

South Yemen Update



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



Southern Yemen's Front Line: Why the Southern Transitional Council (STC) Is Critical to Countering Extremism and Securing Maritime Stability

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) and its affiliated security formations represent the most effective indigenous partner in southern Yemen in the fight against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State – Yemen Province (ISIS-Y). Despite limited resources and inconsistent international backing, STC-aligned forces remain on the front lines, facing relentless attacks while leading counter-terrorism operations in one of the world's most complex security environments.

Persistent Threats and the Front-Line Role of the STC

On 21 October 2025, a coordinated attack involving car bombs and suicide bombers struck a government compound and STC-affiliated units in Abyan Governorate, underlining the enduring threat posed by jihadist groups in southern Yemen. According to The National, fighters linked to the STC were among the casualties.

In June 2024, a vehicle carrying a southern security commander was ambushed by AQAP in Al-Hamima, Abyan, killing one STC-aligned soldier and wounding two others, as reported by Anadolu Ajansı. AQAP remains active throughout the south and frequently targets STC forces as well as other security actors. Recent assaults in Abyan have been attributed by local sources to AQAP militants, further highlighting the vulnerability of southern Yemen's security landscape.

The south's fragmented political environment—marked by a fractured central government—has created a security vacuum that extremist

movements readily exploit. Analysts from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point have noted that the STC is regarded as a “shared enemy” by both AQAP and the Iran-aligned Houthi Movement, primarily because of the STC's aggressive counter-terror operations in the region.

Operational Advantage and Indigenous Legitimacy

The STC's affiliated paramilitary arm, the Security Belt Forces (SBF), was founded around 2016 and has received training and varying degrees of support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The SBF operates under the STC's command structure across southern Yemen, as detailed by ACLED.

In April 2022, the STC formally joined Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC)—the internationally recognised government—granting it a dual identity as both a local military actor and a partial political stakeholder (Wikipedia). Through this position, the STC controls substantial territory across the south, maintaining local legitimacy and trusted access in regions where extremist networks thrive amid weak governance structures.

Given its operational foothold, the STC is arguably the only local force capable of conducting sustained counter-terror campaigns in southern Yemen—particularly as the central state remains institutionally fragile.

Strategic Maritime and Regional Implications

Southern Yemen's geography places it at the epicentre of global maritime

security. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden are critical chokepoints for international trade and energy transportation. Any deterioration of security in this region risks severe global repercussions.

Through its governance and policing functions, the STC has the potential to stabilise these maritime corridors. Consequently, Western engagement with the STC should not be viewed solely through the prism of Yemen's internal politics, but as a matter of international maritime security and energy supply protection.

Why Western Governments Should Strategically Engage

Western policymakers must move beyond outdated perceptions of the STC as merely a separatist movement. In practice, the STC functions as a credible counter-terrorism partner with significant local legitimacy in Yemen's south.

A calibrated strategy for engagement could include:

- Intelligence-sharing with STC-aligned forces operating in AQAP-dense areas.
- Specialised training, logistical support, and equipment provision to enhance operational capacity.
- Direct liaison mechanisms that bypass dysfunctional national-level bottlenecks.
- Investment in local governance and recruitment-prevention initiatives to ensure that the counter-terror campaign is complemented by sustainable civilian stability efforts.

However, engagement must be accompanied by accountability measures. Support should align with international norms on human rights and the use of force. Amnesty International has raised concerns regarding restrictions on civil-society organisations and bureaucratic barriers in STC-administered areas, highlighting the need for transparency and oversight. Western engagement with the STC should also be integrated into broader diplomatic efforts, including the UN-led peace process. Many analysts now argue that the only viable long-term solution to Yemen's conflict lies in recognising southern self-determination alongside a stable northern entity—effectively a two-state outcome. STC leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi has publicly called for such a framework, insisting that Yemen's protracted conflict cannot be resolved by military means alone (The Guardian).

Consequences of Inaction

If Western governments fail to engage meaningfully with the STC, the implications could be dire:

- AQAP and ISIS-Y may exploit instability in the south to regroup and launch new regional or international attacks.
- Houthi-extremist coordination could deepen, forming a transnational threat nexus stretching across the Gulf, Horn of Africa, and Red Sea maritime corridor. A recent attack blamed on both Houthis and AQAP demonstrates the growing risk of this convergence (Barran Press).
- Maritime chokepoints could remain vulnerable to interdiction, threatening global shipping and energy security.
- STC forces, already overstretched and underfunded, could face burnout or loss of morale, potentially reversing years of counter-terror gains.

Strategic Choice

Western governments now face a decisive choice: either engage and empower the STC as a credible security partner—integrating counter-terrorism, maritime security, and governance—or risk allowing extremist groups to re-entrench themselves in southern Yemen. The latter scenario would have consequences that extend far beyond Yemen, threatening regional stability and global trade flows.

The Southern Transitional Council stands as the most capable indigenous force countering extremism in southern Yemen. Extremist groups like AQAP and ISIS-Y view the STC as a direct threat to their operations and continuously target its personnel.

For Western powers, the convergence of counter-terrorism priorities, maritime stability, and regional security underscores the necessity of a pragmatic and principled engagement strategy with the STC. Such engagement—anchored in accountability and diplomacy—could help stabilise one of the world's most strategically vital yet volatile regions.

Sources & Further Reading

- “Al-Qaeda attack in Yemen kills 2 members of southern forces” — *Al-Monitor*
- “STC must end crackdown on civic space” — *Amnesty International*
- “Southern Transitional Council soldier killed ... in Al-Qaeda attack” — *Anadolu Agency*
- “Yemen car bomb attack kills fighters linked to Southern

Transitional Council” — *The National*

• *ACLED profile of Security Belt Forces*

• *CTC Sentinel article on interplay of Houthis, AQAP, STC — Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*

• “Yemen needs two-state solution as no prospect of ousting Houthis, says southern leader” — *The Guardian*

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Official Statement from Friends of South Yemen (FOSY)

In Support of Relocating UN Operations to Aden

October 21, 2025

Friends of South Yemen (FOSY) strongly condemns the October 19th raid by Houthi forces on United Nations offices in Sana'a — a blatant violation of international norms and a dangerous escalation that threatens the safety of humanitarian personnel and the continuity of vital operations across Yemen. In light of these ongoing abuses, FOSY calls on the United Nations to immediately and permanently relocate its main operational headquarters from Sana'a to the interim capital, Aden. This move is not only justified on the grounds of staff safety — it is essential for restoring the UN's ability to operate without coercion or obstruction.

We firmly believe that the UN can continue to deliver humanitarian aid to all regions of Yemen — including Houthi-controlled areas — through remote coordination, local partners, and negotiated access, as is already practiced in other complex humanitarian contexts.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) has made clear that it would fully support such a relocation, and stands ready to provide the necessary guarantees and logistical assistance to ensure that all UN agencies, staff, and operations are able to function freely, safely, and effectively from Aden.

The people of Yemen deserve impartial humanitarian assistance delivered in dignity and peace. The current environment in Sana'a — marked by threats, detentions, and interference — makes this impossible.

FOSY urges the international community and the UN leadership to act decisively. Moving the UN's base of operations to Aden would not mean abandoning Yemen's north — it would mean protecting the neutrality of humanitarian work, holding violators accountable, and upholding the UN's own principles.

الحالية في صنعاء — التي تتسم بالتهديدات والاعتقالات والتدخلات — تجعل من ذلك أمرًا مستحيلًا.

المجتمع الدولي وقيادة الأمم المتحدة على FOSY وعليه، تحت اتخاذ موقف حاسم. إن نقل المقر إلى عدن لا يعني التخلي عن الشمال، بل هو خطوة لحماية حيادية العمل الإنساني، ومحاسبة المعتدين، والحفاظ على مبادئ الأمم المتحدة نفسها.

إن أصدقاء جنوب اليمن يؤكدون استعدادهم الكامل لدعم هذا الانتقال بالتنسيق مع شركائنا في الجنوب وخارجه.

أصدقاء جنوب اليمن — (FOSY)

بيان رسمي من أصدقاء جنوب اليمن

بشأن نقل مقر عمليات الأمم المتحدة إلى العاصمة المؤقتة عدن

أكتوبر 21 2025

بشدة الاقتحام الذي (FOSY) يدين أصدقاء جنوب اليمن نفذته جماعة الحوثي في 19 أكتوبر على مكاتب الأمم المتحدة في صنعاء، والذي يُعد انتهاكًا صارخًا للأعراف الدولية وتضيقًا خطيرًا يُهدد سلامة العاملين الإنسانيين ويُعيق استمرار العمليات الحيوية في جميع أنحاء اليمن.

الأمم FOSY وفي ضوء هذه الانتهاكات المستمرة، تدعو المتحدة إلى الانتقال الفوري والدائم لمقر عملياتها الرئيسي من صنعاء إلى العاصمة المؤقتة عدن. إن هذا القرار لا يبرره فقط الحفاظ على أمن وسلامة الموظفين، بل يُعد ضرورة لاستعادة قدرة الأمم المتحدة على العمل بحرية دون ضغوط أو تدخلات سياسية.

نحن على قناعة تامة بأن بإمكان الأمم المتحدة مواصلة تقديم المساعدات الإنسانية لكافة مناطق اليمن، بما في ذلك المناطق الخاضعة لسيطرة الحوثيين، عبر التنسيق عن بُعد، والشراكة مع منظمات محلية، وضمانات الوصول الإنساني التي يتم التفاوض عليها، كما هو معمول به في سياقات إنسانية معقدة أخرى.

استعداده الكامل (STC) وقد أكد المجلس الانتقالي الجنوبي لدعم هذا الانتقال، وتقديم كافة الضمانات والتسهيلات اللوجستية اللازمة لضمان تمكين وكالات الأمم المتحدة وموظفيها من العمل بحرية وأمان وفعالية من مدينة عدن. إن شعب اليمن، في الشمال والجنوب، يستحق مساعدات إنسانية حيادية تُقدم بكرامة ووفقًا للمعايير الدولية. لكن البيئة



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