to discuss military withdraws and weapons handovers, making progress on the roadmap unlikely until a change in the balance of power on the ground is realized.

The military offensive up the west coast of Taiz continued and troops aligned with Hadi and the coalition reached approximately 25 km north of Mocha town. This brings the ground offensive near to the border of Al-Khawkhah district of Hodeidah governorate, which Houthi/Saleh forces are fortifying and coalition planes are bombarding ahead of the anticipated advance. Clashes along the coast and other areas of Taiz occurred alongside sustained ground fighting throughout the country, including in Hajjah, Al-Jawf, Sana'a, Marib, Sa'ada, Shabwa, and Al-Baydha, with additional heavy airstrikes in Hodeidah and Abyan. The US launched 40 confirmed airstrikes and many more suspected on alleged AQAP targets, while considering measures to increase military assistance to the coalition.

Timeline

- Mar. 2** US conducts at least 40 airstrikes in Al-Baydha, Shabwa, and Abyan over several days
- Mar. 10** Coalition airstrike on a qat market in Hodeidah kills at least 18 civilians
- Mar. 13** The Quint (formerly referred to as the Quad) meets in London
- Mar. 16** Helicopter attack on Somali migrant boat off Yemen's coast kills 42, wounds dozens
- Mar. 17** Houthi/Saleh rocket attack on military camp in Marib kills at least 32 troops, wounds 81
- Mar. 29** UN envoy meets the UN Security Council

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

Food supplies are estimated to be running low nationwide. At the beginning of March Spanish news agency EFE [reported](#) that UN OCHA head Stephen O'Brien said there is only enough food to last around 10 weeks. Then, ICRC operations director Dominik Stillhart [said](#) on March 22 that in Yemen and Somalia "we have probably a window of three to four months to avoid a worst case scenario." UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick [said](#) he agrees with the ICRC assessment and in Yemen specifically "our food stocks in the country are around a three-months supply, both from a humanitarian and a commercial point of view."

At least 106 civilian deaths were documented in March by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "mostly by airstrikes and shelling by coalition warships." The OHCHR [found](#) several incidents in March of airstrikes hitting fishing boats and trucks carrying food supplies, as well as a marketplace in Hodeidah. The strikes are said to be trapping residents and restricting humanitarian supplies. The OHCHR also said Houthi/Saleh forces shelled a marketplace in Taiz and were "preventing civilians from leaving and restricting humanitarian access to Taiz city."

An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) brief titled "[Yemen: Projected Acute Food Insecurity Situation – March-July 2017](#)" sheds new light on the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding. Much is riding on whether the Hodeidah port remains operational, and while noting "the complete closure of the port is a possibility," the IPC forecasts the most likely scenario is it "will continue to function in the next five months, but in its minimal capacity as the fighting progresses towards the port from the southwest part of the governorate." Already around 17 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance, 6.8 million of whom are classified in IPC Phase 4, emergency. This represents a 20 percent increase compared to the June 2016 IPC analysis, and looking ahead to the period from March to July 2017 the report notes:

- The riyal is likely to decline against the dollar and "the liquidity and the hard currency issue will remain the same affecting the overall economic system of the country."
- Basic commodity prices are highly likely to progressively increase due to slowed imports, and the availability of essential goods is likely to deteriorate further.
- Special attention is given to the governorates of Taiz and Hodeidah, where already severe food crises are being exacerbated by escalated conflict and the resulting population displacement. The ICP notes that local and district level analysis is needed in particularly hard-hit areas where especially severe cases may be masked by the larger governorate-level analysis.
- In Hodeidah, large numbers of airstrikes since the beginning of 2017 have damaged port infrastructure, affecting food supply and imports. Even under the assumption that the port will remain operational, continued decreases in overall food availability and nutrition levels are anticipated due to the macroeconomic crisis.
- In Taiz, "the most affected governorate by the ongoing conflict," fishing along the coast has completely stopped and in the lowland areas the global acute malnutrition rate reaches as high as 25.1 percent.

The Hadi administration continued to build its case for retaking Hodeidah port in a number of statements throughout March. The Yemen Gulf of Aden Ports Corporation released a statement titled "[Aden Port: Fully ready to receive containers and other cargo traffic](#)." It says the port has the ability to receive all kinds of ships and it is "the only port that can meet the needs of the state," claiming it has the storage and operational capacity to accommodate all the country's trade and humanitarian imports, and that the distribution from Aden to the rest of the country "should not be a constraint." This appears to contradict the February 21 [statement](#) by UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick, who said "the Aden port does not have the required capacity or infrastructure to accommodate Yemen's import demands" and "the transport of goods from Aden to the rest of the country is not guaranteed given the additional costs, blocked or damaged roads, lack of fuel, and ongoing conflict." On March 28 McGoldrick [said](#) the UN is considering "contingency planning of using alternative ports

such as Aden” and land convoys from Yemen’s neighbors, over fears the port of Hodeidah “may become inoperable or inaccessible in the near future.”

Additionally, Ahmed Bin Mubarak, Yemen’s ambassador to the US, [wrote](#) in Newsweek on March 20, “Some reports have suggested that the government’s attempt to counter the rebels in Hodeidah might impact the flow of aid given the importance of its port. Our government recognizes the significance of Hodeida’s port for aid delivery, and therefore rooting out the Houthis will eliminate their destructive meddling in aid distribution.” Similarly, Abdulraqueeb Fatah, head of the High Relief Committee and minister of local administration, [told](#) the pro-Hadi Saba news that Houthi/Saleh forces had as of March 2017 seized or looted more than 63 vessels at the ports of Hodeidah and Aden, and blocked or confiscated over 223 humanitarian relief convoys throughout territory they control.

Aid shipment delays caused by the coalition “are killing children” said Save the Children’s country director, Grant Pritchard, adding “they are turning aid and commercial supplies into weapons of war.” Over a two-month period, the international NGO [said](#), the coalition has prevented three of its shipments from reaching Hodeidah port. The medicine, medical equipment, and other cargo was intended to support 51 healthcare facilities and reach a total 300,000 people in need of assistance. Save the Children has now moved its import activities to the port of Aden.

Relatedly, details emerged regarding the cranes Saudi Arabia has been preventing from being set up at the port. Four replacement cranes, two of which would be reserved for the World Food Program (WFP), which procured the cranes, were supposed to replace the cranes damaged by coalition airstrikes in 2015. However, they remain in Dubai. The WFP’s country director, Stephen Anderson, [said](#) the coalition gave the WFP permission early this year to deliver the cranes to the port but they were made to wait off the coast for two weeks and in late January the entry clearance was revoked and the cranes were moved back to Dubai.

The number of IDPs in Taiz swelled to 273,780 by the beginning of March, the IOM [said](#), due to the recent fighting in Mocha which has forced at least 25,000 to flee their homes. On March 10 the UNHCR [announced](#) 62,000 people had been reported displaced nationwide in the last six weeks, 48,400 from Taiz alone.

A number of barriers to humanitarian assistance emerged in Ibb governorate, as a result of Houthi violations. On March 23 Doctors Without Borders (MSF) [announced](#) over the next three months it is withdrawing from Ibb’s Al-Thawra hospital due to its “inability to run activities according to MSF’s principles of independence and impartiality,” without elaborating. Tammam Al-Oudat, MSF deputy medical director, was later [quoted](#) by Arab News as saying the Houthis were asked to “guarantee full and free access to patients to hospitals, as well as end the military presence in the hospital and stop interfering with the medics’ decision-making process,” but they refused.

Then, on March 31 five staff members and two drivers working for International Medical Corps were detained by the Houthis, who accused them of spying for foreign intelligence, the Associated Press [reported](#). These incidents come shortly after UN OCHA head Stephen O’Brien was denied access to Taiz from Ibb, apparently by the Houthis. O’Brien did not specifically blame the Houthis, and in a March 10 [statement](#) to the UN Security Council following his trip to Yemen, where he met senior leadership in Aden and Sana’a, he said “all parties to the conflict are arbitrarily denying sustained humanitarian access and politicize aid.”

The Hadi government called on the UN envoy to pressure the Houthis to send state revenues from areas under their control to the Central Bank of Yemen, relocated to Aden in September of last year. The government [warned](#) that without revenue from Houthi-held governorates, it may not be able to pay salaries nationwide and support the operational budgets for hospitals and other essential services.

Political Developments

UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed held meetings in several European and Gulf capitals in March, most notably in London where he met with the foreign ministers of the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Oman. The Quint – what the UN envoy is now calling the Quad after the addition of Oman as a permanent member – convened on March 13 and like the February 16 meeting, no statement was released to the public nor did it appear any significant developments occurred. At the conclusion of his European tour, the envoy's office released a [note to correspondents](#), saying “the Special Envoy briefed his interlocutors on the disastrous situation in the country and his concerns over the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian and economic situation,” and encouraging the parties to negotiate a political settlement.

Background:

Throughout February neither the Hadi camp nor the Houthi/Saleh alliance demonstrated readiness to support the UN envoy's attempts to initiate a ceasefire intended to smooth the way for the resumption of peace talks. Instead, the Houthis requested the envoy's term not be renewed, prompting the new UN secretary general to affirm his support for the envoy, and President Hadi said Operation Golden Spear will continue until the entire western coast of Yemen is in his hands. The US, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman convened on February 16 for a meeting, the first attended by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who appeared to take a more idle approach compared to his predecessor during his final months in office.

The UN envoy continued his efforts to reconvene the 12-member De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC) in Amman to hash out a joint implementation plan for a ceasefire. That plan of action was announced at the December 18 Quad meeting, and by the end of February it appeared to remain the official, if increasingly unrealistic, course of action. At the end of January the UN envoy criticized both warring parties for failing to take steps toward the resumption of peace talks, and while the Hadi government in February voiced its readiness to activate its members of the DCC, heading into March it remained unclear whether this was a genuine effort or political maneuvering.

For more details, see DeepRoot's [February 2017 issue of The Yemen Trend](#).

Leading up to and following the March 13 meeting in London, claims were made by several Arab outlets that a new roadmap would be or had been proposed. For example, Saudi mouthpiece Al-Arabiya [said](#) the new plan stipulates Hadi would retain his powers through a transitional period and removes Vice President Ali Mohsen at the outset. UAE-based Gulf News, citing Saudi sources, [added](#) that the new plan calls for the Houthis to hand over their weapons to military units in Hadhramout not engaged in the conflict. However, according to the Security Council Report, an independent UN monitor, Ould Cheikh [called](#) these claims “unfounded.”

At a closed-door meeting with the UN Security Council on March 29, the UN envoy said “The Government of Yemen should agree to engage in talks based on the framework, and Ansar Allah (the Houthis) and the General People's Congress must end their long-standing refusal to undertake serious discussions on security arrangements,” [according](#) to his office.

Former US Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein, in his March 9 [testimony](#) to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recommended as a goal for 2017 “the US should back Government/Coalition efforts to capture the [Hodeidah] port in exchange for firm guarantees that the Coalition will repair the damaged port facilities urgently and provide unfettered access to the port for international humanitarian organizations to bring in desperately needed food, medicine, and other essential goods.” He also said “limitations on US assistance to the Coalition, whether through restrictions on the re-supply of munitions or denying advice and assistance to Coalition armed forces is counter-productive.” At the same time, Feierstein told the committee the US should “press the parties to resume political negotiations,” with UNSC Resolution 2216 remaining the basis for a resolution.

Fifty-three members of congress signed a letter to Secretary of State Tillerson on March 9, [urging](#) him “to use all US diplomatic tools to help open the Yemeni port of Hodeidah to international humanitarian aid organizations.” Relatedly, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on March 13 [said](#) “plans to launch an offensive

against Yemen's biggest port, Hodeida, are especially worrying. Combat in this region will not only cause mass flight of the population, but will essentially cut the capital, Sana'a, off from food and humanitarian aid supply routes. There is no need to say what disastrous consequences this would have."

Imams were officially removed from dozens of mosques in Aden, replaced by Salafis who follow Hani Bin Buraik's school of thought. Bin Buraik is a Salafi imam, minister of state, and the overseer of the UAE-sponsored Security Belt Forces. In the first half of March alone 32 imams were replaced, including Islahi and Sufi imams, as well as Salafis who follow a different school of thought. The decisions were officially made by Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Al-Wali, the director general of the Aden office of the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowments) and Guidance. For example, Al-Wali [made](#) Ahmed Hasan Saleh, a Salafi who follows Bin Buraik, the imam of a mosque in Al-Tawahi district, replacing Islah-affiliated Imam Afif Mohammed. Some of the imams had held their positions for 15 to 20 years, resulting in significant outcry from their communities over the replacements, which are largely seen to be driven by UAE policies implemented on the ground by Bin Buraik and his local allies.

Military and Security Developments

The US conducted 40 confirmed airstrikes in three governorates in the first week of March.

In statements following attacks on March [2](#), [3](#), and [6](#), the Department of Defense said AQAP militants were targeted in Abyan, Al-Baydha, and Shabwa. In a March 2 strike in Abyan, AQAP operative Usayd Al-Adani, described as "a longtime Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula explosives expert and facilitator who served as the organization's emir" was said to have been killed along with former Guantanamo Bay detainee Yasir Al-Silmi, repatriated to Yemen in 2009. On four other days later in March US airstrikes in Abyan and Hadhramout were reported by international media organizations, [summarized](#) by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

Three Yemeni governorates are considered an "area of active hostilities" by the US military, as per a Pentagon request granted by President Trump, the New York Times [reported](#) on March 12. This designation effectively allows military commanders to carry out attacks without extensive review back in Washington, and removes precautions for avoiding civilian casualties that are additional to standard conduct in active warzones. The article does not state which three governorates were named, although they would appear to be Abyan, Al-Baydha and Shabwa. Several unnamed officials told the New York Times the president signed off on the request at a dinner with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in late January at the same time he signed off on the January 29 raid.

In a related development, the Washington Post [reported](#) at the end of March that Defense Secretary Jim Mattis earlier in the month asked the Trump administration to remove restrictions on military support to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The request is apparently based on a request by the UAE for support in the offensive to retake Hodeidah port, and would allow the US military to support the UAE against the Houthi/Saleh alliance "with surveillance, refueling, and operational planning and assistance without asking for case-by-case White House approval." The Washington Post said a previous proposal by the UAE for help capturing Hodeidah was rejected by Obama on the grounds that the operation "was unlikely to succeed in dislodging the entrenched, well-armed rebels and could worsen the humanitarian situation." Also at the end of the month, the Wall Street Journal [reported](#) that already "the Trump administration has significantly increased military support for Sunni Arab states fighting Al-Qaeda and Iranian-backed militias in Yemen," citing US and Arab officials. The Journal also quoted coalition spokesman Al-Asiri as saying he has a commitment that cooperation will be increased.

The US State Department approved the resumption of the \$390 million deal of precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia in early March, which is now pending White House approval, [according](#) to the Washington Post. Several newspapers said the White House under Obama halted the sale despite former Secretary of State John Kerry saying the deal was subject to normal bureaucratic delays and that his State Department

was supportive of it. Trump is expected to approve the sale, which will then be subject to an automatic 30-day period for Congress to review it, where it is expected to face opposition and a vote on whether or not to block it. "We heard testimony in the Foreign Relations Committee that nothing has gotten better with respect to Saudi targeting," [said](#) Republican Senator Rand Paul, who is a member of the committee. I don't know why we would give them precision-guided munitions that allow them to target civilians more efficiently."

Analysis:

As ground troops advanced near Al-Khawkhah district of Hodeidah and airstrikes pounded Houthi/Saleh positions ahead, an escalation in the offensive to take the port appears near. In late March the UN envoy [said](#) the offensive is "very likely to happen" but he has no details as to the timeframe. "We as the United Nations are advocating that no military operation should be undertaken in Hodeidah," he said, adding that "if the military operation has to go [ahead], we need to have a contingency plan," implying that such a plan does not yet exist.

The US has continued to officially back efforts to implement a ceasefire leading to the resumption of peace talks, but appears to be supporting coalition plans to launch an assault on the port. The rationale for doing so was perhaps best summarized by Senator Marco Rubio, who [said](#) during the March 9 Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Yemen that "irrespective of what we do, the Saudis are going to continue to do what they believe is in their best interest with or without our guidance." In his view, Iran is uninterested in a negotiated settlement and is seeking to gain leverage over Saudi Arabia and the US, which means American national interests are best served by supporting efforts to gain a better negotiating position rather than push for a premature ceasefire that would upset American allies and have little chance of success.

While international focus so far has almost exclusively been on US-Saudi relations as opposed to the other coalition partners, the UAE was given some attention in March as US officials announced a request by the UAE for increased military assistance is being considered. The US has forged a close relationship with the UAE, including in joint military operations like the raid in Al-Baydha on January 29.

As it conducted military exercises in March, the UAE was said to be [hosting](#) around 5,000 American troops. Often in contrast to the Saudis and other Arab forces, Emirati fighters are widely viewed by US officials as organized and efficient, or the "Little Sparta" with "skin in the game" in Yemen, as officials [told](#) the Wall Street Journal.

Forces trained and overseen by the UAE are dominant in much of Yemen's south, and they have carried out hundreds of counter-terrorism raids against alleged AQAP and Islamic State militants. These forces, which include the Security Belt Forces and elite forces in Shabwa and Hadhramout, provide an excellent opportunity to improve security, especially because they are comprised of locals. Furthermore, they have been valuable in supporting America's short-term oriented strategy of disrupting AQAP's capability to carry out a large-scale attack on the west. However, because these elite forces do not answer to the internationally recognized government there will likely be impediments to a broader, longer-term counter-terrorism strategy in Yemen, something that may be overlooked as the US steps up tactical strikes.

It is doubtful the UAE will hand over authority to Hadi, and this power struggle has already caused many rifts. The clash at Aden airport last month made public the divide between Hadi and the UAE, and demonstrated the latter's willingness and ability to use force against the Yemeni government to maintain influence over a key resource. The Security Belt Forces have also had disagreements with resistance leaders who argue operations against extremist groups should be part of a national effort rather than targeted UAE-sponsored raids that leave locals susceptible to retaliation. Furthermore, the UAE's empowerment of militant Salafis at the exclusion of other political and religious groups is creating social grievances, especially as Salafi imams friendly to the UAE were inserted into dozens of mosques in Aden in March alone.

Operation Golden Spear progressed up the coast of Taiz and ground troops are nearing the district of Al-Khawkhah in Hodeidah. In early March troops [reportedly](#) pushed 10 km north of the coastal area of Yakhtul, which itself is about 14 km north of Mocha town. By mid-month army spokesman Brigadier General Abdo Majili [said](#) "our forces are clearing Al-Zahari [region of Mocha district]

from the Houthis and then will march towards Al-Khawkhah." Al-Zahari lies even farther north than Yakhtul, but there remain areas of instability behind the frontline. For [example](#), clashes in the village of Yakhtul on March 10 and 11 left at least 15 dead on either side. In preparation for the anticipated push into Hodeidah, Houthi/Saleh forces are positioned in front of Al-Khawkhah and coalition aircraft are bombing the route ahead. In one [incident](#) on March 10 at least 22 were killed and dozens were injured when an airstrike hit a qat market in the coastal town of Al-Khawkhah, in the district of the same name. The UN Office of the High Commissioner [said](#) at least 18 civilians were killed in the attack.

An apache helicopter attack on a boat killed 42 Somali refugees fleeing Yemen on March 16 and injured 39, [according](#) to the UNHCR. The boat was carrying over 140 Somali refugees headed to Sudan, and at the time of the attack it was almost 50 km off the west coast of Yemen. According to Foreign Policy, the coalition spokesman [said](#) the coalition was not operating in that region at the time of the incident. However, the coalition is regularly active along the coast and it is unclear who else could have been responsible. All 42 of those killed aboard the small [civilian boat](#) (warning: graphic photo) were carrying official UN refugee papers and at least 80 were rescued and taken to a Hodeidah detention center. Shortly following the attack, the coalition released a [statement](#) denying responsibility and calling for the UN to have jurisdiction over Hodeidah port. "This would facilitate the flow of humanitarian supplies to the Yemeni people, while at the same time ending the use of the port for weapons smuggling and people trafficking," it read. In response UN spokesman Farhan Haq [said](#): "Parties to the conflict have a clear responsibility to protect civilian infrastructure and fundamentally to protect civilians. These are not obligations they can shift to others."

A Yemeni coast guard boat struck a mine off the coast in the Red Sea on March 10, killing two sailors and wounding eight others. The AP [called](#) it the first such naval mine explosion since the war began, and said security officials suspect it was laid by the Houthis. A month prior, the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) had [warned](#) "the US government has reason to believe in late January, mines were laid by Houthi rebels in Yemeni

territorial waters in the Red Sea close to the mouth of the Mocha harbor." Then, in late March Hadi-aligned forces [photographed](#) what they claim to be a naval mine planted by Houthi/Saleh forces, found off the coast of Midi in Hajjah governorate.

Iranian Technology Transfers to Yemen, a report by Conflict Armament Research (CAR), documents ([pdf file](#)) the possession of Iranian-manufactured drones by Houthi/Saleh forces and their increasingly sophisticated use, including for so-called kamikaze drone attacks. The report analyzes several drones intercepted by the UAE in Marib, which match those displayed by the Houthis in February, which they claimed to be domestically produced. At least one of the variants displayed is thought to be Iranian-designed, and said to have been intercepted on "a known smuggling route for Iranian material support to Houthi and Saleh-aligned forces." The Houthi/Saleh alliance is said to be crashing these drones into the radar sets crucial to the coalition's surface-to-air missile systems, which intercept missiles fired by the alliance.

After four missiles fired by Houthi/Saleh forces at Khamis Mushait and Abha in Saudi Arabia were intercepted on March 28, the coalition [said](#) "the ongoing missile attacks on Saudi cities provide clear evidence of the arms smuggling that continues to take place in Yemen, notably through the port of Hodeidah." During the lead up to and during the offensive to retake Mocha port, coalition and Hadi-aligned forces repeatedly claimed Mocha was being used by the Houthis to import arms from Iran.

Evidence of recent cluster munitions use by the coalition was discovered by Amnesty International. "Brazilian-manufactured rockets containing banned cluster munitions" were used on [three residential areas](#) in the middle of Sa'ada city on February 15, according to Amnesty. The same rockets, which are truck-loaded rather than dropped from jets, were also used in late January in a location near the same city. Additionally, Human Rights Watch [documented](#) the use of the same Brazilian-made cluster bombs on February 22, on a farm in northern Sa'ada. The findings are significant because they confirm Saudi Arabia is continuing to employ cluster munitions following a [statement](#) late last year saying the specific UK-manufactured BL-755 variant of cluster munitions would be discontinued.

The Hadi government announced a mosque in Marib was attacked by Houthi/Saleh forces on March 17. Abdo Abdullah Majili, the official spokesman of Hadi's national army, [said](#) the rocket attack was on a mosque during prayer time in the Kowfel military camp in Serwah district, and that a total of 32 soldiers were killed and 81 were injured.

Pakistan "is sending a brigade of combat troops to shore up Saudi Arabia's vulnerable southern border from reprisal attacks mounted by the Houthis in Yemen," [according](#) to a Middle East Eye exclusive. The article does not make clear whether this is a relocation of troops already in the kingdom or if they will be sent from Pakistan, and it is not stated which country the "senior security sources" quoted are from. In response to media coverage, Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif [responded](#) to the claims, saying "no military personnel have been sent to Saudi Arabia in perspective of the Saudi Arabia-Yemen conflict," and that if Pakistan were to change its policy of non-involvement in the war, it would have to go through parliament. Shortly after the escalation in March 2015, Pakistan refused to join the coalition following a parliamentary debate. A follow-up article by the UAE's The National [said](#) the brigade is for Saudi internal security.

RECOMMENDED READING AND VIEWING:

- DeepRoot, in partnership with CARPO and the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, announced the project launch of [Rethinking Yemen's Economy: A Track Two Initiative](#), which over the next two years will seek to identify the economic and development priorities in Yemen.
- [Yemenis fight for survival as famine looms](#), writes journalist Iona Craig in an on-the-ground look at the humanitarian crisis in Taiz.
- A Washington Post article on the Islah Party analyses [How war is changing Yemen's largest Islamist coalition](#).
- A report for Hate Speech International titled [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: From Global Insurgent to State Enforcer](#) presents an alternative view of the group: Rather than an insurgent group challenging the state, "AQAP is part of a continuum of Islamist entities in Yemen that have been utilized by the government in Sana'a to function as a kinetic security enforcer on behalf of the state."
- [Falling through the cracks: The children of Yemen](#), a 12-page report by UNICEF summarizing the overall situation for children across the country.
- In an event hosted by the Middle East Institute titled [The Yemen Conflict in Perspective: Geopolitical and Humanitarian Challenges](#), the UN envoy and Yemeni ambassador to the US, in addition to several other experts, provide their perspective on the crisis.

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