

# South Yemen Update

*Dream no small dreams for they do not have the power to move the hearts of men*

Newsletter of the Friends of South Yemen

Issue 11 — 16th April - 15th May 2021

## Another peace initiative bites the dust as negotiators fail to understand Houthi ideology

At the beginning of May a parade of international diplomats breezed through Saudi Arabia and Oman to take part in talks aimed at finding a political solution to the war which has claimed over 250,000 lives, including more than 12,000 civilians, as well as more than 85,000 dead as a result of an ongoing famine caused by the war.

Tim Lenderking, the US Envoy on Yemen, visited Muscat and other regional capitals. He was joined by the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Senator Chris Murphy (Democrat, Connecticut), Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on the Near East, South Asia, Central Asia and Counterterrorism, and the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths. By May 5th it was obvious that another peace initiative had failed miserably.

Griffiths said that warring factions in Yemen were not close to striking a deal to end the war despite extensive diplomatic efforts. "We have been discussing these issues for over a year now and the international community has been supporting us in full force," he said in a statement. "Unfortunately, we are not where we would like to be in reaching a deal. Meanwhile, the war continues unabated and causes immense suffering to the civilian population."

The Houthis refused to meet the UN envoy and US special envoys for Yemen in Muscat. They insisted on opening Sanaa airport to unlimited destinations, including Iran, lifting restrictions on the seaport and the complete cessation of Arab coalition airstrikes before they would consider halting their deadly offensive on Marib. But the Yemeni government would not agree to this as it is convinced direct flights from Sanaa to Iran, Syria and Lebanon would enable the Houthis to funnel weapons and fighters.

The governor of Marib Sultan, Al-Arada, claimed as many as 18,000 have died since early 2020, but the number of deaths has escalated since February. The United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR said the escalation in hostilities this year alone has "led to the displacement of over 13,600

people (2,272 families) in Marib — a region that is hosting a quarter of Yemen's four million internally displaced people." In addition to stepping up their military offensive in a bid to capture Marib the Houthis have dramatically increased their cross-border attacks, targeting Saudi cities, oil refineries and key infrastructure with dozens of drones and ballistic missiles.

Elisabeth Kendall, a Yemen expert at Oxford University's Pembroke College, believes that the stream of representatives from around the globe passing through Muscat is in itself a sign of earnest attempts to craft a cease-fire agreement. But she was clear that a political agreement would only be the first step, and just like the politics behind it, the war itself has become incredibly complicated.

"Reaching a deal will be extremely difficult, but not impossible," she said. "The greater challenge will be translating any deal into peace on the ground. That may well be impossible currently."

The Chairman of Friends of South Yemen (FOSY), Dr Abdul Galil Shaif, believes the failure of the UN Security Council to bring about an end to the war in Yemen is a failure of international diplomacy. "The UN has failed so far to make any meaningful impact on ending the war because it has failed to understand the dynamics on the

ground and its strategy has never been conducive to any meaningful action. The UN resolution on Yemen is not fit for purpose as there is too much focus on the Houthis and less on the rest of the country, particularly the Southern issue. The Southern Transitional Council was not included in the latest round of negotiations. This is a big mistake as it is a powerful force on the ground in the South which has fought both the Houthis and the Internationally Recognized Government," Shaif said.

"If the UN and now the US do not change their soft diplomacy strategy and show some willingness to expend genuine diplomatic capital with a change in emphasis, a new resolution and much tougher action the chances of getting a



Martin Griffiths



Timothy Lenderking

Issue 10 of *South Yemen Update* introduced **A Road Map For Yemen**, a proposal to end Yemen's war and develop the country. An additional special issue of *South Yemen Update* has been produced to explain the proposal in much more detail. Both newsletters can be viewed online or downloaded from:

<https://www.friendsofsouthyemen.org/newsletters/newsletters.php>

solution are even less. Their needs to be a fresh approach supported by sanctions against Yemeni politicians and states that refuse to stop the fighting.”

Shaif went on to say that President Biden would not be able to achieve anything by pursuing a failed UN approach and emphasized that there has to be an obligation by the super-power to keep sea lanes open, encourage economic and cultural development, promote trade and ensure respect for human rights. All sides in the conflict will test the seriousness of US diplomacy to achieve a negotiated peace in a conflict which is destroying a whole nation and becoming a national and international shame.

He is concerned that for the time being the US will continue to see the region as a patchwork quilt of divergent and conflicting power houses, mostly with incompatible national interests. “The struggle for regional dominance will continue and states will seek alliances with outside powers, allowing them to interfere in a way that sometimes can be helpful, sometimes toxic. It will be interesting to see how the Biden administration deals with these conflicting interests while trying to stop the war fought on Yemeni soil,” Shaif said.

All peace initiatives in Yemen have failed because the negotiators try to interpret the Houthis’ motives through the pragmatic lens. That is why many analysts argue they are stepping up their military offensive to strengthen their hand in negotiations. But to make any progress in defeating the Houthis their religious ideology has to be understood.

They believe that only *Ahl al-Bayt* — a religious term that refers to the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad — have a right to rule over Muslims. The Yemeni term for *Ahl al-Bayt* is Hashemites or *Sadah* (the plural of *Sayyid*), and Houthi leaders belong to that caste. They are motivated by a

desire to reinstate the Imamate, a theocracy in which Hashemites ruled parts of northern Yemen for hundreds of years until it was overthrown in 1962. They are convinced that they have a divine right to rule Yemen and for them power sharing or participating in a democratically elected government is therefore impossible.

Nadwa Al-Dawsari, a non-resident scholar at the Washington-based Middle East Institute, summarized the problem with current diplomatic efforts to end the war, which are entirely based on the delusion that the Houthis are open to a political solution with other Yemeni forces, even when the rebel group continues to thwart these efforts time and again.

“The Houthis have stated publicly and repeatedly that they want an unconditional end to the Saudi-led coalition’s military intervention and the withdrawal of its forces from Yemen. That is their definition of ‘ending the war in Yemen’. They are determined to take Marib and the rest of Yemen. The Russians, Omanis, Qataris, Europeans, and the UN combined do not have the influence to convince them to change course. Over the past six years, Saudi military intervention has failed to weaken the Houthis militarily and to compel the rebel group to come to the negotiation table in good faith. While Iran does not have a command-and-control relationship with the Houthis, the rebel group is part and parcel of Iran’s expansionist agenda. The two have their eyes on the prize, which is bringing the region under the control of Iran and its proxies, and they are in it for the long haul. Failing to recognize that will only lead to misguided policies that will likely contribute to prolonging the conflict in Yemen and fail to address the broader security threat posed by Iran in the region.”



STC President Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi

### Southern Transition Council pushes for restoration of separate state

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) announced in a statement by its leader Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi, that the “restoration” of the southern state is nearing.

Al-Zubaidi said that the STC “opened all doors in front of the people’s cause and the extraction of the adversaries’ recognition of a fully sovereign independent federal state” that is based on the pre-unity border of 21 May 1990. He added that the STC will refuse any unilateral decisions taken by the Yemeni government.

According to STC sources, the Council joined the government in signing the Riyadh agreement to open a pathway for its goal of restoring the southern Yemeni state, and that the agreement with the government does not entail backing down from its main goal of the restoration of that state.

### FOSY Road Map well received

FOSY’s road map for ending the war in Yemen and ensuring a lasting peace and development of the country has been well received by British MPs and the European Union. The road map has been sent to President Biden, the UN Secretary General, the American and UN special envoys on Yemen and the British Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa. The full text of the road map was published on the front page of Adenonline and on the website of the Southern Transitional Council. FOSY’s Chairman Dr Abdul Galil Shaif introduced the road map at an international zoom conference on the current situation in Yemen and the way forward organised by Geneva-based Euro Med Monitor. (Click here for a special issue of FOSY’s newsletter on the roadmap).

### Keynotes from “The First Road Map to End Yemen’s War” (2021-2030)

The first stage (2021-2022) focuses on a permanent ceasefire and the imposition of sanctions on anyone profiting from the war. Economic development is given precedence over humanitarian aid with an international body supporting the development of the North and South, and ensuring accountability in the use of the Central Bank funds.

The second stage (2022-2025) involves a two-region solution: one region in the North and the other in the South, each with its own parliament, political parties, executive, ministries, legislative and judicial powers, budget, internal security forces, and police. A central administration will be responsible for defence, foreign policy, and the allocation of an equitable share of national revenue to the two regions.

The third stage (2025-2030) involves a national referendum, in both the North and the South, held to decide whether or not to opt for two independent states (as was the case before 1990) or continue with the two-region solution.



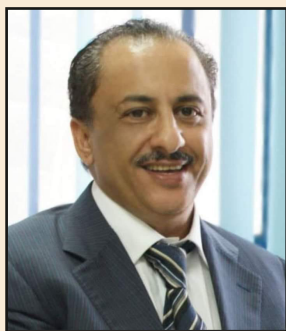
## CAN A TWO-STATE SOLUTION IN YEMEN END THE CIVIL WAR?

Nihan Duran of *Politics Today* interviewed FOSY Chairman Dr Abdul Galil Shaif

Friends of South Yemen (FOSY) has developed a three-staged road map to end the war in Yemen, where there are numerous political, economic, and security issues at stake, as well as an ongoing unimaginable humanitarian crisis. Nihan Duran interviewed Dr Abdul Galil Shaif, the chairman of FOSY and the former chairman of the Aden Free Zone Public Authority in Yemen, on the current state of war in Yemen and the way forward to finding a peaceful solution.

***Before going into details of the three-stage road map, could you please explain the current state of the war in Yemen?***

First, this is not just a war between Yemenis. It is also a proxy war at a regional and international level on Yemeni soil. All the partners in this war are self-imposed, and I think it is now obvious that there is no military solution to this conflict. The only solution is a peaceful resolution, and our immediate objective as Friends of South Yemen, a grassroots, self-financed, and independent organization, is to bring an immediate end to the war through a military ceasefire. Otherwise, it is going to be very difficult to find a peaceful solution as people continue to be displaced and killed.



Dr Abdul Galil Shaif

It is evident that so far, the international community and the diplomatic efforts have failed miserably to materialize or bring a peaceful solution to the war in Yemen. We have 85,000 children who have died in this war among the 250,000 people killed and the three million displaced. Fifteen million people are facing starvation, which could be one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world. The economy has been damaged immensely. GDP in 2015 was 43 billion dollars. In 2020 it was 21 billion dollars, while the population has grown from 25 million to 30 million. It is unbelievable in these economic circumstances how the people of Yemen are surviving.

***Why do you think previous efforts have failed to bring an end to the war?***

Most of the proposals in the past have been short-term. They were only concerned with how to bring about a ceasefire, without any reflection on how to move forward when the fighting has stopped. But in order to find a peaceful solution that will work, we need to understand the different regions, players, and their positions in this war.

The south of Yemen has been liberated from Houthi control in 2015 and there is now a power sharing government mediated by Riyadh between the legitimate government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and the north has almost been taken over by the Houthis, who are trying to expand their influence and territory. Our main objective is to bring an immediate end to the killing fields in Yemen and to do that, we need to make sure that we do something about what is happening now in Marib.

***Why do the cities of Hodeidah and Marib play such a critical role?***

If the Houthis take over the rich oil region of Marib, it will

make the peaceful solution much more difficult and complex to implement. It will also give the Houthis the upper hand militarily politically and economically as they could be on the verge of taking over Marib, the last stronghold of the legitimate government of Hadi, which many depend on for oil and gas resources in that region.

Taking over Marib will strengthen the Houthis and play into their expansionist policies. This could become very dangerous for the South and the Houthis pursuing this policy may decide to take over the South again through Shabwa. And, I think, such a development is not in the interest of anybody since if they could, the Houthis would take over the whole of Yemen – as they tried to do in 2015. Allowing the Houthis to take over the country will be a huge disaster for the whole of Yemen considering that this is a self-imposed unelected group that does not want to share power with anyone because they believe they have a God-given right to rule Yemen as they see themselves as descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. They are also a sectarian group who are creating sectarian divisions that did not previously exist in Yemen. We need to be aware that the more land they take and the more influence they have, the stronger they become as a group at the international negotiating table. The intensification of the war and Houthi expansionist policy gives them no motivation to engage in international negotiations.

***How do you evaluate the recent development of US President Joe Biden taking the Iran-backed Houthis off the country's terror list?***

I believe that the Houthis are a power and a part of Yemen's reality that we cannot ignore, and therefore they have every right to be involved in a peaceful, negotiated settlement. I also think that being taken off the list of terrorists by the United States has emboldened them. They have seen this as an opportunity to advance into Marib.

I believe that the peaceful solution is the only way forward, but it needs a tough and consistent diplomatic effort. I think that an international intervention at this point is critical. I hope that US President Biden is going to push forward a strong diplomatic effort, as was his campaign promise, because the international interest in that region is huge. That is why I think that the international and regional partners of Yemen have a huge role to play.

Biden seems serious in his efforts, but in order to succeed he needs to do something different than the UN envoy and the other governments involved. The Biden administration needs to introduce a powerful force into Yemen's politics to make sure that the Houthis, the legitimate government, and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) understand that the United States is serious about bringing a fresh impetus to the peace process. However, in order for US diplomacy to be effective the US would need to use all its leverage not just on the regional powers but on the Houthis in particular.

***What do you propose in your road map for the peace negotiations in Yemen that was not properly addressed in previous or other current approaches?***

I believe, as Friends of South Yemen, we are putting forward a solution that will allow every side, the local and regional players as well as the international community, to win

## CHRONOLOGY

**Apr 16th:** UN envoy Martin Griffiths describes “dangerous signs” that a Houthi-rebel assault in Marib province is growing fiercer and calls for a Ramadan respite to the fighting.

- The Houthis use drones and missiles to attack targets in the southern Saudi city of Jazan, including one belonging to Aramco where a fire was caused.

**Apr 17th:** Clashes between government forces and Houthi fighters near Marib continue to escalate on various fronts, with at least 96 people killed in two days.

- The UAE is constructing a military barracks on Socotra.

- The Yemeni government says it approved the docking of more fuel ships at Hodeidah, which is held by the Houthis, as the country grapples with shortages exacerbating a dire humanitarian crisis.

**Apr 18th:** Saudi Arabia and Iran hold secret talks over the Yemen conflict.

- Officers of the US Marine Corps arrive at Al-Ghaydah International Airport in Mahrah province, eastern Yemen.

**Apr 19th:** Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Owaishek, the assistant secretary general for political affairs and negotiations at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), meets Sweden’s envoy to Yemen Peter Semneby.

- KSrelief launches Ramadan Food Baskets Distribution Project in Mahrah governorate.

**Apr 20th:** The Houthis claim they are on the verge of capturing Marib.

- The participants in Marib’s first conference for Human Rights urge the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organization owing to their war crimes.

**Apr 21st:** Iranian support for the Houthis is “significant” and “lethal”, the special envoy for Yemen says during a US State Department briefing.

- A COVID vaccination campaign begins in government-controlled areas of Yemen.

**Apr 22nd:** The Houthis launch another successful drone attack against King Khalid Airbase in Saudi Arabia’s Southwestern province of Asir in retaliation for the blockade against Yemen.

- Britain’s Campaign Against Arms Trade is granted permission for its legal challenge against the UK government’s decision to renew arms sales for use in the war in Yemen to proceed to the High Court.

**Apr 23rd:** A British official acknowledges that the UK government had made no attempt to assess the impact of a controversial decision to cut aid to Yemen by two-thirds.

- Iran supplied the Houthis with weapons technology that helped the militants to attack Saudi Arabia, according to Rostam Ghasemi, a senior official in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iran’s former Economy Minister.

**Apr 24th:** Yemeni government

something. Suppressing the other side has not worked. The past six years have demonstrated an international diplomatic failure to stop the war. What we suggest is to bring a political-diplomatic solution with the heavyweights, such as the United States, Britain, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran, who would play an effective role in influencing the Houthis, the legitimate government, and the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

Yemen might not be a priority for Western countries now, but it will be a priority in the future if extremist elements take over. If geographic areas in Yemen end up ungoverned, Al Qaeda, Daesh (ISIS), and other forms of extremists may fill that vacuum. Therefore, it is in the interest of the international community to bring this war to an end.

We encourage all actors involved to have a look at our proposal seriously because we are confident that our proposal provides a peaceful solution. We also believe that if people have a road map, a vision with regard to their future in Yemen, they will eventually start settling their differences through proposed peaceful solutions.

***The first stage of the Road Map (2021-2022) primarily focuses on an immediate ceasefire and a meaningful series of negotiations with the actors involved. A transitional government could be set up for one year paving the way for a two-region solution and ensuring the provision of essential services. What does the second stage of the proposal entail?***

After we manage to resolve the issue of ceasefires during the first stage (2021-2022), we can move towards the second stage (2022-2025), which proposes a two-region solution. While President Hadi may continue to be the president of Yemen, the two regions, one in the north and one in the south, will have their own parliaments, political parties, ministries, legislative and judicial powers, budget, internal security forces, and police. A central administration will be responsible for defence, foreign policy, and the allocation of an equitable share of national revenue to the two regions. There should also be national reconciliation within the Northerners and the Southerners.

***What is the key motivation for your proposal to have a two-region solution in Yemen?***

If you look at the North, there are different actors and they are all fighting each other. If you look at the South, there are still skirmishes, even though there is the Riyadh Agreement. If we can achieve a reconciliation among the political divisions in the South and North, we would have extremely positive results. I believe that having two national conferences on both sides would lead to much more trust and understanding between the warring factions in each region.

The two-region solution would also give them time to build the country, the institutions, and the infrastructure, which have been destroyed during the war. Yemen is not a poor country; it is poorly governed. Yemen can be in a better situation. It has almost everything that a country requires to become a great nation. It has rich resources of oil, gas, fisheries, beaches, and tourism.



I would rather have two states live in peace side-by-side than have one state fighting within itself which is what we have had since 1990. It does not matter whether we have one state or two states or two regions. What matters is that people begin to understand that there is a potential win-win situation for everybody. That is why the two-region solution is a coherent strategy, which the international community should support with its diplomatic efforts.

***The second stage chiefly focuses on the political organization and institutionalization in South and North Yemen. How does this transitional stage relate to the third and final stage (2025-2030) that should determine the future of Yemen?***

I believe that once we have the two-region solution running for a couple of years, eventually during the third stage (2025-2030), we could have a national referendum, one in the North and one in the South, where people can decide in each region whether to opt for two independent states (as was the case before 1990) or continue with the two-region solution.



### ***What other challenges or opportunities should we expect with regard to the feasibility of the road map to end the war in Yemen?***

The failure to reach an international peaceful settlement in Yemen is a failure of the whole world. Fifteen million people are facing one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world. There is a new generation of young people who have not been to school for the last six or seven years. This crushes the ambition of the children in Yemen, who should aspire to be doctors, engineers, or teachers. Instead, today, we have children carrying guns because they think that the war is a solution to their problems. We need to reverse this psychology. We need to make sure that people think we can make peace possible.

We believe that our peaceful solution is a real opportunity for the Houthis, the STC, and the Internationally Recognized Government to get together around the negotiation table and pursue a peaceful solution that will break divisions among them, the people, the region, and the international community.

### **Latest Publication from the \*Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies**

## **Foreign actors in Yemen: the history, the politics and the future**

Foreign actors have a long history in Yemen. From the first Zaidi imam who arrived in the country in the ninth century to the regional military intervention led by Saudi Arabia in 2015, outsiders have often altered the trajectory of domestic politics in Yemen. This has been particularly pronounced throughout the 20th century, when modern communication technology, speed of travel and air power allowed outside powers, such as the British empire in south Yemen, to more directly influence and impact change on the ground in Yemen. But perhaps never have foreign actors had as large and influential a role in Yemen as they do in the midst of the ongoing war.

Saudi Arabia – a hereditary kingdom – took the lead in overseeing Yemen's democratic transition from Saleh's rule in the wake of the Arab Spring. Three years later, in 2015, Saudi Arabia felt compelled to intervene militarily in Yemen in an attempt to restore the internationally recognized government of President Abdoroba Mansour Hadi. A war Saudi Arabia thought would last six weeks has now lasted six years, with no end in sight. In many ways, Yemen is much more divided in 2021 than it was in 2015. It is far from certain whether Yemen will be reconstituted as a single state in the near- to medium-term future.

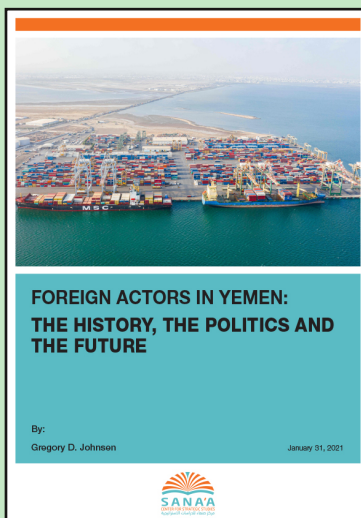
Along with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran, all of whom have played outsized roles in Yemen's recent history, the United States remains a key actor both for what it has done in Yemen as well as what it left undone. The United States has backed the Saudi-led coalition's military intervention in Yemen, providing logistical and intelligence support, even as the US maintains that it is not a party to the conflict. Perhaps more importantly, the United States has failed to use its diplomatic influence with Saudi Arabia to influence or change the current trajectory of the war.

Given the current realities on the ground as well as the numerous foreign actors involved in the current conflict, Yemen is unlikely to be able to chart its own course in the near future. This paper does not propose a solution to the current predicament. Rather, it explains how Yemen got to this point by illustrating the roles and interests of Yemen's many foreign actors.

To read the paper, click here:

<https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/13042>

**\*The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.**



officials and local human rights activists accuse the Houthis of brainwashing and training primary school students for war.

- The Yemeni army downs three drones launched by the Houthis towards Marib and Taiz.

**Apr 25th:** The Houthis make important gains in the battle for the government's last northern stronghold, advancing close to the centre of Marib city despite heavy casualties.

- The Internationally Recognized Government accuses the Houthis of following the Iranian agenda and blocking peace efforts.

- Houthi forces in Sanaa seal the offices of Yemen Digital Media, a private media services provider, preventing journalists and staff from entering.

**Apr 26th:** Yemen's Information Minister denies reports that the Houthis have captured the Al-Kassara area of Marib.

- The Yemeni army and the Houthis carry out a new prisoner swap in Marib.

**Apr 27th:** Yemen government forces thwart a massive Houthi attack west of Marib city and reinforce their positions as they defend their last northern stronghold, two military commanders and an official said.

- The UN opens a humanitarian air bridge to Marib.

**Apr 28th:** The governor of the battleground Marib province rallies troops to defend it against a Houthi advance amid potentially decisive fighting for the provincial capital.

- Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman says Riyadh is ready to support the Houthis economically if the movement expresses readiness to stop attacking the kingdom.

**Apr 29th:** Agricultural irrigation using solar pumps is seriously depleting water resources in Yemen, according to a paper by the Berlin-based Energy Access and Development Programme (EADP).

- The Houthis carry out another drone strike on a major air base in Saudi Arabia's Southern region of Asir, reportedly in retaliation for the kingdom's military strikes and blockade against Yemen.

**Apr 30th:** Timothy Lenderking, the US Envoy to Yemen, visits Saudi Arabia and Oman to discuss efforts to end the civil war and ease the flow of aid.-The Yemeni government calls on Tehran to prove its credibility in supporting peace efforts for the country by withdrawing Hassan Erlo its representative in Sanaa.

**May 1st:** The Houthis repress dozens of Ramadan-inspired charity campaigns while completely disregarding poverty and famine levels hitting unprecedented highs in the areas they run.

- Tim Lenderking meets Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman to discuss a comprehensive political solution to Yemen's civil war.

**May 2nd:** Floods sweep through parts of Yemen amid heavy seasonal rains,

leaving at least 13 people dead.

- Forces aligned with Yemen's Southern Transitional Council drive the Houthis out of the strategic Al Fakher region, depriving them of an essential source of revenue.

**May 3rd:** Eleven Houthi prisoners are released.

- Saudi air defences intercept and destroy an explosive-laden drone launched by Houthis from Yemen towards the Saudi city of Khamis Mushayt.

**May 4th:** Yemen's World Heritage Site, the Old City of Sanaa, is under increasing threat of being carved out into an exclusive stronghold for the Houthis and moulded into an epicentre for sectarianism.

- The Houthis attack military positions in Najran Airport and King Khalid Air Base in southwest Saudi Arabia.

- Over 22 Yemeni NGOs call on the Houthis to unconditionally release journalists detained in their prisons, including those sentenced to death.

- King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center distributes shelter aid for displaced people in Al-Azhoor camp, Saada governorate, including 80 tents and 240 blankets, benefiting 400 people.

- Severe flooding kills four people in Tarim city, one of the historical sites in Wadi Hadramawt, and threatens historic mud brick buildings.

**May 5th:** The Houthis fire two ballistic missiles towards Marib.

- A bipartisan group of US senators presses the State Department to push international donors to address a \$2.5 billion shortfall in assistance to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

- King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) distributes 11,900 packs of dates to needy people in a number of districts of Aden governorate, benefiting 11,900 families.

**May 6th:** Yemen's Prime Minister visits the battleground city of Marib in a bid to boost morale among troops as the Houthi offensive to capture the oil-rich region continues.

- The UN envoy, Martin Griffiths, says a week-long round of talks in Saudi Arabia and Oman involving President Biden's envoy to Yemen, Tim Lenderking, failed to make progress, as the Houthi offensive on Marib continues.

**May 7th:** Thousands of Yemenis march in Sanaa to mark International Quds (Jerusalem) Day.

- The humanitarian situation in Yemen is "falling off a cliff", with 16 million people going hungry and a \$2.5 billion hole in the global aid budget, a UN spokesman says.

**May 8th:** Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which have been fighting in the ranks of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, have sent some 120 Syrian mercenaries to Yemen to fight on the side of the Houthis, Anadolu News Agency reported.

- The UAE is accused of operating trips and direct flights for tourist groups

## COVID IN YEMEN:

### International Zoom Conference Discusses Challenges



"Resources are limited and cannot cope with the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Yemen. Receiving help in time is critical for us." That was the message from Dr Qasem Buhaibeh, Yemen's Minister of Public Health and Populations, who addressed a recent international Yemen zoom conference of health care professionals.

The conference, *Yemen Covid 19-response*, was organized by Health Professionals for UK, and the Yemen Special Interest Group (SIG), Faculty of Public Health UK to raise awareness of the COVID-19 second wave in Yemen and identify issues and needs facing the Yemeni health system in fighting against the virus.

On April 9th the health minister announced that occupancy in intensive care units in quarantine centres had reached maximum capacity because of a sharp increase in the number of cases. On May 7th cases of COVID-19 totalled 6,426 and deaths 1,265. This is likely to be an underestimate owing to a severe lack of testing facilities and the questionable reliability of figures from the government and the Houthis who control most of the north of the country. The mortality rate of 27 per cent is one of the highest in the world and five times the global average.

One of the greatest challenges in fighting COVID-19 is the collapsing healthcare system which is buckling as the coronavirus pandemic hits an infrastructure already devastated by more than six years of war. The ongoing conflict means that many cases are untraceable. Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine forecast that as many as 11 million could be infected, leading to 62,000-85,000 deaths. A report from the non-governmental organization MedGlobal and the Center for Global Health at the University of Illinois, USA said that 97 healthcare workers had died from COVID-19, citing data collected by medical students and local doctors. Around 18 per cent of the country's 333 districts have no doctors, and many of those who are still working have been unpaid for nearly two years. MedGlobal said that there were now 10 healthcare workers for every 10,000 people, less than half the World Health Organization benchmark.

All the speakers who addressed the conference drew attention to the shortage of medical and PPE equipment, lack of IC beds, lack of trained IC staff, the threat from other diseases such as cholera and diphtheria, malnutrition, food insecurity and the problem of Internally Displaced People with a weak immune system who are at great risk of contracting COVID-19.

The first wave of the virus affected Yemen from April to August 2020. On 10 April 2020, Yemen recorded its first laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case in the Southern governorate of Hadhramaut. By the end of May, cases and deaths had been reported in the governorates of Aden, Taiz, Lahj and Sanaa. By June 2020 coronavirus spread across the country, pushing Yemen's ruined health care system to the brink.

Many hospitals closed for fear of the virus, or for lack of staff and personal protective equipment. The second wave started in March 2021 on the sixth anniversary of the start of the civil war. The recorded cases of Covid in the first two weeks of March were 22 times higher than the number of cases in the first two weeks of February. On March 31st the Internationally Recognized Government declared a health emergency in the areas under its control.

Dr Buhaibeh told the conference that in Aden and the southern governorates there are 16 isolation centres. "We started to provide them with equipment but resources are limited and we cannot cope with the second wave of the pandemic. We have a shortage of trained qualified IC staff. Because of the war many of our qualified Yemeni doctors travelled abroad or went to work in private clinics attracted by good salaries.



Dr Qasem Buhaibeh



We have shortage in the IC equipment and we have shortage in oxygen. There is also a major problem in IDP camps in Marib where there are limited facilities. Yemen is also receiving many refugees from Somalia with weak immunity.”

Some two million people are internally displaced in Yemen, according to the latest figures from UNHCR. Nearly 90 per cent of those uprooted have been displaced for more than a year. The UN estimates that some 24 million people in Yemen—nearly 80 per cent of the entire population—require some form of humanitarian assistance and protection. There are 125 camps and between one and three million displaced people in the Marib area, but already 15,000 people have been forced to leave the camps since fighting began in the region in February.



*Dr Adham R Ismail Abdel-Moneim*

Dr Adham R Ismail Abdel-Moneim, the WHO representative to Yemen, said that most of the reported cases of COVID-19 are in the south of the country, home to 30 per cent of the population. There are no reports of the number of cases from the north. Last December WHO conducted a survey in Aden by collecting samples from almost 2,000 randomly selected individuals. In Aden with a population of one million 27 per cent already had antibodies.

Almost 250,000 have been infected from the first wave.

Dr Abdel-Moneim also spoke about major funding problems. Six million dollars are needed to respond to the cases on the ground. “At least £3 million is needed in the coming months - \$2 million are needed in June and July and the remaining \$1 million is needed before September. The Saudi Development Bank, the Korean government, the King Salman Relief Fund, the UN organisation OCHA and the World Bank have contributed generously but we need to mobilise new donors.”

Professor Maha Al-Rabat, the WHO's Special Envoy on COVID-19, emphasized the need for proper public health measures. “The stopping of activities is only for a certain period. But this is not a long-term response or intervention. The communities have to be empowered to work for the benefit of the country. We need to involve the people themselves. It is not just the government that has to respond. The whole society has to respond.”



*Dr Maha Al-Rabat*

Professor Neil Squires, International Registrar for the Faculty of Public Health said that the faculty has a Yemen Special Interest Group. “We work on advocacy against cuts in the aid budget which has led to a reduction in humanitarian support. This is having a real impact on Yemen. Our collective voices need to be raised against this. We need to promote the equitable distribution of vaccines to make sure that all countries particularly the poorest and most vulnerable have access.” This year the UK has pledged at least £87 million, down from a promise of £160 million in 2020 and £200 million in 2019.



*Professor Neil Squires*

Professor Squires drew attention to the fact that some health workers in Yemen have not received salaries. “They are working in remote and difficult situations. It is difficult for them to get access to learning and development materials in order to maintain professional standards. Members of the faculty have been working to try to identify ways in which we can continue to support our professional colleagues and build peer to peer linkages which are incredibly important. Individual health workers appreciate one to one communication and it can really lift their spirits in the absence of any external reward.”

from Abu Dhabi to Socotra without the permission of the Yemeni authorities.

**May 9th:** The battle for Marib claims the lives of more than 1,400 10-15-year-olds recruited by the Houthis between 2014 and 2020.

- The US Navy announces it seized an arms shipment hidden aboard a vessel in the Arabian Sea, the latest such interdiction by naval forces amid the war in Yemen.

**May 10th:** A Yemeni government base in Marib is attacked.

- Dozens of Yemeni activists, politicians and journalists have signed an online petition to force the Iran-backed Houthis to release the abducted Yemeni model Entesar Al-Hammadi and her colleagues.

**May 11th:** Chris Murphy, chairman of the Senate's Middle East panel, says a US delegation pressed the Omani government during a trip to the region last week to do more to convince the Houthis to join a proposed Saudi ceasefire.

- The Arab coalition says it intercepted and shot down a booby-trapped drone in the southern region launched by the Houthi militia.

**May 12th:** At least 65 fighters have been killed over the past two days in the battle for Marib as the Houthis advance towards the city centre.

- The leader of Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement voices full support for the oppressed Palestinian people in their struggles against the occupying entity, saying that the Yemenis are closely coordinating with the resistance axis over the latest developments.

- The Yemen Data Project finds that the Saudi-led coalition has conducted at least 22,766 air raids in Yemen and up to 65,982 individual air strikes since it began its bombing campaign in 2015, with roughly a third hitting non-military sites, including schools, residential areas and hospitals.

**May 13th:** The UN envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, says his efforts to end the country's six-year conflict were not gaining traction. He will leave his post soon to replace Mark Lowcock as the UN's humanitarian chief and emergency relief co-ordinator.

- The U.N. Security Council calls for an immediate halt to fighting in Yemen saying that only a lasting cease-fire and political settlement can end the six-year conflict.

**May 14th:** The Coalition intercepts cross-border drone and ballistic missile attacks launched by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia.

- More than 70 US lawmakers send a letter to President Joe Biden urging him to “publicly pressure” Saudi Arabia into ending its “unconscionable” blockade on Yemen.

**May 15th:** The head of the Houthi Supreme Revolutionary Committee stresses that Saudi Arabia should stop bombing and invading Yemen and do so against the Zionist regime, which is bombing Palestine.



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