

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

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Southerners protest against government's failings

They may disagree about almost everything, but the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) united in suppressing protests which erupted throughout South Yemen last month.

Hundreds of people poured into the streets of Southern cities demanding basic services such as electricity and water and the steadying of Yemen's riyal. Salaries, which are in arrears, are insufficient for the people to buy food and basic necessities and poverty is widespread as both the IRG and the STC struggle with a complete collapse of services in the areas they control. In Aden government buildings and cars were set alight.

The Yemeni currency has collapsed to more than 1,120 to the US dollar in the southern provinces, making food prices prohibitively expensive for many in a nation where 80 per cent of the population are reliant on aid. In 2015 the riyal stood at around 215 to the dollar.

Ammar Thabit, a teacher in Aden, is struggling to feed his family as food prices rise daily. He took part in the protests raging about the insecurity that the spiralling currency and his salary – equivalent to \$60 per month – bring.

"No one can stop us demanding our rights. The population is now in the streets and it is hunger that forces us to do this," Thabit said in an interview with *Middle East Eye*. "Both the STC and the government are behind our suffering. They only care about their interests leaving people to starve to death. Not one of them found a solution to this economic disaster."

The IRG's security forces fired live bullets at peaceful demonstrators in Mukalla, Hadhramaut Governorate, killing Salem Bugshan. STC forces killed a young man, Ziad Zaher, in Aden and wounded a number of other demonstrators.

A state of emergency was subsequently declared in Aden and the governorates the STC controls on September 16th. The STC President Aidarus Al-Zubaidi said in a televised address that "elements seeking to derail legitimate protests and distort their demands would not be tolerated."

Nour Olwan from Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor said the declaration of the state of emergency by the STC would pave the way for a worse phase in suppressing demonstrators and restricting freedoms.

With the escalation of the demonstrations, the Governor of Hadhramaut, Major General Faraj Al-Bohsani, said the Houthis were planning to create chaos in the governorate,



Protests in South Yemen (Pic: Middle East Online)

and announced a partial curfew from 8pm to 6am until further notice.

Instead of doing their best to find a way out of the quagmire the IRG and the STC have used the protests as an opportunity for scoring points against each other. Mukhtar Al-Rahbi, an adviser to the Information Minister, accused the STC of kidnapping dozens of activists in Aden. The STC tweeted: "Despite the repression and terror that the demonstrators were subjected to in Shabwah they came out and demanded the expulsion of the

occupying Muslim Brotherhood militias and called for the return of the UAE-backed Shabwani elite forces." The STC called for further protests "against the occupation of the government of President Hadi."

The unrest has drawn international concern. The ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK and the US held a press conference in Riyadh and expressed concern about the deteriorating economic situation. But they have done little to ensure that the IRG which they support has a viable budget to provide essential services and revitalize the stagnating economy.

The situation in the South is going from bad to worse. In March hundreds of protestors stormed the presidential palace in Aden over similarly bad living conditions, the non payment of salaries to government employees, and the corruption of the IRG. There have also been clashes between STC and IRG forces.

On September 28th Yemen's Prime Minister Abdul Malik Saeed and the IRG cabinet returned to Aden from Saudi Arabia for the third time in the hope of reviving quick and full implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, and to address the financial meltdown that has paralyzed the country. But there is still no financial or political programme.

The Chairman of Friends of South Yemen Abdul Galil Shaif emphasized that the IRG and the STC are reaching a critical moment. "The Houthis are fast approaching Marib and Shabwa simultaneously but the IRG and STC are unable to work together. They must deal with a very damaging economic crisis; rising poverty; and political disillusionment. The coming period could be extremely painful, not only for the most vulnerable, but also for the ruling political class of all orientations. Unless they are careful and work together in accordance with the Riyadh agreement, public anger will significantly increase and lead to social unrest and the possibility of much more Houthi control."

FOSY writes to new UN Special Envoy for Yemen

On 19th September FOSY sent the following letter to the recently appointed UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg:

The war in Yemen is a terrible human and economic tragedy, Yemen is struggling with profound economic and social challenges, aggravated by a pointless seven-year war and a pandemic, but even more so by the shortage of political will by its leaders to adopt and implement meaningful political negotiations and economic reforms the people are calling for.

Your appointment by the UN as the special new envoy to Yemen is a key moment for international policymakers to bring these leaders and the regional partners together to bring this war to an immediate end and address the severe economic and social crisis which is driving the entire country towards the abyss. It is also a moment for the international community to stand by the country and its people – with urgent humanitarian assistance, and support for the economy to pull Yemen from the brink of complete economic collapse. The suffering of the people of Yemen is difficult to comprehend.

Over the past 12 months, Friends of South Yemen (FOSY) have been engaged intensely with policy makers and state authorities in a number of forums, as well as with civil society and the international community, on setting out a peace plan

aimed at addressing the deepening political crisis in the country and the shape of the state and its political structures, strengthening governance and accountability, and restoring confidence in the economy.

Unfortunately these discussions have yet to yield results. We are ready to support you as the special envoy and redouble our efforts. But we need unity of purpose at the international and regional level and an accelerated peace process that allows all the partners to be properly engaged with the process including equal southern representation.

Soft diplomacy in our opinion with the Yemeni local leaders does not work or yield results as they have become beneficiaries of the war. In our opinion they are less interested in peace and more interested in prolonging the conflict. Pressure by the international community to humiliate them with travel bans and a freezing of their international bank accounts will go a long way to forcing them to find a solution to the conflict. We look forward to meeting you soon to discuss our peace plan, which is attached to this letter, in more detail.

Yours Sincerely
Dr Abdul Galil Shaif
Chair of FOSY

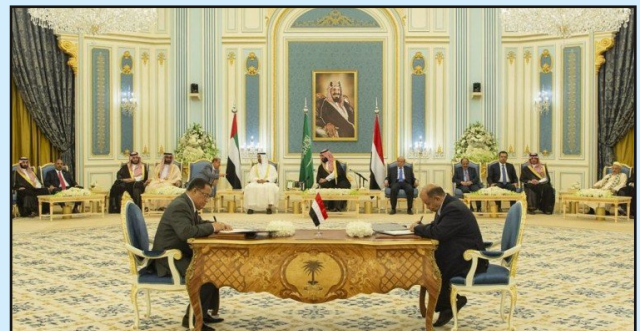
Regional states need to make Yemen a shared foreign policy priority

FOSY's Chairman Dr Abdul Galil Shaif addressed the Gulf Council in London about the role of regional states in Yemen. He emphasized that the regional states engaged in the war in Yemen need to make Yemen a shared foreign policy priority and to overcome their competing foreign policy approaches to the country and thus reduce Iranian influence in Yemen and in the region generally. Regional states should:

- *Reinvigorate* the UN political track and use it to reinforce a unified policy towards a peace process rather than entrench competing agendas. The Saudi and Emirati governments should pursue a joint policy approach in dealing with the Yemeni crisis and be open-minded about solutions to the crisis. The main priority should be to end this pointless war with immediate effect.

- *Focus* on protecting their core interests in Yemen and in the region generally by ending the conflict and creating a reliable local partner or partners, and preserve their unified influence. Thinking through the interest of ordinary Yemenis does not have to be at the expense of their own regional interest.

- *Significantly increase* the pressure on the UN process and make it work more effectively, and take a more hands-on approach within the UN structures to block and isolate local domestic and international spoilers, refocusing their political track on unifying their own objectives, and supporting any solution that genuinely takes into account the military and political situation on the ground.



Yemen's President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (right) signs the Riyadh Agreement aimed at ending the conflict between the Internationally Recognized Government he heads and the Southern Transitional Council to an end. (Pic: STC)

- *Ensure stabilization* of the political situation in Yemen and provide technical expertise and diplomatic support to bring the warring factions together for reconciliation and strengthen current state institutions, humanitarian assistance and development reconstruction projects and accountability mechanisms, which are needed to ensure a new government can successfully function.

- *Have a plan* with a clear time scale to bring Yemen into the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as an equal partner with a genuine economic package that deals with current economic collapse and create an opportunity for sustainable peace in the region.

A British perspective on the way forward for Yemen

Michael Aron, a former British ambassador to Yemen, analyzed the country's intractable problems at a recent lecture delivered to the British-Yemeni Society. The lecture is the third in a series on winding down the war.

Aron began his lecture with an analysis of the current situation and the position of the main parties in the conflict.

Saudi Arabia has been ready to end this conflict since September 2019 when the Houthis attacked its oil fields. The fact that the Iranians were able to attack the major oil facilities of a neighbouring state and get away with it demonstrated very clearly to Saudi Arabia that while their objectives in the war in Yemen were laudable – the restoration of the legitimate government – it posed great risks, and since then it has been clear that the Crown Prince and the Saudi establishment have been working to end the conflict, on their terms. Saudi Arabia is looking at what happened in Afghanistan and drawing conclusions which will make them even more cautious.

The Houthis are intent on continuing the war. Their objective is to take Marib. They would not necessarily stop after taking Marib and what has happened in Afghanistan is likely to encourage them to continue fighting. They use the pretext that they are under a blockade. It is a pretext because Saudi Arabia, the UN, the USA and the Omanis have separately and collectively made it clear to them that an end to the blockade is on the table and would be part of the ending of the war.

The Yemeni government is in disarray politically and economically. The failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement is a serious blow. The government and the Southern Transitional Council are failing to implement it and this has a negative effect on the position of the government, and the only party who benefits from this is the Houthis. There is no chance of successfully negotiating an end to the war that is in the interests of those who care about Yemen without those parties uniting, and regrettably we are not seeing that.

The UAE has a role and they have residual support for the STC and remain suspicious of Islah and what they perceive as the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. They profess support for Saudi Arabia but they have taken actions which go counter to the interests of the coalition.

Oman has a very positive role to play under the new Sultan and the new foreign minister. It is the first time they have gone to Sanaa to engage with the Houthis directly with a view to promoting the peace process. So far this has not borne fruit but it was their first attempt; further attempts should be encouraged.

The Iranian foreign ministry claims to be supportive of peace but the foreign ministry does not set Iranian foreign policy, and the actions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and those who control policy go counter to Iranian claims to be pro peace. Their support for the Houthi military effort is extremely unfortunate.

American statements that Yemen was going to be a top priority for them were very welcome and their engagement is going to be vital in going forward. Taking the Houthis off the terrorist list and announcing curbs on weapons supplies to Saudi Arabia both have the effect of emboldening the Houthis, but overall having an American administration which is really determined to promote peace is vital for the changes of success.

The UK is the pen holder for Yemen in New York. It is very engaged with the parties on the ground, talks to all the parties and supports the role of the UN.

The Houthis are the main obstacles to peace. They are refusing to talk to the UK (they may be talking to other parties). The lesson from Afghanistan is that the failure of the coalition was the failure to create a viable alternative. The Yemeni players, the regional players and the international players have three things to focus on.

The first thing to do is to ensure that it is clear to everybody that it is the Houthis who are the problem. A lot of people believe there is a war because the Saudis are bombing Yemen with British and American weapons. It is a lot more complicated than that and the Saudis are trying to end the war. It is really important the Houthi myth – that this war is being imposed on them and if everybody would just accept their method of government and leave them to get on with it everything would be all right. It would not. Yemen would be in chaos, a parallel to Afghanistan, and a small tyrannical minority would be running a very large and strategically important country of over 30 million people.

Secondly, we need to work out how to put maximum pressure on the Houthis to change their calculation that they can win this war and all they need to do is to hold out and eventually they will be recognized and will be left to get on with managing



Michael Aron

CHRONOLOGY

Sept 16: The US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines warns that terror groups operating in unstable regions of Yemen, Somalia, Syria and Iraq pose a greater threat to US national security than those in Afghanistan.

-Nearly 5,000 Ethiopians stranded in Yemen are waiting for their chance to safely return home.

-The Southern Transitional Council declares a state of emergency in southern provinces.

Sept 17: Yemen calls on the Gulf states to organize an urgent conference to support the country's deteriorating economy.

-Ali Hassan bin Gharib Al-Shabwani, a leading figure of the Ubaidah tribe in Marib, survives an assassination attempt.

Sept 18: A meeting in the presence of the foreign ministers of Iraq and Yemen underlines the importance of easing tension and achieving peace and stability in the region, through dialogue and joint coordination.

-The Houthis execute nine people who they said were involved in the killing of a senior Houthi official in an air strike by the Arab Coalition more than three years ago.

Sept 19: The UN Secretary General, the United States and the United Kingdom condemn executions by Houthis.

Sept 20: The Houthis assert control over a strategic area in Marib as they continue to gain military progress on the ground in their battles against Arab Coalition forces.

-Yemeni security forces and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces kill two and injure a number of other demonstrators during popular demonstrations in cities in southern Yemen, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor said in a statement expressing deep concern.

Sept 21: The UAE expresses its strong condemnation and denunciation of the attempts of the Houthis to carry out an attack with two booby-trapped boats near the coastal area of As-Salif, in Hodeidah, which were intercepted by the coalition forces.

-The leader of the Houthis says the United States was in charge of administering his country's internal affairs prior to the popular revolution against President Hadi, better known as the September 21 Revolution.

Sept 22: The start of a new round of widespread popular protests in the southern provinces of Yemen in recent days against the poor economic and living conditions, the lack of social services and welfare, and the presence of foreign occupiers is presenting more problems for the coalition.

-Saudi forces in Socotra cancel a UAE flight to the archipelago's airport, because of a lack of coordination with the Yemeni embassy in Abu Dhabi.

Sept 23: The Houthis advance just 50 kilometres from Marib, and capture key areas in southern Yemen's oil-rich province of Shabwa.

Sept 24: The Houthis announce they have seized control of al-Bayda province in central Yemen.

-The US House of Representatives votes to pass Ro Khanna's amendment to end US support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen. The amendment was passed with 11 Republicans voting in favour and 11 Democrats voting against, with a final vote of 219 to 207.

Sept 25: The fourth batch of a supply of Saudi oil derivatives arrives in Aden as part of the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY).

Sept 26: At least 50 Houthis and pro-government troops are killed as fighting intensifies for Marib.

-Iran advises the Houthis not to negotiate with the Internationally Recognized Government before taking control of Marib, according to Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak.

Sept 27: The White House announces that National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan will be travelling to the Middle East and meeting Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss the war in Yemen.

-The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) distributes shelter aid, including 35 tents and 35 shelter bags, to those affected by floods and torrential rains in Al Shihr District of Hadhramaut, benefiting 210 people.

Sept 28: The Houthis could be on the verge of changing the course of the war as they close in on Marib, experts say.

-Over 100 Yemeni children are being held captive by various militant groups in the country for their alleged support of certain parties in the war, the UN says in a report.

Sept 29: Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discusses the kingdom's initiative to end the Yemeni crisis, during discussions with the US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

-The Internationally Recognized Government and the Houthis exchange 206 prisoners.

Sept 30: The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) expresses concern about the arrests of human rights defenders and the use of the death penalty after unfair trials, in which those convicted alleged they were tortured in Yemen.

-According to a report published by the Yemeni organization Mwatana for Human Rights Yemen's cultural capital Taiz has been hardest hit by the war on the cultural level, with the destruction of eight archaeological landmarks since 2014.

Oct 1: The World Food Programme (WFP) Director David Beasley urges countries to support Yemen because his agency's food assistance can run out quickly.

-Four people including a child are killed in Aden in clashes among STC forces



The Houthis have no interest in ending the war (Pic: Al-Jazeera)

said they are ready to end the war and the other parties decide they don't want to end the conflict.

The most important thing is to create a viable alternative for the Houthis. There is no such alternative at present. All the people with power and influence in Yemen need to be working towards peace but the idea that we suddenly have a negotiating table which instead of two seats has seven or eight seats, and if you have a militia then you deserve a seat at the table, is the way to chaos.

The only solution is for those parties who are opposed to the Houthis – that is, the majority of Yemenis – to work together and come up with a viable alternative which the population can get behind. A start was made with the formation of a power sharing government which includes members from across the political spectrum, but the STC has not bought into it fully and neither have other factions.

What needs to happen with Saudi and international encouragement is that the Yemenis need to get together, sort out their differences and agree that in the fullness of time they will look at issues like federalism, separatism etc. Now is not the time to have those kinds of arguments. Now is the time to work together and to come up with a government which the population feels is representative and something it can work with. The Houthis are not going to disappear and the government needs to work with them. It needs credibility, it needs people to feel that it can exercise power and it needs to work with the other parties on the ground – Tariq Saleh, the Giants Brigade, the STC, etc. – so that all the factions feel there is a point in them working with the peace process.

This government also needs to be economically viable, and that means both implementing reform which the current prime minister is trying to do. It also means stamping out corruption, and again there are parallels with Afghanistan, where a government that was supported by the international community in the end did not have credibility and was riddled with corruption. We need to have a government which commands the respect of the population. The elements who are benefitting from the continuation of the war or are making money out of it need to be removed.

Saudi Arabia has strong leverage in this role but it also needs to be able to help out with the economic reform and contribute to making the government economically viable. And the international community needs to be working with Saudi Arabia to continue to be the party pushing for peace.

At the moment there are two factors influencing Saudi Arabia. They feel, not unreasonably, why should they take steps on the ground when they are pretty sure that the Houthis will not respond in kind. The other is to make sure that some of the moves we are suggesting they might take, such as the opening of the airport and the restricting of imports, are politically benefiting the Houthis who are suffering from the blockade. The Houthis are making more money by smuggling in oil from the South than they would if it was coming in through Hodeidah.

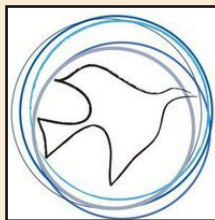
The UAE has to be persuaded to fully align its position with Saudi Arabia. It has a residual sympathy for the STC. It is also nervous about the role of the Muslim Brotherhood through Islah. The only party that gains from divisions between Saudi Arabia and the STC is the Houthis. It is really important that the UAE redoubles its efforts to bring itself in line with Saudi Arabia so they have a common vision. There has been a lot of progress on this.

I just want to counter one argument that the Houthis are a terrorist organization and it is impossible to talk to them. They are not an organization along the lines of AQAP or Daesh. They are of a different nature and they are exercising control in the North. It is vital that they are accepted as a Yemeni player. If the Houthis are not accepted as a Yemeni organization which must be included in negotiations the war could go on forever. There is no sign that there is going to be a military victory over the Houthis. They could grind everybody down and Saudi Arabia and the international community could pull out and the Houthis will be left in charge. That would be a disaster.

*Michael Aron was Her Majesty's Ambassador to Yemen from February 2018 until 2021. Prior to this he was Ambassador to Sudan from 2015 to 2018. He has extensive experience representing the UK in Libya (2012 to 2015), in Iraq (2011 to 2012), and in Kuwait (2008 to 2009).

FOSY's Chairman addresses UN side meeting on Yemen

On September 14th, 2021, the Next Century Foundation (NCF) hosted the United Nations side meeting on Yemen held in conjunction with the UN Human Rights Council. The meeting was chaired by Safa Al-Azami with as keynote speaker Dr Abdul Galil Shaif, the Chairman of FOSY. Discussions covered the appointment of Hans Grunberg, the new UN special envoy, the impact of the success of Afghanistan's Taliban on the Yemen war, and the involvement of foreign powers in the Yemen conflict.



Next Century
Foundation

The arrival of the newly appointed United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grunberg, sparked discussion. On social media, Yemenis have responded positively to Grunberg's accession as well as the resumption of diplomatic efforts for peace following his arrival. However, there remains an underlining uncertainty regarding the future of Yemen, as noted by Shaif: "We have a new envoy, we do not have a new policy," Shaif said.

We have a UN new envoy, we do not have a new policy

With recent events in Afghanistan in the forefront of many minds, there was conjecture as to the influence of the Taliban on the Houthis in Yemen. Several parallels were drawn between the Houthis and the Taliban, including the similar manner in which both groups had acceded to power and the influence of international attention on the actions of the groups. Shaif suggested that "The Yemenis would become more extremist in the same way as the Taliban". It was suggested that the success of the Taliban in reclaiming Afghanistan has become a source of inspiration for the Houthis. Various attendees viewed the current climate in Afghanistan and the failure of the West in the region as illustrative of the potential future of Yemen.

The involvement of foreign powers, specifically Western interests, in the Yemen conflict was divisive. The "localization" of the peace process was an idea that was supported by many Yemenis. Both Shaif and Dr Neil Partrick stated that the localization of the peace process has not been one of the United Nations' objectives in regard to the Yemen conflict. The consensus amongst Yemenis present was that Yemenis should decide the future of their state and nation, rather than regional or international powers.

When questioned on the role of Western powers in the conflict, there were disagreements amongst attendees. Some viewed Western powers as attempting to "nation-build" in Yemen, whereas others believed that any involvement of Western powers should be limited to the role of mediator or facilitator in the peace process. Perhaps there is room for encouraging future prosperity for Yemen through trade agreements and deals, as suggested by Patrick Emek. Unfortunately, however, as argued by Y.M. Al-Hussain, regional powers are simply pursuing their own interests in Yemen. Shaif did not hesitate to emphasize the extent to which the West is benefiting from the conflict, specifically from the sale of arms. As reiterated by numerous attendees, the access that Yemen provides to the Red Sea should be a motivating factor for international powers to become involved in encouraging the peace process, not in taking advantage of the current conflict.

The failure of the UN's current policies

The text of Shaif's keynote address follows. He began by speaking about the new UN Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg. I think the information that I'm picking up from many sources is that people are not optimistic that we have a new envoy because we've had a number of envoys now. People are more keen to see what the message that envoy has that's different from the messages that the other envoys have carried before and I don't think there's been any change in the policy, they've basically given him the same message as they've given the previous envoys, and that can only end in failure. Unless the UN has a different message, a different policy, an accelerated peace process and new ideas on the table we will just get the same results as we have before. And the envoy will face many difficulties and will not be able to do his job.

The humanitarian disaster is getting worse in Yemen. And conflicts are opening up everywhere. The Houthis have been very busy recently in the attack on Marib and they've actually accelerated the military attack. The fact that they hit the storage facilities in Maha and the recent attack on Abha airport in Saudi Arabia, and the attack on Al Anad in Aden, is an indication that the Houthis have become more emboldened.

due to disputes over control of neighbourhoods.

Oct 2: Seven Yemeni illegal migrants die in crossfire near the Saudi border.

-Women in Aden demonstrate against the deteriorating economic conditions and the decline in the value of local currency.

-An artillery attack by the coalition on the border area in Yemen's Saada province leaves five Yemeni civilians dead and 11 wounded.

Oct 3: The Houthis besiege thousands of civilians in the south of Marib, preventing food supplies, medicine and fuel from entering the area, Yemeni human rights sources announce.

-Pockets of famine-like conditions have returned to Yemen for the first time in two years in Hajjah, Amran and al-Jawf, the World Bank reports.

Oct 4: The European Union is applying pressure for a ceasefire in Yemen and to stop the attacks on Saudi Arabia, an EU official says, adding that Houthi assaults on the Kingdom violate international law.

-The radio stations Adeniya FM and Bandar Aden are suspended after police raid their headquarters in Aden.

Oct 5: Attacks by the Houthis against residential neighbourhoods in Marib spark widespread public outrage in Yemen and draw US and international condemnation.

-Saudi and Iranian officials agree to look for a practical mechanism for a solution in Yemen, the Jadeh Iran website reports.

Oct 6: The UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grunberg calls for an "inclusive political settlement" to end the conflict, as he wraps up his first visit to Yemen.

-The coalition destroys three explosives-laden boats in Hodeidah that had been readied for imminent attacks.

Oct 7: An escalation of hostilities in and around Yemen's Marib governorate forces thousands of people to flee in search of safety in an alarming rise in displacement since the beginning of September.

-The United Nations' (UN) Human Rights Council narrowly votes to end its investigation of war crimes in Yemen.

Oct 8: Ten people are injured in twin drone attacks at King Abdullah Airport in Saudi Arabia. The Houthis did not claim responsibility for the attacks.

-A report by the UN Population Fund (UNPF) says that an estimated 6.1 million women are in urgent need of protection. It added that violence and deprivation are also taking a toll on the psychological well-being of Yemenis. One in five people is estimated to suffer from a mental health disorder, yet mental health services remain scarce.

Oct 9: A vehicle rigged with explosives targets the convoy of Aden's governor, Ahmed Lamlas, who survived the blast.

-Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly says that Egypt believes that finding a political solution is the best way to end the crisis in Yemen, in a meeting with his Yemeni counterpart Maeen Abdulmalik in Cairo.

Oct 10: The King Salman

Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) Project (Masam) for clearing mines in Yemen, dismantles during the first week of October 2021 a total of 1,446 mines planted by the Houthis in various parts of Yemen.

-The Arab Coalition announces that its air operations over an 18-day period stopped the Houthis' storming of Abdiya district in Marib governorate.

Oct 11: The coalition announces 130 more than 130 Houthis have been killed in air strikes south of Marib, a flashpoint of the civil war.

-The Yemeni Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor signs an agreement with Altwasul for Human Development, a Yemeni NGO to construct a basic education school in Lahj.

Oct 12: Houthi sources report that they continued to advance in Marib province and took control of the city of Al-Juba and surrounding areas.

-The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) says of Yemen's displacement that 74,478 individuals have experienced displacement at least once this year.

Oct 13: A comprehensive negotiated political settlement is needed to end the violence in Yemen "once and for all", UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg tells the Security Council.

-Thirty-eight Yemeni lawmakers urge President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to scrap the Stockholm Agreement. The MPs in a statement asked Hadi to direct the army to "liberate" what is remaining of the coastal city of Hodeidah and "to move all the military garrisons in the rest of the provinces toward liberating the capital Sanaa."

Oct 14: The assistant for operations affairs in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Abbas Neil Foroshan, says the Saudis have no choice but to negotiate an end to the Yemeni war, noting that "the wisest way is to reach a peaceful agreement." In an interview with the *Iranian Tasnim Agency* Foroshan said that the "Yemeni resistance" has developed militarily enough, with reference to the Houthis that Tehran supports in Yemen.

-A Chinese envoy calls for an immediate cease-fire in Yemen and for efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in the country.

-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken hosts Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Washington to discuss a range of issues, including Iran and the war in Yemen. "We have a strong partnership between the United States and Saudi Arabia," Mr Blinken said. "We are committed to the defence of the kingdom."

Oct 15: Yemen is faced with a collapsing economy and a worsening humanitarian crisis, the country is also at risk of seeing "large-scale" famine as aid agencies Ramesh Rajasingham, the deputy humanitarian chief for the United Nations, said during a briefing to the U.N. Security Council.

-Russia intends to assist Yemen's authorities and Houthis in finding compromise and supports the launch of talks under the UN auspices.

I actually believe very strongly that the Saudis and the Arab Coalition want to get out of this war. Now after seven years they do not feel that they are gaining anything except losing money and the Houthis are getting stronger. In the South, particularly in Dhala and in Shabwah, there's a lot of resistance to Houthi militarization of the area. The problem that we have now is if the Saudis and the Arab coalition do pull out, the Houthis might see this as a passport to take the whole of Yemen.

That would be catastrophic, because we have a self-imposed group, very similar to the Taliban taking over Yemen. The West is just as much to blame for this as the local Yemeni leaders who want to see this war continue, because their own political and financial survival rests on the continuation of the war. Unfortunately no leader has emerged to take Yemen forward to a much more peaceful resolution. So far, most of the leaders have become military warlords who are making money out of this war. So we have a problem at the local level, the international level, and the regional level. And unless the UN can come up with new ideas, unless they can support a much more domesticated peace process where the people are the actual key players who play a role we're not going to get very far. I'm quite pessimistic, I think the war will continue for quite a while now. The Houthis feel that as long as they're making military gains and as long as they're getting international attention, which they are, they will continue to do exactly what the Taliban did in Afghanistan. So, we have a real problem. Whilst we have a new envoy, we don't have a new policy.

And if the envoy carries on the same policy as Griffiths, and Benomar before him, then we will get the same results. So, something dramatic needs to happen, something more creative needs to take place, the West needs to take a bigger interest before the vacuum is filled by the Houthi militia and other militaries around the country, including Daesh and Al Qaeda, who may see this as a base for them in the future because of the state vacuum, in many areas.

The UN keeps banging about legitimacy and the UN resolution, and taking the government back, it's all a bit of a political drama that doesn't have any relationship with reality. So, I'm hoping that someone somewhere is thinking through a different strategy, different policy, possibly different local leaders than the ones that we have at the moment.

The future of the STC

The other issue is, do we need a replacement to the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in the South? I think there are a lot of people in the South now who are questioning the legitimacy of the STC and who are saying that the STC hasn't done a very good job at the negotiating table to get a separate Southern autonomy and we want to see the results of that. There have been demonstrations in Aden yesterday and today about the deteriorating situation in Aden. I actually believe that the STC, if it does disappear, will leave a big vacuum of representation for Southerners because it's the only group at the moment that has some legitimacy. There was the million-person march in Aden in support of the STC.

Any Southerner that you speak to with some intelligence will probably say to you that it's not the STC that would rule South Yemen – the STC is a Transitional Council and what we will want would be fair elections. You're more likely to develop an atmosphere for democracy and elections in the South than you are in the North. Because the Southerners have had enough experience of one-party rule they would want to engage with the STC, if the South gets autonomy, to have elections, and people can put themselves and their political parties forward for election with their programmes. And I hope that is where the STC is heading. I don't believe the STC is heading for itself to rule South Yemen because it would face a lot of opposition in the South.

War Crimes

In terms of war crimes in Yemen, you cannot look at that in isolation as the West may be selling weapons, but someone else is using them. The regional players and the international players will all have to be looked at when it comes to war crimes – Houthis included.

Nation-Building

I don't think that the West was ever in Yemen for nation-building. I cannot give one example where the West has positively developed the political or the economic system of Yemen. The West is a beneficiary of this war: arms are being sold from the West to the Middle East. I don't want to be too cynical and say that's the only reason they're involved but it is the main reason. I'm just hoping that there's a human conscience somewhere where they will say, right, we're making so much money out of this by selling these arms, enough has happened in terms of humanitarian disasters: 85,000 children have died. The West does have leverage both economic and military. They urgently need a new vision for resolving the crisis in Yemen. The biggest victims of this war are not the Americans, the Saudis or the British – the biggest victims are the

250,000 Yemenis who have been killed. We're facing the biggest humanitarian disaster in the world with 11 million people displaced.

The Houthis took over Yemen because they've got the military bounce, they've got the military advantage. And what we will see if the Houthis do try and take over the South is resistance from the South and continued fighting and killing.

I'm for a new vision, new ideas, much more creative than the ones that we have had before. Let's have a divided Yemen if that is the solution. We could have a federal South Yemen, where the Hadhramis and the Shabwahanis have their own autonomy. We could have three regions in the South with different power players, different parties or individuals. But to think that we can only have Yemen as a centralized state, which has been, unfortunately, the proposal so far, is impossible. There is no central state, there is no Yemeni army – it was destroyed in the first week of the war and we have militias.

Yemenis have to change their own destiny. But the powerful players at the moment are not the Yemenis themselves

Yemenis have to change their own destiny. But the powerful players at the moment are not the Yemenis themselves. The biggest powerful players are the regional players and the international players. They're the ones calling the shots, while the local Yemeni political class is benefiting from the war. Ordinary Yemenis are losing out day by day, our 6,000 schools are un-operational.

The Houthis are supported by the Iranians, and Iran is holding Yemen hostage. The only reason the Saudis are in this war is because they fear Iran will take over Yemen. The Emiratis and the Saudis are not interested in the South and neither is the international community. They might not even be interested in Yemen as a whole. They are not allowing Yemen to bring new leaders.

They seem to be stuck in the old ways and Yemen is held hostage to the international community.

We need to have a different approach. The paper the NCF put forward to the UN Human Rights Commission is fantastic. (Click here for a link to the paper).

Yemen could drown and become a bastion for terrorist organizations in the future. Thirteen per cent of the world's trade goes through the Gulf of Aden. If a terrorist group ever gets hold of that, the whole world is screwed up. So the international community has an economic interest in resolving the conflict.

Roles of USA, Britain and the Yemeni political class

Don't underestimate the power that the United States and the British have in the Gulf states. But they don't understand Yemeni culture. Soft diplomacy doesn't work with Yemenis at all. They are very proud people who think they have a history of civilization. They kicked out the British, the Egyptians and the Turks and have never accepted foreign influence in their country. The Saudis are experiencing the same thing in this war. They're finding that it's very difficult to win a war of military confrontation against Yemen.

The biggest problem now is that we have a political class in Yemen that has been bought. And the people are finding it very difficult to recreate or re-establish or channel their energy into a new leadership or a new form of revolution. But the Yemenis will find a way of dealing with the plastic class. You need to humiliate them to get them to do things. You need to expose their benefits from this war, you need to expose their lack of concern for their people by engaging in strong diplomacy.

Unless this war is stopped the Yemenis will become more extremist like the Taliban in Afghanistan. Yemeni leaders

from the North and the South, all those that are gaining benefits from this war must know that they can survive through other ways. Arab intervention is needed as well. Egypt can play a more central role. Unless the Yemeni war ends very soon we will lose Yemen to extremists. Then there will be a big outcry in the world and we will have hard diplomacy and trillions of pounds will be needed, but we can find a solution before it comes to that.

Possible solutions

It is important to look for a solution rather than talk about the problems. Yemen is not a poor country – it is a rich country which is being poorly managed. I think it's very poorly managed. The state has to be managed in such a way that the resources of the country benefit the people. We have oil, gas, fisheries, honey and coffee and good locations in terms of the ports. The only reason the British occupied South Yemen for 127 years was because of Aden port which became the second busiest port in the world.



*Aden Port one of South Yemen's greatest assets
(Pic: By T3n6o - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia)*

The second area that people need to understand is that the Americans spent 2 trillion in Afghanistan. The Saudis are now spending nearly \$120 billion on the Yemen war. If they used the \$120 billion economically, they could have brought the whole Yemeni population on their side. And Iran would have no influence at all.

Yemen is not a poor country, it is a rich country which is being poorly managed

They thought the war would be for three or four weeks because they did not understand the culture of Yemen. The Saudis have borders with both Hadhramaut and Mahra. They have a Houthi group who is linked to Iran and would take over Saudi land and reach Mecca if they could. And that, in a sense, is why the Saudis could be justified to be in the war. But there are other ways of solving this without war.

If the Saudis had used \$5-10 billion in the South they could have changed the whole economy, provided electricity, paid salaries and got schools functioning. The North Yemenis would have overthrown the Houthis because they would have been envious of the economic development. So this argument that war is the only solution is a failed argument. We need positive intervention, and a new vision by the UN.

We need to threaten those Yemeni leaders who are making money out of this war with sanctions, travel bans and a freeze of their money outside the country. Continuing with the war will result in the same dilemma as Afghanistan and the Houthis may eventually take over the whole of Yemen. And then we have a similar situation to the Taliban.

Revitalizing Yemeni Coffee

For centuries, until the colonial powers established coffee plantations in Africa and Southeast Asia, almost the entire global coffee supply came from Yemen. But Yemeni coffee farming has been on the decline since and today is threatened by conflict, climate change, and increased competition.

While scientists have traced the genealogy of coffee plants to western Ethiopia, all sources point to neighboring Yemen as the place where coffee was first enjoyed as a beverage — namely, among Sufi monks in the fifteenth century, who found that a bitter brew made from the boiled husks of coffee cherries kept them alert during long nights of ritual chanting. This less flavorful, less caffeinated, and less expensive brew, called *qishr*, is still popular in Yemen, despite the global ubiquitously of brews from roasted coffee beans, the seeds cradled within coffee cherries. We have the Ottoman Mediterranean world to thank for shaping our current tradition of brewed coffee, but that's another story.

Most Yemenis have families or relatives that are fifth-, sixth-, even in some cases tenth-generation coffee farmers.

Yemen was also first to cultivate and trade the crop, its "birthplace as a global commodity," according to Nancy Um, author of *The Merchant Houses of Mocha: Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*. Yemeni farmers developed intricate terraces to foster coffee plants in Yemen's rugged mountain ranges, and love for the bitter intoxicant flowed from there, first across the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea to places like Cairo and Jeddah. Then, when Yemen came under the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century, coffee traveled with new trading partners further afar.

"Most Yemenis have families or relatives that are fifth-, sixth-, even in some cases tenth-generation coffee farmers," Ali Sulaimani who has opened a number of cafes abroad tells me. Faris Sheibani, founder of Qima Coffee, a London- and Yemen-based coffee exporter, adds: "You cannot find this heritage and experience in any other coffee-growing country in the world."

The geographic center of the early-modern Yemeni coffee trade was Bayt al-Faqih in the lowland Tihama region that stretches along the Red Sea. From there, mountainous coffee-growing regions like Haraz and Yafa, the namesake of Sulaimani's Brooklyn café, and the region his parents emigrated from in 1995, could be reached via well-trod



Yemeni Coffee Growers (Pic: Qima Coffee)

mountain passes. But it was Yemen's southernmost port of Mocha that captured imaginations. If that name sounds familiar, it's because we borrowed the word "mocha" from there. It traveled with coffee itself aboard merchant ships, becoming a catch-all label for Yemeni beans in European circles.

The current conflict in Yemen has shrunk the export market, explains Sheibani. As coffee becomes less lucrative as an export crop, "many farmers are replacing coffee trees with other crops which rely on a domestic market," he says. One of these new crops is *qat*. The addictive leaf is chewed by an estimated 90 percent of the population and can be harvested three times per year, compared to a single harvest of coffee. As such, "tens of thousands of

Yemeni farmers have been replacing coffee with *qat* over the last few decades," says Sheibani. About 2 percent of arable land in Yemen has been given over to the shrub, which is also a thirsty crop, requiring deep-well irrigation that water-scarce Yemen cannot afford.

Changes in the climate also threaten agriculture in already-arid Yemen. Seasonal temperatures in the region are rising, desertification creeps across an additional 3 percent to 5 percent of the nation's agricultural land every year, and rainfall is becoming more erratic, putting all crops, not just coffee, at risk.

The movement to reintroduce Yemeni coffee to the world has taken root not only despite these challenges but in response to them. Abdulrahman Saeed, co-founder of United Arab Emirates- and Yemen-based Sabcomeed, tells me that he was inspired to start his business to support struggling Yemenis. "I realized that the best way to benefit Yemen is going back to its roots," he says.

The commitment among entrepreneurs like Sulaimani, Sheibani, and Saeed to support Yemeni coffee farming has manifested in partnerships with small-scale producers in Yemen and education for consumers abroad who are not acquainted with the rich history of the crop in a nation many now associate with the crises they see in headlines. There's hope that coffee might have the power to uplift people within Yemen's borders and change the public's perception outside them.

-By Marianne Dhenin writing for *Atmos*.



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