



# 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 rate of new reported cholera cases dropped steadily throughout October, and at the end of the month MSF announced it is closing or reducing the capacity of the majority of its cholera treatment centers in Yemen. Nevertheless, the outbreak is far from over, and by the end of October Yemen was nearing 900,000 suspected cases, surpassing Haiti as the worst cholera outbreak since records began in 1949, and placing Yemen on track to accumulate 1 million suspected cases by the end of the year. Meanwhile, the start of the new school year was marred by teachers' salary strikes affecting 78% of the country's 15,826 functioning schools, and an estimated 2 million children are not attending school at all.

On the political front, following a visit to Riyadh UN Envoy Ould Cheikh said he is "currently exploring significant steps that each side can take to restore confidence and move towards a viable negotiated settlement." However, despite talk of a new humanitarian initiative, no tangible progress was reported in his briefing to the Security Council, and both Foreign Minister Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi and Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam said the envoy had not presented them a clear plan for moving forward. Meanwhile, at a demonstration on October 14, Southern Transitional Council President Aidarous Al-Zubaidi announced the establishment of a 303-member southern parliamentary body, and said a referendum would be held soon to determine the fate of south Yemen.

Little changed on the battlefield in October, but a prominent anti-Houthi/Saleh resistance figure in Taiz, Abu Al-Abbas, was branded by the US and its Gulf allies as a supporter of AQAP and the Islamic State. The US launched airstrikes on alleged Islamic State training camps in Al-Baydha for what is said to be the first time, and a concurrent resolution to bar the US military from involvement in the war in Yemen lost its "privileged" status, meaning the bill will not be voted on in the House.

# Timeline

- Oct 10** The cholera outbreak in Yemen becomes the largest since records began in 1949
- Oct 11** Ten Islah members arrested and a party office raided by security forces in Aden
- Oct 14** STC head calls for establishment of a 303-member parliament, referendum on secession
- Oct 16** US launches airstrikes on alleged Islamic States training camps in Al-Baydha
- Oct 25** Taiz resistance figure Abu Al-Abbas designated an AQAP and Islamic State supporter

# Humanitarian and Economic Trends

**The rate of new reported cholera cases dropped steadily throughout October**, but the epidemic is still on track to reach 1 million suspected cases by the end of the year, including [600,000 children](#). Starting at [771,945](#) suspected cases and 2,132 associated deaths at the beginning of the month, by October 30 a total of [887,440](#) suspected cases and 2,184 associated deaths had been reported, making Yemen the largest cholera outbreak on record and surpassing the [815,000](#) cases reported in Haiti between October 2010 and August 2017. The number of new suspected cases remains high – on average there were 3,850 new suspected cases per day throughout October – but nevertheless there is a clear downward trend. At the end of October, MSF [announced](#) the number of new reported cases at its treatment centers “has significantly decreased since the peak of the outbreak,” and that it is closing or reducing the capacity of the majority of its cholera treatment centers. “The cholera outbreak is not over but it is no longer our medical priority in Yemen,” MSF said. “However, this should not eclipse the dire health situation of millions of Yemenis who are unable to access basic primary healthcare.”

**Discussions are underway to launch a cholera vaccine campaign in early 2018**, ahead of a potential new wave of cholera coinciding with the rainy season. The International Coordinating Group (ICG), which manages the global stockpile of emergency cholera vaccines, allocated 1 million doses of cholera vaccine to Yemen in June, but the plan was scrapped the following month. [According](#) to IRIN, officials from the ministries of health on both sides of the conflict maintain that the past cancellation of the plan, as well as its future implementation, depend on there being a sufficient number of vaccinations. “The ministry does not oppose organizing a cholera vaccination campaign once [more] vaccines are available,” the deputy minister of public health and population in the Hadi government said. On the Houthi/Saleh side in Sana’a, the ministry spokesman told IRIN a vaccine campaign for 2018 is being discussed, and claimed the decision to halt the shipment in July was not motivated by political or security considerations, but rather because the “low effectiveness of the OCV [oral cholera vaccine] may affect the trust of the community about other routine vaccines for children.”

**The exchange rate deteriorated rapidly throughout October**, and a circular issued by the Aden-based Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) on October 31 placed the reference rate at 396 YER/USD. This is from a rate of about 375 YER/USD at the beginning of the month, and there were [indications](#) at the end of the month the market was trading at 412 YER/USD, a rate that continued to deteriorate into November. Meanwhile, international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are now able to exchange currency close to the market rate. As Oxfam [explained](#) in mid-October, until recently the organization was exchanging currency with banks at the official rate of 250 YER/USD, and they had no choice but to go through official channels as opposed to use the market rate. “We have however succeeded in negotiating a new rate, now updated every month, which is the bank rate minus 3% for their fee,” Oxfam said, noting that for October the rate is 379 YER/USD. Other international NGOs have also [reportedly](#) begun exchanging close to the market rate.

**The education of 4.5 million children in Yemen is at risk**, according to UNICEF’s regional director for the MENA region, Geert Cappalaere. “Three quarters of teachers have not received their salaries in nearly a year, and the violence has forced one in ten schools across the country to close,” he said in a [statement](#). The beginning of the school year was postponed from the standard September start date, and materials, including textbooks, are said to be in severely short supply. “As of July 2017, 1,600 schools have been partially or totally destroyed, and 170 have been used for military purposes or as shelter for displaced families,” Cappalaere said, estimating that 2 million children are currently not in school. Scores of teachers in both Houthi/Saleh and Hadi government territory were [on strike](#) throughout October, with many demanding pay increases on salaries as low as \$160 per month, and others protesting that they have not received a salary at all. It is estimated that 12,240 of 15,826 functioning schools, accounting for 78% of all students in Yemen, are affected by the strikes.



Meanwhile, the minister of youth and sport in the Houthi/Saleh government, Hasan Zaid, raised controversy in October for suggesting students and their teachers head to the frontlines. “What if studies stopped for a year and students and their teachers headed for recruitment? Wouldn’t we be able to reinforce the fronts with hundreds of thousands (of fighters) and resolve the battle?” he wrote on Facebook.

**The coalition was added to the draft version of the UN’s blacklist for grave violations against children in conflict.** “In Yemen, the coalition’s actions objectively led to the listing for the killing and maiming of children, with 683 child casualties attributed to this party, and, as a result of being responsible for 38 verified incidents, for attacks on schools and hospitals during 2016,” the draft [reportedly](#) says. The Houthis, government forces, pro-government militias, and AQAP are all blacklisted as well. The annual report notes the coalition has introduced measures to “improve the protection of children,” which is the first time the UN has made such a distinction between blacklisted parties. Many characterize this new distinction as an attempt to reduce the [controversy](#) surrounding the report, especially given that Saudi Arabia is widely viewed as having pressured the former UN Secretary-General to exclude the coalition from last year’s list.

**All sides are impeding humanitarian access in Yemen,** according to UN OCHA’s director of operations, John Ging. “The authorities in Sana’a regularly deny access and have also arbitrarily delayed or denied dozens of requests for humanitarian personnel to enter the country via Sana’a,” Ging said in his October 10 [statement](#) to the Security Council. At the same time, he said, the authorities in Aden have also failed to issue visas for international NGOs for several weeks.

Relatedly, when Senator Todd Young asked during a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee [hearing](#), “are you saying today that the participants to the conflict in Yemen are deliberately restricting food or medicine to the vulnerable populations to advance their aims?” Matthew Nims, acting director of USAID’s Office of Food for Peace (FFP), responded in the affirmative. Young asked about the mobile

cranes purchased by the US for use at Hodeidah port, to which Nims explained “USAID maintains that the addition of these cranes to port operations would greatly improve the throughput of that port to allow additional humanitarian as well as commercial cargo to more quickly throughput through the port and have an impact on the situation.” Nims also reaffirmed that large-scale diversions of humanitarian aid shipments at the port are not taking place. Based on the testimony from Acting Director Nims, Senator Young stated “the Saudi-led coalition is using food as a weapon of war in Yemen.”

## Political Developments

**UN Envoy Ould Cheikh had little tangible progress to show for in October,** telling the Security Council that he is “currently in the process of discussing a proposal that includes humanitarian initiatives to rebuild trust and steps to bring the parties back to the negotiations table.” In his [October 10 briefing](#) to the Council, the envoy said he “will discuss the details of this proposal with the government of Yemen and the alliance of the Houthis and General People’s Congress, who have committed to engage in a further discussion on the details of the proposal.”

On October 25, the UN envoy finished a four-day visit to Riyadh, where he met with President Hadi and Foreign Minister Abdulmalk Al-Mekhlafi. “We are currently exploring significant steps that each side can take to restore confidence and move towards a viable negotiated settlement,” Ould Cheikh [said](#) following their meeting. “These steps are focused on three pillars: the resumption of the cessation of hostilities, some specific confidence building measures that can alleviate the humanitarian suffering and the return to the negotiation table in order to reach a comprehensive peace agreement.”

### The Peace Process in Focus

Despite talk of new humanitarian initiatives, news reports indicate the same core proposals the envoy has been working on for the last six months continue to be the basis for his ongoing efforts, albeit with the focus shifted toward tackling the issues from a humanitarian perspective, given the deadlock in political discussions. Ahead of his trip to Riyadh, it was [reported](#) that the envoy’s new “humanitarian initiatives” would focus on Hodeidah port, Sana’a

airport, public sector salaries, the siege on Taiz city, and prisoner releases. However, the head of each sides' official delegation to the peace process said they did not receive any significant updates. Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi [criticized](#) the envoy's proposals earlier in October over what he called "mere intentions to conceal the failure of the United Nations," and after having met Ould Cheikh in Riyadh, on October 24 Al-Mekhlafi [said](#) there are ideas being discussed but that there is no clear plan to restart the political process. Meanwhile, Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam [said](#) on October 29 that the Houthis had not received any initiatives or ideas from the UN.

Since May 2017, Ould Cheikh has been prioritizing two critical issues: A mutually agreed upon military committee to manage Hodeidah port, and in parallel a financial committee to develop a mechanism to have state funds collected from all parts of Yemen and disbursed to public servants on both sides. These measures, according to the envoy, would serve to demonstrate both sides' willingness to advance the wider peace process, and ultimately lead to the establishment of a cessation of hostilities and the renewal of political negotiations. In his August 18 briefing to the Security Council ([text/video](#)), the envoy mentioned two additional measures. Firstly, he called the reopening of Sana'a airport to commercial flights "a vital and fundamental component of the proposals." Secondly, he said "there should also be immediate steps re-open roads to and from Taiz for humanitarian and commercial supplies as many representatives of Taiz civil society have demanded."

However, in subsequent months the status of the above measures became clouded. The coalition [stated](#) that it would permit the resumption of flights to Sana'a only if the airport is put under UN supervision, and in his October 10 [briefing](#) Ould Cheikh gave no indication as to whether the UN had responded to this stance. Furthermore, in his most recent statement to the Security Council the envoy made no mention of re-opening roads to and from Taiz. Despite allegations of bias from the Houthis, in September Ould Cheikh's contract was extended into 2018. Repeated invitations by the envoy for the Houthi delegation to meet him in a third country have failed to materialize.

With the political process at an apparent deadlock, officials in the Hadi government – as well as the president himself – have been suggesting that further military action is necessary to push the Houthis to the negotiating table, while at the same time maintaining support for the UN-sponsored

process. When asked in October by Saudi newspaper Al-Riyadh how long the Hodeidah crisis will continue, Al-Mekhlafi [said](#) "Hodeidah is part of the war. It is the only port remaining before the Houthis and Saleh for smuggling, therefore we agreed to the UN initiative and there is a plan to liberate Hodeidah soon." In a similar vein, the army spokesman Brigadier General Abdo Abdullah Majili [said](#) "we do think that a military option would not only solve the crisis of Hodeidah, but the whole country."

When asked in an [interview](#) with Al-Quds Al-Arabi about the status of the ongoing peace plan, Hadi said in September that the Houthis rejected the plan and his government is in agreement with the coalition "that the solution will not be anything but military to reclaim Hodeidah and other cities." Accusing the Houthis and Saleh of being unwilling to abide by any agreement that would strip them of their weapons, the president said "we are determined to force them to accept the requirements of the peace process." Hadi indicated that the international community is split on its inclination toward the peace track or further military action. "Europe, for example, is with the political solution, and the American administration wants to strike Iranian interests in Yemen by supporting a military solution," Hadi said.

The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) released a policy brief titled Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios, in which it is recommended Russia play a more central role in breaking the political deadlock. "Given that Saudi Arabia and the United States are intent on continuing the war," the brief reads, the most likely scenario moving forward "would be to pass through all the typical phases [of conflict] and enter a smouldering phase," which would consolidate society and at the same time make humanitarian collapse inevitable. A second scenario is that the coalition's military operation is ended without reaching a comprehensive political settlement, but instead by the "foreign actors in Yemen [using] their own levers of power, and the situation in the country may quickly turn from hybrid warfare into a civil war, which would be fraught with no less grave consequences for the region. The third scenario, "which is best in line with the interests of Yemen and of regional security, is the cessation of hostilities and the simultaneous adoption by the UN Security Council of a new comprehensive settlement plan that would take both the lessons of the past and the present realities into account."

# Military and Security Developments

Arguing that the latter scenario would be impossible to achieve without the emergence of new powerful external actors; that the Trump administration is escalating the conflict and hampering the peace process; and that the current nature of the conflict “has nothing in common with the original provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 2216,” the RIAC made several recommendations. Among the most important, the policy brief says the lack of progress over the past two-and-a-half years suggests the international community will be responsive to the implementation of a peace process in Yemen, and “Russia commands the diplomatic and political resources and has a moral right as Yemen’s historical partner to break the deadlock in the settlement.” Additionally, it notes that since the beginning of the conflict the key parameters have changed, and as the humanitarian element of the crisis takes center stage, “this warrants a thorough revision of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, from which Russia abstained.”

**A southern parliamentary body is set to be established** and a referendum on southern secession will be held soon, Southern Transitional Council (STC) President Aidarous Al-Zubaidi [said](#). The announcement, made during a demonstration on October 14 to mark the 54th anniversary of the 1963 uprising against the British, calls for a 303-member National General Assembly, which would function as a parliament representing Yemenis from across the south. A member of the STC leadership, Adnan Al-Kaf, [clarified](#) that a vote on secession would not be rushed. First, he said, separatist supporters would seek to build their legislative capacity and increase their control over southern institutions and natural resources.

**Adeni security forces arrested ten Islah members and raided a party office** on October 11. Among those arrested from their homes were Undersecretary-General Mohammed Abdulmalik, as well as a member of Islah’s local Shoura Council and a militia commander. A security source in Aden [said](#) the arrests were in response to the car-bomb assassination of a Salafi imam in Aden the previous day.

**The US military conducted airstrikes against alleged Islamic State training camps** in Al-Baydha governorate on October 16. [According](#) to the Department of Defense, “dozens of ISIS members” were killed in the attack on two training camps, where “ISIS militants conducted endurance training and trained to conduct terror attacks with AK-47s, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers.” Although the US military did not give further details, news agencies [reported](#) this as being the first American attack against the Islamic State in Yemen. Residents of the Yakla and Al-Abl areas of Al-Baydha [told](#) Reuters that around 12 missiles were launched at militants in their area, and that the fighters were AQAP affiliates fighting the Houthis. The US has been launching airstrikes in Al-Baydha against anti-Houthi/Saleh fighters affiliated with AQAP for over three years.

**A leading resistance figure in Taiz was branded an AQAP and Islamic State supporter** on October 25. Abu Al-Abbas, formally known as Adel Abdu Fare’a, was [sanctioned](#) along with several other Yemenis by the US Treasury, in partnership with Saudi Arabia as co-chair of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC), which also includes the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman. “[Fare’a], in his role as a prominent military instructor with AQAP, reportedly commanded an armed AQAP-associated group made up of approximately 2,000 fighters,” the Treasury Department [said](#), adding that he “also served with ISIS-Y in Taiz Governorate.” The designation came as a shock to many, as Abu Al-Abbas has for long been the coalition’s main point of contact in Taiz for the distribution of funds and military equipment, which he has used to build the powerful Abu Al-Abbas Battalions. After the designation, one of his fighters [told](#) Middle East Eye that Abu Al-Abbas holds monthly meetings with the coalition leadership to help their air force target the Houthi/Saleh alliance, and said he had met them the same week he was designated.

**The “privileged” status of Concurrent Resolution 81 was removed**, meaning the US House of Representatives will not vote on a bill to withdraw the US military from participation in the Yemen war. Originally submitted on September 27, [H.Con. Res.81](#) is a bipartisan bill that calls on the president to “remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not



been authorized by congress."The argument is that congress has the sole power to declare war, but US military personnel "have been involved in hostilities between Saudi-led forces and the Houthi-Saleh alliance," including through refueling warplanes, without authorization from congress. If passed, Trump would have been directed by congress to remove military personnel within 30 days, with the exception of those engaged in counter-terrorism operations, which is covered by 9/11-era legislation.

As a concurrent resolution, the bill has to pass the House and then the Senate, but would not be required to get the president's signature. By invoking the War Powers Resolution of 1973, lawmakers intended to give the bill "privileged" status, which would require that the bill receive a vote. However, on November 1 the House [decided](#) that the War Powers Resolution does not apply to Resolution 81. Following the decision, advocacy groups [argued](#) "US refueling of Saudi and UAE planes bombing Houthi targets in Yemen meets [the criteria outlined in the War Powers Resolution], therefore by law H.Con.Res.81 should have been privileged.

## Recommended reading and viewing:

- [Discord in Yemen's North Could Be a Chance for Peace](#), writes the International Crisis Group in a piece that outlines the divisions between the GPC and the Houthis, and offers recommendations for renewing more inclusive peace talks.
- Writing for the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), Peter Salisbury considers whether the referendum declaration by Southern Transitional Council head Aidarous Al-Zubaidi marks [Another Step toward the "Erbilization" of Yemen's South?](#)
- [2 Paths for Yemen's War-Scarred Children: Combat, or Marriage](#), a New York Times article detailing the fate that has become increasingly common for Yemeni boys and girls during the war.
- For a Russian-centric look at the relationship between Russia and Saudi Arabia and how it relates to the conflict in Yemen, see: [Saudis could seek Russian bailout in Yemen](#).
- [Sudan's Controversial Rapid Support Forces Bolster Saudi Efforts in Yemen](#), but "rather than presenting a battlefield challenge to the Houthis, the Sudanese forces may be more of a public relations liability for the Saudis," writes the Jamestown Foundation.
- Arguing that American military support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemen war is counter-productive, in an opinion piece for the New York Times three members of the US House call on their government to [Stop the Unconstitutional War in Yemen](#). Offering a different view, Saudi Arabia's permanent representative to the UN, Abdallah Al-Mouallimi, argues [It's Up to the Rebels to Stop Yemen's War](#).

Compiled by: Brett Scott - DeepRoot Consulting  
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