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Prospects of Peace in Hudaydah

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Basem Ganani

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Basem Ganani is a journalist and human rights activist from Hudaydah Governorate. He began his media and advocacy career in 2008 by launching Hudaydah Net, the first local news website in the governorate, which he dedicated to spotlighting the concerns and struggles of its residents. He later worked as a correspondent for several Yemeni newspapers and, in 2013, assumed the presidency of the National Youth Conference in the governorate. To this day, Al-Janani remains active in both journalism and human rights work, participating regularly in local and international conferences and forums. Since 2022, he has been engaged with the Independent Southern Group at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, submitting periodic reports documenting human rights violations in Hudaydah. He also maintains a regular presence in rights-focused seminars and media outlets, contributing to efforts to convey the reality of Yemen's humanitarian and human rights situation, especially in Hudaydah, to the international community.

REVIEW TEAM

Dr. Nadia Al-Saqqaf – Researcher and Specialist in Political Affairs

Dr. Abubakr Ahmed Batheeb – Researcher at the European Center for Opinion and Strategic Studies

Linda AL OBAHI - Expert in Political Affairs and Conflict Mediation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hudaydah Governorate, located on Yemen's western coast, is one of the country's most strategically vital regions. Its critical geographic position and its port on the Red Sea make it a central hub for Yemen's commercial, agricultural, and fishing sectors. However, the governorate has been deeply affected by political and security developments, most notably the Houthi takeover of state institutions including the Port of Hudaydah, in 2014.¹

As the conflict in Yemen intensified, Hudaydah became a focal point of political and military conflicts that have caused a sharp deterioration in humanitarian and economic conditions. Its port gained heightened importance as a primary lifeline for millions of Yemenis by facilitating the entry of essential goods and fuel. Since the outbreak of the war, the governorate has seen repeated waves of violence, particularly during 2018 battles along the western coast² between government forces backed by the Arab Coalition and the Iran-aligned Houthi group³. This military escalation severely disrupted social life, decimated public services, eroded community stability, and led to increased internal and cross-border displacement.

Hudaydah's proximity to the Bab al-Mandab Strait, one of the world's key maritime chokepoints, has further amplified its geopolitical relevance. The Houthi group has used this position to launch attacks on commercial vessels under the pretext of solidarity with Gaza⁴. These attacks have triggered growing serious international concerns over maritime security in the Red Sea, through which approximately 21,000 commercial ships and oil tankers pass annually.⁵

1 Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014)(S/2023/130) [EN/AR] Yemen, ReliefWeb, 21 Feb 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/final-report-panel-experts-yemen-established-pursuant-security-council-resolution-2140-2014s2023130-enar>

2 Ali Jaabour, "The battle on the West Coast cuts off the militia's lifeline," [Arabic], Al-Bayan, 25 May 2018, <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2018-05-25-1.3274510>.

3 UN Yemen Country Results Report 2024, 28 April 2025, <https://yemen.un.org/en/293369-un-yemen-country-results-report-2024>

4 Mohammed Abdu, "These are the most prominent Houthi attacks in support of Gaza over the past year," [Arabic], Al Jazeera, 7 October 2024, <https://bit.ly/4ldnIWQ>.

5 Sarah Vuylsteke, When Aid Goes Awry: How the International Humanitarian Response is Failing Yemen, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 27 October 2021, <https://sanaacenter.org/reports/humanitarian-aid>

Political developments, ranging from the 2011 uprising to the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) in 2022, have further shaped the prospects for peace both in Yemen broadly and in Hudaydah in particular. These shifts have compounded the challenges of reaching a sustainable and locally meaningful stability.⁶

This paper aims to analyze the conflict in Hudaydah through a multidimensional lens and provides a grounded analysis of lived realities. It aims to contribute to the formulation of practical strategies for addressing the situation⁷, and calls for robust international support to promote peace and stability in the governorate; outcomes that would benefit the broader Yemeni context.

Employing a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodology, the paper explores local peace dynamics in areas controlled by both the Houthi group and government-aligned forces. It investigates the intersections and divergences in peacebuilding pathways within this complex landscape. The study draws on extensive field experience and incorporates data gathered through both direct and indirect interviews with 21 local actors (38% of whom were women). These participants included researchers specializing in Yemeni political and military affairs, local authority representatives, civil society actors, military leaders, and journalists, all of whom shared their perspectives on the prospects and challenges of local peace amid ongoing political and military fragmentation. In addition, a multi-stakeholder workshop was held, bringing together participants from official, community, and military sectors. The workshop helped develop a set of actionable recommendations captured in this paper, representing areas of local consensus on peacebuilding approaches. Strict security measures were put in place to protect participants, especially those facing threats or mobility constraints, and to ensure confidentiality.

⁶ Abubakr al-Shamahi, Coalition Falls Back in Hudaydah, Fighting Shifts South – The Yemen Review, Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies, November 2021, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/15894>.

⁷ AlYoum8, "The Crisis of the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait" [Arabic], May 2024, <https://alyoum8.net/files/052024/663fe035167a4.pdf>

Beyond primary data, the study also draws on secondary sources, including prior reports, academic research, and local and international media coverage, to situate its findings within the broader context of Hudaydah. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify common themes in participants' viewpoints and to distill the core challenges and opportunities for fostering local peace in an environment marked by deep political and military division.

The research prioritizes inclusivity and source diversity, enhancing the credibility and relevance of its findings. In doing so, it strengthens the practical applicability of the recommendations presented, with the ultimate aim of supporting a more stable and peaceful future for Hudaydah and Yemen as a whole.

DIAGNOSING THE POLITICAL REALITY OF THE GOVERNORATE

THE POLITICAL MAP OF HUDAYDAH

Hudaydah Governorate has experienced a state of political, economic, and security fragmentation since 2017, when popular resistance forces, backed by the Arab Coalition, regained control over parts of the southwestern coast. Effective authority in the governorate is now divided between two main actors, each exercising separate forms of governance within its respective area of control, and each facing distinct security realities and challenges.

I. AREAS UNDER HOUTHI CONTROL

The Iran-backed Houthi group maintains control over the majority of Hudaydah Governorate, including most of its densely populated and economically active coastal and inland areas. These include strategic infrastructure such as vital ports, industrial zones, power plants, and key facilities for importing fuel and essential commodities like grains and raw materials. In these areas, resources are managed through a centralized and heavily militarized system.

The Houthi group maintains a monopoly over the trade of petroleum derivatives and imposes wide-ranging levies on various sectors including humanitarian relief and essential goods. Revenues are funneled into financing military operations and expanding the group's networks of control and influence. At the same time, the group enforces a stringent security regime marked by constant surveillance of civilians and public activities, arbitrary detention of individuals suspected of dissent or criticism, and pressure on business owners and workers in vital sectors. These practices have had a profound negative impact on the local economy and the livelihoods of the population.⁸

II. AREAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE JOINT FORCES OF THE WEST COAST

By contrast, the Joint Forces of the West Coast, also backed by the Arab Coalition, control the southwestern parts of the governorate, particularly areas such as Al-Khawkhah and Hays. These forces emerged in the context of confronting the Houthi group's expansion and developed further after 2017 with direct support from the Arab Coalition, especially the United Arab Emirates. The UAE played a pivotal role in training, equipping, and arming these forces with modern weaponry and logistical capabilities, as well as overseeing military operations on the ground.⁹

POLITICAL AND MILITARY COMPOSITION OF THE JOINT FORCES

Headquartered in Mokha, the Joint Forces of the West Coast are composed of three main formations: the National Resistance Forces Brigades, the Tihama Resistance Brigades, and the Giants Brigades, each with its distinct political and social backgrounds. Despite these differences, the formations operate under a unified command structure and pursue shared military objectives.

⁸ UN Yemen Country Results Report 2024, previously cited.

⁹ Sarah Vuylsteke, When Aid Goes Awry, previously cited.

The composition includes:

- **National Resistance Forces Brigades:** Aligned with the former Republican Guard, this formation includes a significant number of officers and fighters previously affiliated with the Republican Guard and Special Forces.
- **Tihama Resistance Brigades:** Comprised largely of fighters from Hudaydah Governorate, this formation draws heavily from the Zaraniq tribes and the Tihama Movement, with many of its leaders and members rooted in local tribal and regional dynamics.
- **Giants Brigades:** A Salafi-oriented force, the Giants Brigades are primarily composed of fighters from Yemen's southern governorates. Some of its leadership maintains links with the Southern Transitional Council.

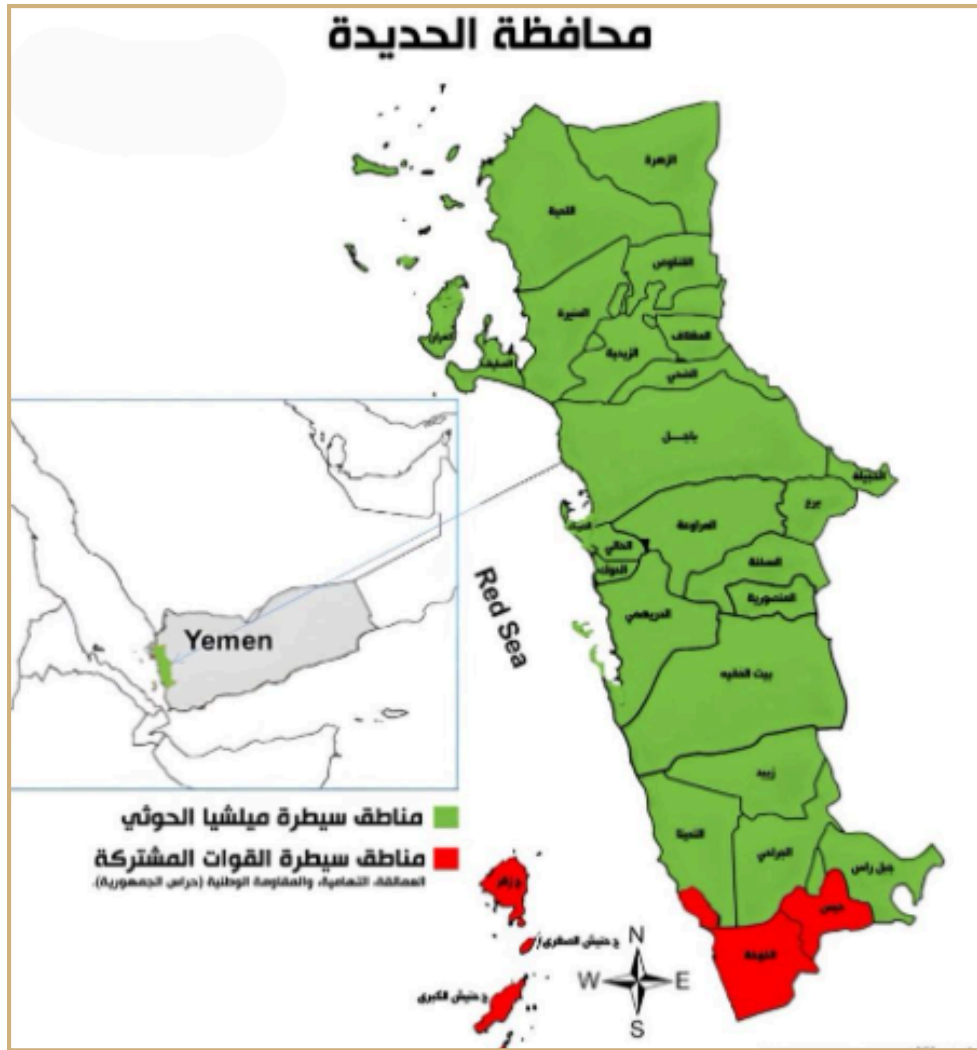
Despite the internal diversity of these factions, the groups formally merged in 2019 under the collective name "Joint Forces," led by Brigadier General Tariq Saleh, who currently serves as Vice President of the Presidential Leadership Council. The Joint Forces share a unified strategic goal: to confront the Houthi group and secure the strategically vital coastal strip that extends along the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait.¹⁰

Disparity in Resources and Influence

Despite the Joint Forces' considerable military and political presence, the areas under their control lack the natural resources and infrastructure found in Houthi-held territories. Their influence is largely confined to limited parts of districts such as Hays and Al-Khawkhah, areas that are less densely populated and economically underdeveloped. The Joint Forces conduct security operations in coordination with units affiliated with the Ministry of Interior of the internationally recognized government, including the Security Directorate and Central Security. This cooperation has helped enhance the visibility and political-social influence of the Joint Forces within their areas of control.

¹⁰ Abubakr al-Shamahi, *Coalition Falls Back in Hudaydah*, previously cited.

Zone of Control Map in Hudaydah Governorate



Map No. (1): This map illustrates the division of control in Hudaydah Governorate as of mid-2025, showing areas held by the Houthis (in green) and those controlled by the Arab Coalition-backed Joint Forces (in red). It highlights the Houthis' concentration in densely populated inland and coastal areas, in contrast to the Joint Forces' presence along the southwestern coastal strip.

Drivers of Conflict in Hudaydah Governorate

The roots of the conflict in Hudaydah stem from multiple, intertwined factors that intersect with the broader Yemeni crisis, while also reflecting local specificities related to the governorate's nature, geographic location, and demographics. These factors that contribute to conflict can be categorized into local, regional, and international levels, with this section focusing on local causes.

I. Local Drivers

1-Political Exclusion and Power Imbalances

For decades, the people of Hudaydah have experienced forms of political exclusion and marginalization, due to the concentration of power in the hands of central elites from outside the governorate. Despite Hudaydah's considerable population and geographic importance, this has not translated into equitable representation within state institutions, whether civil or military. This marginalization has been compounded by authoritarian practices, including the confiscation and seizure of agricultural and coastal lands, and the monopolization of financial and customs revenues, all of which have further entrenched a sense of exclusion and dispossession.¹¹

2-Competition Over Influence and Resources

Multiple forces compete for local influence and control of resources, including armed groups, tribal entities, political parties, and business interests. This rivalry has fragmented the internal landscape and obstructed efforts to build stable local governance or achieve equitable resource distribution.¹²

¹¹ UN Yemen Country Results Report 2024 | United Nations in Yemen

¹² Farea Al-Muslimi, The Southern Question: Yemen's War Inside the War, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace - Diwan, 8 July 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/middle-east/diwan/2015/07/the-southern-question-yemens-war-inside-the-war?lang=en>.

3-Development Deprivation and Service Collapse

Hudaydah suffers from acute underdevelopment and a breakdown in essential services. Electricity reaches only 10–15% of the population, and most areas lack functioning water and sanitation infrastructure. More than 80% of the population lives below the poverty line, with widespread unemployment, malnutrition, and severely weakened healthcare and education systems. Despite hosting three of Yemen's most important ports (Hudaydah, Al Salif, and Ras Issa) the governorate has seen little tangible benefit from these assets in terms of local development.¹³

4-Demographic and Economic Profile

Hudaydah is the second-largest governorate in terms of population with approximately 3 to 4 million people, and includes more than 26 districts varying between urban and rural areas, with rural communities forming the majority. These areas rely primarily on agriculture and fishing, yet the governorate has consistently been sidelined in national development planning. This neglect has widened development disparities and reinforced public perceptions of injustice and neglect.

5-Tribal Dynamics in the Local Landscape

Despite the rural and kinship-based structures of the Tihama tribes compared to those of northern Yemen, they continue to play a notable role in local alliances and conflicts. Prominent tribes include the Zaraniq in Bayt al-Faqih and the Al-Qahri in Bajil. Historically, these tribes resisted the Imamate regime and more recently clashed with the Houthis, including during the siege of Al-Kidiyah in 2015. Although the overall influence of tribal actors in Tihama has declined, their presence remains important in shaping local political balances.¹⁴

¹³ Abubakr al-Shamahi, Coalition Falls Back in Hudaydah, previously cited.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Death is More Merciful Than This Life" Houthi and Yemeni Government Violations of the Right to Water in Taizz," 11 October 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/11/death-more-merciful-life/houthi-and-yemeni-government-violations-right-water>.

6-The Political and Partisan Landscape

Before the war, the General People's Congress (GPC) was the dominant political force in the governorate, with strong representation in local governance. Alongside the Islah Party and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), it formed a unique political constellation in Hudaydah driven by close personal and social ties among local leaders. These informal relationships brought about a consensus on many local issues and enabled the avoidance of sharp political rivalry, contributing to a period of relative stability and flexible partnerships prior to the conflict.

The Tihama Movement emerged after the 2011 protests, and has advocated for the rights of the Tihama people including fair political representation and participation in governance. Despite significant challenges, it has sustained both local and international visibility, serving as a voice of popular resistance to long-standing exclusion.

Despite the presence of political parties, tribal actors, social movements, and youth and community organizations, these forces remain marginalized within Yemen's broader conflict dynamics. The lack of genuine representation for the people of Hudaydah in national decision-making bodies continues to limit their ability to assert their demands or protect their rights.

II. Regional and International Drivers

Regional and international actors have long sought to shape outcomes in Yemen in pursuit of their strategic interests, ranging from national security and economic ambitions to control over critical maritime routes. The geopolitical significance of Hudaydah Governorate—due to its location, on the Red Sea and its proximity to the Bab al-Mandab Strait—stands as a key driver of such involvement. External competition has added layers of complexity to the conflict, fueling it dynamically and making a political settlement increasingly difficult to achieve without consensus among these external powers. As a result, the local population continues to bear the brunt of prolonged instability both economically and humanitarially.

Therefore, the conflict in Hudaydah cannot be seen merely as a contest among local forces, but also a reflection of broader proxy dynamics involving regional and international stakeholders. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have provided sustained support to the Joint Forces, while the Houthis continue to receive military and logistical backing from Iran. In contrast, the United States has escalated its military posture against the Houthis, particularly in March 2025, following a surge in Houthi-led attacks in the Red Sea linked to their stated position on the war in Gaza.

This entanglement of regional rivalries and international interventions has turned Hudaydah into a flashpoint that transcends local dynamics, further complicating any prospects for peace and obstructing de-escalation efforts on the ground.

The Stockholm Agreement: From Averting War to Consolidating Houthi Control and Eroding the State's Presence

The media and political focus on the humanitarian situation in Hudaydah Governorate in 2018 was not an isolated or spontaneous event. Rather, it was the culmination of intertwined political, military, and humanitarian dynamics. Since the onset of the war in March 2015, Hudaydah has represented a strategic objective for the internationally recognized government (IRG) and its backers in the Arab Coalition due to its vital role as Yemen's primary port, through which an estimated 70% of humanitarian and commercial imports pass.

By mid-2018, coalition-backed Joint Forces had advanced to the outskirts of Hudaydah as part of a military campaign known as Operation Golden Victory. At the time, it appeared that control of the city was within reach. However, this advance triggered mounting concern from the United Nations and major humanitarian organizations, who warned that a full-scale battle for the city could result in a humanitarian catastrophe, potentially endangering the lives of millions who relied on the port for survival.

Amid this growing alarm, international media and diplomatic attention reached unprecedented levels. Leading news outlets and UN human rights bodies provided extensive coverage of the looming disaster, supported by urgent warnings from organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), and the World Food Programme. These fears also catalyzed swift diplomatic interventions from key international capitals, including London and Washington, which exerted direct pressure to halt the offensive. This pressure effectively froze the military advance and paved the way for UN-brokered negotiations.

The talks culminated in the signing of the Stockholm Agreement in December 2018, which called for a ceasefire and the redeployment of forces outside the city and port as a compromise to avert large-scale civilian harm. In this sense, the media and diplomatic campaign was not simply reactive coverage; it functioned as a powerful instrument of leverage, redirecting the trajectory of the conflict and imposing a limited settlement that designated Hudaydah as a fragile frontline buffer zone shielded from direct military confrontation.

The Stockholm Agreement, signed in December 2018, comprised three key components: an agreement on the status of Hudaydah and its ports, a prisoner exchange agreement, and a set of understandings regarding the status of Taiz.¹⁵

Agreement on Al Hodaydah (City and Ports):

The agreement called for an immediate ceasefire in the city of Hudaydah and its three ports: Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa, with the joint redeployment of forces to mutually agreed locations outside the city and port facilities. It also stipulated the removal of all military manifestations and the formation of a Joint Coordination Committee, under the UN supervision, to monitor the ceasefire and ensure the implementation of redeployment measures.

¹⁵ UNMHA, STOCKHOLM AGREEMENT UNDER UNSC RESOLUTION 2451 (2018), UN MISSION TO SUPPORT THE HUDAYDAH AGREEMENT, [HTTPS://UNMHA.UNMISSIONS.ORG/STOCKHOLM-AGREEMENT](https://unmha.unmissions.org/stockholm-agreement).

The agreement also included a UN role in the management and inspection of the ports, support for the Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation, and a commitment to facilitate the movement of civilians, goods, and humanitarian aid. It further required that port revenues be deposited in the Hudaydah branch of the Central Bank, with the aim of paying civil servant salaries. These provisions were to be implemented in phased within 21 days from the beginning of the ceasefire.

Taiz Understandings

The understandings provided for the establishment of a joint committee composed of representatives from both parties, alongside civil society actors, under UN supervision. The committee's primary mandate was to address the humanitarian situation and work toward opening humanitarian corridors in the besieged city of Taiz. The operational mechanisms of the committee were to be determined at a later stage, and its findings were to be presented in subsequent negotiation sessions.

Prisoner exchange agreement:

Both parties agreed to the exchange of all prisoners, detainees, and forcibly disappeared persons as a purely humanitarian issue, outside the realm of political bargaining. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was designated as a neutral supervisory body responsible for facilitating the transfer and exchange process, in line with a mutually agreed implementation framework.

Implementation Challenges

Despite the significance of the Stockholm Agreement, its implementation has encountered substantial obstacles, chief among them:

- The absence of a binding enforcement mechanism.
- Divergent interpretations of the agreement's provisions by the parties involved,
- The Houthis' exploitation of the truce to reposition forces and consolidate territorial control

According to the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), over 30,000 ceasefire violations were recorded between the signing of the agreement and mid-2024. These violations included artillery shelling, armed clashes, and the planting of landmines, which pointed to the fragility of the agreement and the persistence of military tensions on the ground.

In strategic terms, the Stockholm Agreement marked a shift in international attention toward Hudaydah, diverting focus from the broader structural roots of the Yemeni crisis. While the agreement's backers argue that it helped prevent large-scale destruction in the city, it also created space for the Houthi group to regroup militarily and entrench its presence, further complicating efforts to liberate the governorate or rebalance the conflict.

Hudaydah After the Agreement: A City Under Arms and in the Grip of Houthi Repression

The Stockholm Agreement marked a turning point in the trajectory of local peace efforts, but it did not bring an end to militarization in Hudaydah¹⁶. The city has become a massive depot for weapons and fighters and, according to international reports, a major route for the smuggling of Iranian arms and military technology to the Houthis¹⁷. The fragile security environment persisted, with tens of thousands of ceasefire violations recorded over six years of an uneasy truce¹⁸.

Rather than ending violence, the ceasefire ushered in a new phase of systematic repression against the local population. In the absence of active military clashes, the Houthi group used the truce to entrench its security and intelligence apparatus, imposing a suffocating police-state reality. One human rights activist described the situation as a “closed security state” where dissenting voices are silenced and the community is governed by fear, all under the pretext of maintaining public order.

One of the most shocking and violent incidents occurred in September 2021, when the group publicly executed nine residents of Hudaydah, accusing them of involvement in the killing of Houthi Political Council President Saleh al-Sammad, who was killed in a coalition airstrike¹⁹. The trial was widely condemned for its complete disregard for basic standards of justice; a judicial spectacle conducted at gunpoint, devoid of transparency, due process, or the right to defense, a proceeding ruled by the logic of blood feud and vendetta.

16 Al-Ayyam, “Hudayhah Port: A Gateway for Arms Smuggling to the Houthis, and Calls to Stop Interventions” [Arabic], 17 february 2025, <https://www.alayyam.info/news/A4CXIYN-DPR743-9C6E>.

17 Khabar Agency, “American Institute: Hodeidah Port Is a Gateway for Iranian Weapons Smuggling... and the Fall of the Houthis Will Be Faster Than Assad's” [Arabic], 6 February 2025, <https://www.khabaragency.net/news226255.html>.

18 UN News, “UN: Concern over Hodeidah agreement breach after latest attack on Salif” [Arabic], 8 March 2020, <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2020/03/1050821>.

19 Al-Asima Online, “The execution of the sons of Tihama” is a complete crime that requires the prosecution of the killers” [Arabic], 19 September 2024, <https://alasimahonline.com/reports/18888>.

A local figure described the executions as a “disgrace”, calling them a “fully-fledged political crime cloaked in a false judicial veneer,” and noting that the event “left a bleeding wound in the memory of Hudaydah.”²⁰

Under the guise of an international agreement meant to protect civilians, residents of Hudaydah found themselves under an iron grip; a city without a state, where fear dominated and silence became the daily language of survival.

West Coast Redeployment (November 2021):

In November 2021, the Joint Forces carried out a sudden redeployment on the West Coast, south of Hudaydah, withdrawing from strategically important areas without military engagement. The maneuver was conducted under direct orders from the Arab Coalition leadership, particularly the United Arab Emirates, in coordination with Saudi Arabia. Official statements framed the move as part of compliance with the Stockholm Agreement and a strategic shift in focus to other military fronts.

However, the timing of the withdrawal, the lack of coordination with local actors, and the outcomes on the ground, which largely benefited the Houthi group, led many military analysts to describe it as a costly concession of territory. One analyst characterized the move as a “tactical withdrawal on the surface, but in essence one that disrupted the military balance and handed the Houthis a golden opportunity to redeploy and fortify their positions, at virtually no combat cost.”

Humanitarian Truce (April–December 2022):

The humanitarian truce declared in April 2022 marked a new chapter in Yemen’s fragmented approach to peace, introducing terms that allowed the Port of Hudaydah to receive a limited number of vessels per month, on condition of effective UN oversight to prevent arms smuggling.

²⁰ Al-Khaleej, “Widespread condemnation of the Houthis’ public execution of nine Hodeidah residents in Sana’a” [Arabic], 19 September 2021, <https://bit.ly/4ffv767>.

During the truce period, more than 89 fuel tankers and dozens of commercial vessels entered the port, according to reports by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).²¹

The Truce: Military Calm or Opportunity for Repositioning?

While the humanitarian truce declared in April 2022 succeeded in reducing active hostilities, its implementation, particularly in Hudaydah Governorate, produced unintended consequences that ultimately strengthened the Houthi group's position.

The truce allowed for an increased flow of ships into Hudaydah's ports, including vessels carrying fuel and commercial goods, but lacked effective oversight mechanisms to monitor customs and tax revenues. Rather than being allocated to pay civil servant salaries or improve public services, these revenues were diverted into financing the group's war effort and expanding its security and military influence, especially in strategically sensitive coastal areas.

The Houthi group also capitalized on the halt in military operations to reposition its forces, strengthen naval and intelligence capabilities, and prepare for future escalations. This contributed to a heightened threat to maritime navigation in the Red Sea.

In the absence of strict enforcement measures, military and political pressures on the group diminished, allowing the truce to be used as a tool for entrenching control rather than advancing a meaningful political settlement.

Moreover, customs and tax revenues became a major financial pillar of the Houthi war economy²². In 2022 alone, the group collected over 100 billion Yemeni riyals (approximately USD 170 million) in revenue from Hudaydah Port²³. These funds were neither transferred to the Central Bank nor used for salary payments, but were instead directed toward military operations and bolstering the group's security infrastructure.

²¹ UNDP, Damage and Capacity Assessment for Ports of Hodiedah, Salif and Ras Issa, 12 April 2020, <https://www.undp.org/yemen/publications/damage-and-capacity-assessment-ports-hodiedah-salif-and-ras-issa>

In effect, the truce functioned as a form of indirect support for the Houthis, as it bought time and resources for the group to consolidate power. Meanwhile, the position of the internationally recognized government and local communities weakened, particularly in Hudaydah, which gradually evolved into a hub of expanding Houthi economic and security influence over the course of the truce period.

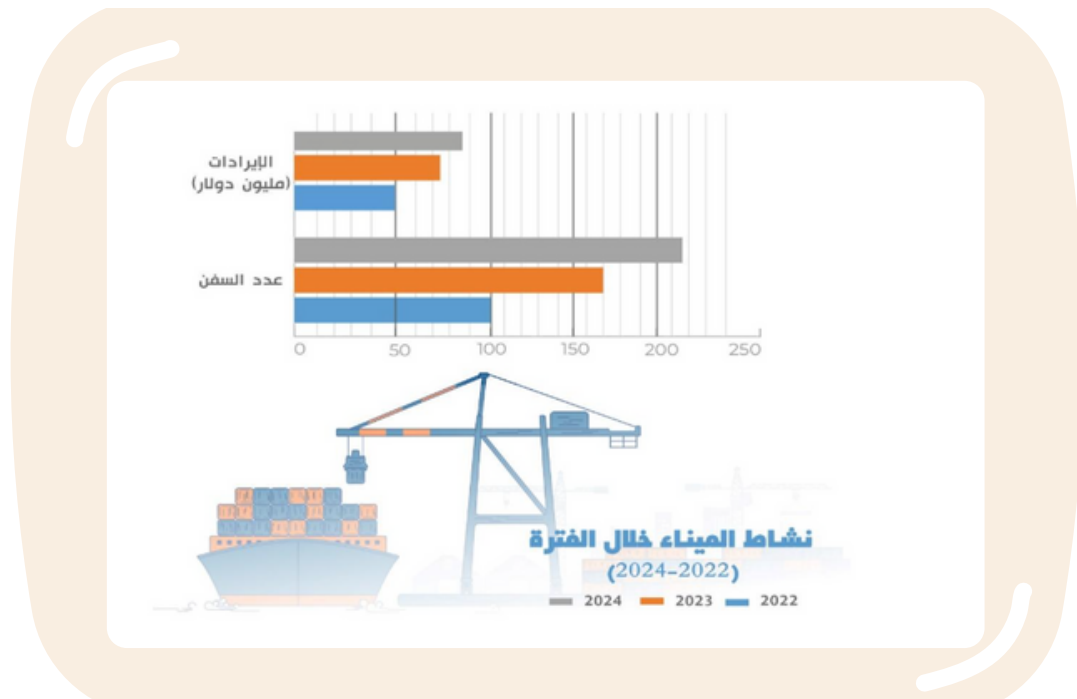


Figure No. (1): The chart shows the annual increase in the number of incoming ships and revenues from the port of Hudaydah between 2022 and 2024, reflecting a significant improvement in commercial and logistics activity.

²² Dr. Rahima Abdul Rahim, "Food security and conflict in the countries bordering the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden: a case study of Somalia and Yemen" [Arabic], Perim Journal, 3 April 2025, <https://perimjournal.com/1825>.

²³ Awsan Salem, "Since the truce was announced, the Houthis have plundered 1.6 trillion riyals in revenues from the port of Hudaydah" [Arabic], Al-Arabiya, 20 August 2023, <https://bit.ly/4IGVxzy>.

Post-Ceasefire: From Humanitarian Pause to Mechanism of Control

Although the Stockholm Agreement succeeded in halting the battle for Hudaydah on the ground, the aftermath of the ceasefire did not mark a transition toward genuine peace. Instead, it gradually turned into a phase of entrenching the Houthi group's authority and expanding its influence in the vacuum left by a retreating state presence and declining international pressure.

On the political front, the agreement failed to produce any meaningful breakthrough in the peace process. Instead, it set a dangerous precedent by solidifying de facto territorial division and reframing the notion of "calm" as a means to cement the status quo. On the social level, many residents of Hudaydah felt abandoned to their fate, left to live under an armed authority immune to accountability, amid international silence justified in the name of "stability."

As a result, the ceasefire originally intended as a temporary humanitarian measure—was transformed into a structural pillar of control, used not to facilitate peacebuilding, but to freeze any prospect of meaningful change.

Landmines: A Silent Weapon That Threatens Life

As the Houthi group expanded its control across large areas of Hudaydah Governorate, particularly along the coastal strip, it planted thousands of land and sea mines, turning vast swathes of territory into latent death zones. These mines have posed a grave and persistent threat to civilian lives and critical infrastructure, resulting in heavy human losses, many among women and children. Beyond the toll on human life, landmines have crippled agricultural activity, undermined food security, displaced hundreds of families, and deepened psychological trauma among affected communities.

Despite sustained efforts to clear affected areas, the scale of the challenge remains daunting. According to its 2024 annual report, the Saudi Project for Landmine Clearance (MASAM) reported the removal of 48,705 landmines and unexploded ordnance across Yemen, with thousands cleared specifically from Hudaydah and the West Coast.

Since its launch in 2018, the project has removed a total of over 476,432 mines and explosive devices, according to official figures. Landmines remain one of the most enduring legacies of the conflict, a silent weapon that continues to claim lives, displace communities, and obstruct recovery and stability in Hudaydah.²⁴



Figure No. (2): The chart shows the number of mines and munitions removed in Yemen under the MASAM project, illustrating the 2024 tally compared to the total removed since the project's launch in 2018.

²⁴ Annahar News, "MASAM removes 48,705 mines and unexploded ordnance in Yemen during 2024" [Arabic], 31 December 2024, <https://www.annahar-news.com/news/single/16301>.

In addition to the efforts of the Saudi MASAM Project, the Yemeni government's National Mine Action Programme, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has supported local demining teams, albeit with limited training capacity and basic equipment. Parallel efforts are being carried out by engineering units affiliated with the National Resistance, operating in parts of the West Coast.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is also active in Hudaydah and Taiz, implementing projects that provide funding, technical training, and community awareness. However, these initiatives are often constrained by restricted security access, particularly in areas under Houthi control, where field operations remain highly limited.²⁵

According to field experts interviewed, these combined efforts remain "insufficient given the scale of the disaster," highlighting the urgent need for more effective international engagement and stronger coordination among all actors involved in mine action.

*Deining efforts in Yemen are
"Insufficient given the scale of the
disaster"*

Liberated Areas: Absence of the State and Erosion of Trust

In the liberated areas south of Hudaydah, which are administered by local authorities affiliated with the internationally recognized government, the presence of state institutions remains fragile and basic services are largely absent. In interviews with local officials, the failure to achieve post-conflict recovery was attributed to several interrelated factors:

- Severely damaged infrastructure following years of conflict.
- Lack of financial and administrative resources, with local authorities relying on limited support from international organizations and donors.

²⁵ UNDP, "UNDP and UNMHA Joint Statement: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action," 4 April 2021, <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/speeches/undp-and-unmha-joint-statement-international-day-mine-awareness-and-assistance-mine-action>.

- Institutional dysfunction, including the appointment of unqualified individuals to key positions, some of whom live outside the country.

On the other hand, residents in these areas voiced deep frustration with the performance of the legitimate government, describing it as a missed opportunity to present a viable alternative to Houthi rule, arguing that it remains fragile and unconvincing.

Amid a prolonged military stalemate and waning attention to the local dimensions of peace, Hudaydah finds itself trapped in a complex and polarized reality. One part of the governorate remains under a repressive Houthi grip, where the group mobilizes resources under the rhetoric of “resistance” and political slogans; the other part, liberated yet neglected, suffers from a lack of governance and essential services.

The people of Hudaydah are not the fuel of war, as warring parties may presume. They are caught between the anvil of Houthi exploitation and the hammer of governmental absence. In the space between, a vacuum persists, enabling continued violations, the spread of landmines, and foreign interventions that only deepen the suffering of civilians, with no meaningful solutions in sight.

The Red Sea and International Security in the Context of Hudaydah

As international intervention priorities in Yemen began to shift, particularly with growing emphasis on Hudaydah Governorate, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2452 (2019), building on the Stockholm Agreement signed in December 2018. The agreement called for special security and administrative arrangements in the city of Hudaydah and its ports. In response, the resolution established the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA)²⁶. Given Hudaydah's strategic geopolitical importance, the resolution can be understood as a step toward limited international oversight of the city and its maritime infrastructure, aimed at preventing conflict escalation, safeguarding humanitarian aid flows, and protecting global interests tied to Red Sea trade and navigation.²⁷

UNMHA represents the second UN-led initiative focused on local peacebuilding in Yemen, operating in coordination with key UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), as well as with international and local NGOs.

The mission is tasked with monitoring the ceasefire, facilitating humanitarian access, and ensuring the free movement of civilians and goods through the three ports of Hudaydah, Al Salif, and Ras Issa. However, its role has largely remained limited to observation, with little capacity for proactive enforcement or intervention. This has prompted calls to enhance its effectiveness and expand its mandate to include administrative and economic oversight, ensuring a more balanced and comprehensive implementation of the Stockholm Agreement.

²⁶ UN | UNMHA, Stockholm Agreement, previously cited.

²⁷ United Nations, "Adopting Resolution 2452 (2019), Security Council Establishes Special Political Mission to Support Ceasefire between Yemen's Government, Houthi Militia," Press Release, 16 January 2019, <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13664.doc.htm>.

The limits of UNMHA's operational influence were made clear during key developments, notably the government forces' surprise redeployment in November 2021. The mission publicly stated that it had received no prior notification, stressing the informational and operational disconnect between UNMHA and the conflict parties, and pointing to the need for a more empowered and better-integrated international monitoring presence on the ground.²⁸

Houthi Naval Attacks: From Escalation to Decline

Since 2016, following their takeover of Hudaydah Governorate, the Houthi group has launched a series of maritime attacks as part of a broader shift in its combat tactics against the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition. These operations initially targeted military and logistical vessels,²⁹ including the UAE ship Swift in October 2016³⁰, and the Saudi frigate Al-Madinah in January 2017.³¹ However, in 2018, as the Joint Forces advanced along the Red Sea coastline from Al-Khawkhah to At-Tuhayta and Ad-Durayhimi, eventually reaching the outskirts of Hudaydah Airport, Houthi naval activity declined markedly. This decline was attributed to the loss of territorial control over large coastal areas previously used as launch points, as well as the destruction of workshops used to manufacture explosive-laden boats and drones.

Additional factors played a role in constraining Houthi operations, including intensified aerial and maritime surveillance by the Joint Forces and Coast Guard, and increased ground pressure that disrupted supply lines and maneuverability. According to military analysts and field commanders interviewed for this study, the decline in naval attacks was not due to a strategic shift by the Houthis, but rather a temporary outcome of battlefield dynamics at the time.

“Decline in naval attacks was not due to a strategic shift by the Houthis, but rather a temporary outcome of battlefield dynamics at the time”

28 UNDP, Damage and Capacity Assessment for Ports of Hodiedah, Salif and Ras Issa, previously cited.

29 Tahaqaq, “A video of the Houthis targeting the Emirati ship Swift in 2016 is being circulated claiming they were targeting an American ship in the Red Sea” [Arabic], 19 January 2024,

30 Al-Bayan, “The UN Security Council condemns the Houthi attack on the Emirati ship” [Arabic], 5 October 2016.

31 BBC Arabic, “Houthi attack on a Saudi frigate in the Red Sea” [Arabic], 31 January 2017.

This situation, however, changed significantly following the Joint Forces' withdrawal in 2021, which created an opening for the group to reposition itself and restore operational capabilities along the coast.

Escalation Resurgence: Hudaydah at the Heart of the Conflict

Since the outbreak of the Israeli war on Gaza in October 2023, the Houthi group has intensified its attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea³², under the banner of “supporting the Palestinian people.” In response, the United States and several allied countries formed a naval coalition (Operation Prosperity Guardian) with the stated goal of protecting international maritime routes and deterring rising threats to navigation³³.

In a related escalation, Israel launched direct airstrikes on Houthi positions in Yemen in retaliation for missile attacks that targeted its territory, including the city of Eilat. These strikes devastated critical civilian infrastructure, including the ports of Hudaydah, Al Salif, and Ras Issa, as well as power generation facilities in Ras Katheeb and the Al-Hali area. Oil storage tanks in Hudaydah and Ras Issa were also hit, deepening the humanitarian crisis and threatening the economic and livelihood security of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the governorate.

In field interviews conducted with residents and activists in Hudaydah, perspectives on these developments varied. Some expressed serious concerns about the governorate entering a cycle of open-ended international bombardment, further endangering both civilians and infrastructure.

Others viewed the escalation as a predictable consequence of Houthi control over maritime access points and their use of Hudaydah's resources to fuel a broader war effort. One participant described the current trajectory as “political exploitation of popular anger over a just cause – that of Palestine – for military purposes that do not serve Yemenis.”

³² Noam Raydan and Farzin Nadimi, “[Houthi Shipping Attacks: Patterns and Expectations for 2025, Policy Analysis](#)”, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 16 December 2024,

³³ Mohammed Ali Thamer and Betul Dogan Akkas, “[Red Sea Hostilities: Local, Regional, and International Implications](#)”, Commentary - SADA, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 January 2024.

Fragile Military Balance: An International Strategy to Prolong the Conflict

The Stockholm Agreement, which halted the battle for Hudaydah in December 2018, not only reshaped the trajectory of the military conflict in Yemen from a humanitarian standpoint, as it was publicly framed, but also functioned as part of an international strategy to sustain a fragile military equilibrium that serves the strategic interests of Western powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom.

While the agreement prevented what appeared to be an imminent military collapse of the Houthi group, it also provided the group with critical space to reposition, fortify its control over parts of the western coast, and entrench itself near key areas such as Hudaydah Port and Red Sea maritime corridors. This foothold later enabled the Houthis to launch naval attacks on international shipping routes from areas that remained under their control due to the freeze in military operations.

Although the Stockholm Agreement was promoted as a humanitarian breakthrough, the push for a ceasefire by Washington and London was also driven by strategic calculations, chiefly a desire to prevent a decisive military outcome that might reduce the dependency of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on Western security, political, and military support.

Maintaining a stalemated balance of power ensures continued Western influence in the Gulf and sustains the rationale for major arms deals:

- Between 2015 and 2021, the United States sold over \$64 billion in weapons to Saudi Arabia.³⁴
- The United Kingdom sold more than £23 billion in arms, highlighting its direct economic stake in the perpetuation of the conflict.³⁵

³⁴ Frederic Wehrey and Michele Dunne, *From Hardware to Holism: Rebalancing America's Security Engagement With Arab States*, Research, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 May 2021.

³⁵ BBC Arabic, *"The Biden administration temporarily freezes arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE"* [Arabic], 28 January 2021.

Western Containment Policy: Limited Effectiveness and Growing Repercussions

The Yemeni conflict illustrates the ineffectiveness and unsustainability of the containment approach adopted by the United States and the United Kingdom in dealing with the Houthis.

Rather than fostering de-escalation or a viable peace process, this strategy has produced counterproductive outcomes, for several key reasons:

- Unconditional agreements and ceasefires have allowed the Houthis to reposition and rebuild their capabilities, particularly naval assets, without any disarmament measures or binding commitment to a clear political roadmap.
- The policy has enabled military entrenchment rather than political engagement. Instead of incentivizing the group to pursue a negotiated settlement, these dynamics have provided it with the space to expand its security and administrative control, effectively sidelining any meaningful peace process.
- The absence of firm or coordinated international measures has emboldened the group to escalate, as evidenced by its attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea between 2023 and 2025.

Taken together, these developments suggest that Western containment has functioned more as a holding pattern than a conflict-resolution strategy, which contributes to delaying a crisis it ultimately helps deepen. Taken together, these developments suggest that Western containment has functioned more as a holding pattern than a conflict-resolution strategy, which contributes to delaying a crisis it ultimately helps deepen.

International and Regional Partners in Hudaydah

A range of international and regional actors operate in Hudaydah Governorate, engaging across political, humanitarian, and development tracks. The most prominent among them can be classified as follows:

1-The United Nations

The United Nations plays a leading role in international efforts to support peace in Yemen. At the forefront is the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General which brokered the Stockholm Agreement in December 2018, widely considered the first significant political breakthrough in the Yemeni peace process, particularly with regard to Hudaydah.

The second key UN body is the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), established under Security Council Resolution 2452. UNMHA is tasked with monitoring the ceasefire, facilitating humanitarian access, and ensuring freedom of movement through Hudaydah's key ports and strategic corridors.

On the development and civilian front, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been especially active, implementing projects focused on mine action, reconstruction, and strengthening the rule of law. Some of its most notable interventions in Hudaydah include:

- Supporting the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center (YEMAC) in clearing mines from roads and residential areas.³⁶
- Implementing infrastructure initiatives under the Institutional and Economic Resilience Enhancement Program, such as paving the road connecting the center of Al Munirah District to the main route into Hudaydah city.
- Rehabilitating the Port of Hudaydah and its critical facilities, in partnership with the Red Sea Ports Corporation.

These projects are supported through funding from major donor countries, including the United States, Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

2-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia plays a pivotal role in Yemen's political trajectory, beginning with the GCC Initiative of 2011³⁷, and continuing through its support for the internationally recognized government. Its interventions are channeled through two main entities:

- **Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY)**³⁸

SDRPY operates across eight core sectors: education; health; water; energy; transportation; agriculture; institutional capacity building; and economic development.

While the program has an extensive presence in governorates such as Aden, Ma'rib, Hadramaut, and Socotra, its activity in Hudaydah remains limited and is restricted to areas under the control of the IRG.

- **King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief)**³⁹

KSRelief is among the most active humanitarian actors in Hudaydah. Its interventions include: providing food and medical assistance to displaced populations and the most vulnerable groups; supporting UN-led programs, in coordination with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO); and funding mine clearance operations, water provision projects, and emergency interventions during periods of military escalation. Despite facing security and logistical constraints, KSRelief remains a cornerstone of the humanitarian response in Hudaydah's liberated areas.

³⁶ UNDP Yemen in Hodeida, United Nations Development Programme, 14 May 2019, <https://www.undp.org/yemen/publications/undp-yemen-hodeida>.

³⁷ GCC Yemen Initiative of 21 April 2011, Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, 23 January 2012, https://osesgy.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gcc_initiative_yemen_english.pdf

³⁸ Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, official website, <https://sdrpy.gov.sa/en>.

³⁹ King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), official website, <https://www.ksrelief.org/>.

3-The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates has played a significant role in both the military and humanitarian arenas in Yemen, particularly during the escalation years along the West Coast front. It was a key partner in the Joint Forces' military operations that advanced toward the city of Hudaydah in 2018, and was instrumental in supporting and forming several prominent fighting forces,

including the National Resistance Forces, the Giants Brigades, and the Tihama Resistance, all of which played a pivotal role in liberating large swathes of the governorate's districts.⁴⁰

In tandem with its military involvement, the UAE also provided humanitarian and development assistance in the liberated areas of Hudaydah. Its efforts focused on rapid-response interventions in the sectors of food, health, water, and shelter. Through the Emirates Red Crescent, it implemented a range of projects, including: rehabilitating hospitals; distributing food baskets; drilling water wells; and funding emergency shelter initiatives for displaced populations, especially in areas such as Al Khawkhah and Al Tuhayta.⁴¹

Although the UAE's direct military presence declined after 2019, its influence remains embedded in the security and humanitarian infrastructure of the coastal areas. This is maintained through local support networks and field-level operational entities, most notably the humanitarian cell affiliated with the National Resistance Forces, led by Brigadier General Tariq Saleh.⁴²

4-The Quartet Countries

The International Quartet on Yemen was established in June 2016, comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It was formed as a diplomatic mechanism to coordinate political, economic, and humanitarian efforts, and to support the peace process in Yemen.

⁴⁰ UAE Involvement in the Yemeni Conflict: An In-Depth Analysis , Total Military Insight, <https://totalmilitaryinsight.com/uaes-involvement-in-yemen-conflict/>

⁴¹ IMichael Knights, Lessons from the UAE War in Yemen, Policy Analysis, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 18 Aug 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/lessons-uae-war-yemen>.

⁴² Zachary Laub, How the UAE Wields Power in Yemen - Interview with Neil Partrick, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 June 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/how-uae-wields-power-yemen>.

In its February 2019 statement issued from Warsaw, the Quartet emphasized the need for full implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement, including the redeployment of forces from the city and from the ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa. The statement also called on all parties to cooperate with the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) and the UN Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA).

The Quartet holds significant political, military, and economic leverage over the main actors in the conflict, enabling it to coordinate pressure and provide guarantees to support agreement implementation. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE exert influence over the Yemeni government, the United States and the United Kingdom maintain diplomatic and security relationships that allow them to shape international stances on the Houthis, whether through the UN Security Council or through backchannel diplomacy.

Moreover, the Quartet can also exercise indirect influence over the Houthis via regional actors connected to them, particularly Iran and Oman. By leveraging its relations with Muscat and Tehran, the Quartet can apply pressure to promote de-escalation and advocate for the implementation of the Hudaydah agreements.

5-Islamic Republic of Iran

Although not directly involved in official diplomatic frameworks, Iran has been a key backer of the Houthi group since the 2014 coup, providing multi-dimensional support that includes political and media guidance, military training, and the transfer of drone systems, ballistic missiles, and advanced naval warfare technologies. This strategic backing has enabled the Houthis to bolster their military capabilities, tighten their control over state institutions, suppress dissent, recruit children, and establish an ideological project modeled on the Iranian experience.

For its part, Iran has used the Yemeni file as a regional pressure card in its standoff with the Gulf states and the United States, positioning the Houthis as a military proxy in the southern Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, Tehran maintains a diplomatic buffer through intermediaries such as Oman, giving it flexibility and plausible deniability in international forums.

Should Tehran's priorities shift or its interests call for regional de-escalation, it possesses real leverage over the group, which has the potential to steer the Houthis toward a comprehensive political settlement.

6-European Union

The European Union (EU) is among the leading international supporters of a political resolution in Yemen. It plays a neutral diplomatic role and provides funding for humanitarian and development programs through instruments such as the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). The EU has contributed to UN-led efforts, notably by supporting the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement, financing the UNMHA mission, and funding local organizations working to advance community peacebuilding in Hudaydah.

Looking ahead, the EU has the potential to play a more effective role by backing local mediation efforts, expanding its development portfolio, and linking aid disbursement to political progress. In addition, it could leverage its influence to press regional actors, particularly Iran, to support de-escalation and constructive engagement in the peace process.

7-China and Russia

China and Russia play an indirect role in the Yemeni file, primarily through their positions in the UN Security Council. Both countries support political solutions under the auspices of the United Nations and maintain balanced stances toward the warring parties. While they have no direct presence on the ground, their strategic interests in Red Sea stability are vital for protecting global trade and energy routes, and thus make them invested in maintaining de-escalation. Their relative neutrality could position them to play a constructive role in future political dialogue or post-conflict reconstruction, should a comprehensive agreement be reached.

Despite the diversity of international and regional actors involved in **Hodeidah**, their combined efforts remain insufficient to catalyze a meaningful breakthrough in advancing local peace within the governorate.

Solutions and Moving Forward Towards Peace in Hudaydah

The restoration of local peace in Hudaydah remains a long-term challenge that goes beyond the governorate's own internal dynamics and drivers of violence, and extends across the wider Yemeni context. Any viable vision for peace must begin with the gains already achieved in Hudaydah and build upon them towards a phased and inclusive recovery.

It is crucial that security measures designed to foster local peace must not be limited to legitimized violence exercised within conflict-controlled territories. Rather, such measures should be understood within a broader and more holistic concept of security that addresses development as a fundamental and genuine pathway to achieving lasting peace and stability. Sustainable peace cannot be realized without a stable economic environment, and no development is possible without a secure setting that ensures justice and equal opportunity. Security and development, therefore, must be approached as mutually reinforcing pillars.

This means creating a wide array of employment opportunities for the labor force disrupted by years of conflict, and establishing an enabling economic environment legally, administratively, and operationally. These opportunities should encompass small-scale productive and artisanal enterprises, as well as coastal and maritime economic initiatives along Hudaydah's long shoreline, including its islands and fishing waters. The local population has traditionally depended on fishing and agriculture, and the region's coastline holds untapped potential for tourism and economic diversification.

Women must also be actively included and competitively engaged alongside men and youth in all sectors. Such an approach can generate dynamic economic activity across tourism, agriculture, trade, and light industry, which would respond to the aspirations of Hudaydah's residents, steer communities away from the shadow of war, and strengthen opportunities for equitable and dignified livelihoods.

The ports of Hudaydah (Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa) play a central role in facilitating the entry of goods, fuel, and imports into the country. In the past year, port activity reportedly increased by 85%, with revenues doubling. Yet despite this surge, the residents of Hudaydah continue to suffer from deteriorating living conditions, poor services, and scarce economic opportunities.

In this context, Hudaydah stands among the governorates most affected by the ongoing crisis, with escalating poverty, weakened public services, and deepening hardship among vulnerable groups, especially amid ongoing salary suspensions and job scarcity. To address these challenges, a new framework is urgently needed for managing the governorate's ports and public resources—one that ensures their neutralization and reorientation towards sustainable development and improved living conditions.

“Women must also be actively included and competitively engaged alongside men and youth in all sectors.”

A key step in this direction involves reviewing the current administration of Hudaydah Port and establishing a civilian-led management model, agreed upon by local representatives and stakeholders. A portion of the port's revenues should be earmarked for improving living conditions, restoring public services, and ensuring salary payments, particularly for sectors such as electricity which is essential for daily life.

Additionally, a comprehensive rehabilitation plan is needed to revitalize the three ports (Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa) through infrastructure upgrades and reconstruction of facilities damaged during the most recent waves of military escalation. This includes docks, service buildings, oil storage facilities in Hudaydah and Ras Issa, and damaged power plants in Ras Kathib and Al-Hali, many of which were struck during recent Israeli and US air raids.

Beyond reconstruction, it is critical to expand dock capacity to accommodate more vessels and store larger volumes of cargo, thereby enhancing the ports' competitiveness. Cooperation with international port authorities and specialized logistics firms could bring in much-needed expertise and investment. Pursuing funding from institutions such as the World Bank could also support infrastructure modernization and equipment upgrades, contributing to improved port performance, both economically and in terms of service provision.

In tandem with these efforts, a multi-dimensional framework should be developed to guide the recovery of local peace in Hudaydah, based on the following elements:

Reactivating the Role of the UN Mission:

The Stockholm Agreement represented a legal opportunity to reorganize the situation in Hudaydah, but the absence of serious commitment to its implementation, particularly in the administrative and economic dimensions, has severely limited its impact on the ground. A comprehensive reactivation of the agreement is therefore essential, with an expanded role for the United Nations that aligns with the aspirations of the people of Hudaydah and the broader Tihama region, and that lays the groundwork for sustainable local peace.

To revitalize the role of the United Nations Mission in Hudaydah (UNMHA), it is crucial to emphasize the need for full implementation of the Stockholm Agreement, not only its military provisions.

This entails renewed focus on the agreement's administrative (local governance), security (protection of civilians and public spaces), and economic (management of ports and financial resources) components. A balanced and integrated approach to implementation is needed to foster both stability and development.

To this end, the UN mission should strengthen its role through the following:

1. Enforce Accountability Measures under Chapter VII

UNMHA should advocate for the activation of legal accountability mechanisms for violations of the agreement or breaches of international humanitarian law. Chapter VII of the UN Charter provides a legal framework for taking punitive measures against parties that obstruct peace or commit grave violations. Enforcing accountability would enhance international oversight, deter violations, and help protect civilians as well as monitoring personnel on the ground.

2. Support Inclusive Political Engagement and Local Initiatives

The mission should actively promote the involvement of all local political and social actors in shaping and executing the implementation framework. The goal is to ensure that all components of the Stockholm Agreement – military, administrative, security, and economic – are addressed as an integrated whole, with meaningful participation from local stakeholders. This inclusivity is key to ensuring representation, local ownership, and durable stability in the governorate.

3. Establish Joint Civilian-Security Committees Under UN Oversight

UNMHA should facilitate the creation of joint committees comprising representatives from both sides of the conflict. These committees, under direct UN supervision, would be responsible for implementing both the civilian and security provisions of the agreement. International oversight would help ensure transparency, reduce the risk of manipulation or violations, and enhance trust in the process.

Mine Clearance:

Mine contamination in Hudaydah Governorate remains one of the most pressing obstacles to peacebuilding and development. Effective mine clearance requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that encompasses: community awareness campaigns about the dangers of mines, field clearance operations by specialized teams, the physical and psychological rehabilitation of victims, reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, and coordinated efforts between local and international actors to ensure sustained implementation and oversight.

The responsibility for leading and coordinating these efforts lies with the United Nations Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), which must adopt a more proactive role in mitigating civilian harm and facilitating recovery.

The Saudi-led MASAM demining initiative can also be more strategically leveraged, especially in coastal and agricultural areas such as Hays, Al Khawkhah, Bayt Al Faqih, At Tuhayat, Ad Durayhimi, and Al Hali. Strengthening the national mine action program is essential to building local capacity and ensuring the long-term sustainability of clearance efforts. Renewed partnership with the United Nations is also critical, especially given its prior achievements in this field, though such progress has recently stalled due to funding shortages.

Security and Military Guarantees:

No peace process can succeed without a comprehensive system of security and military guarantees that builds trust among parties and prevents a relapse into violence. In this context, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Dismantle violence-enabling structures** by eliminating practices and symbols that encourage conflict, releasing detainees, and reopening key roads to facilitate the movement of goods and people between Hudaydah and neighboring governorates.
- **Annul politically motivated** convictions against opponents and ensure their safe return, enabling them to resume their lives free from fear or persecution.

- **Empower the local community** including civil society organizations and diverse societal groups, as a cornerstone of sustainable security and social justice. This includes promoting popular oversight to ensure institutions serve the public interest rather than narrow factional agendas.
- **Advance civic development** through educational reforms that foster tolerance, the economic inclusion of women and youth, and the enactment of legislation that criminalizes extremism.
- **Restore judicial capacity** to recover confiscated private property, especially land, and compensate affected individuals. This also requires improving human rights and gender sensitivity training for security services.

To ensure effective implementation of these measures, clear distribution of responsibilities is essential:

- **The Internationally-Recognized Government (IRG):** Activate legal mechanisms to ensure accountability, in coordination with the United Nations and the Security Council.
- **UNMHA Mission:** Oversee the implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement, coordinate joint committees, and ensure inclusive representation from all parties.
- **Joint Civilian and Security Committees:** Composed of representatives from both sides of the conflict, operating under UN supervision.
- **The National Mine Action Program & MASAM Project:** Lead mine clearance operations with support from international organizations and in coordination with local authorities.
- **United Nations and Regional Entities:** Provide financial, logistical, and technical assistance to support implementation.
- **Ministries of Defense and Interior:** Design and monitor security guarantees in cooperation with UNMHA and local stakeholders.

Hudaydah Governorate faces one of the most severe humanitarian crises in Yemen. The compounding effects of war, economic collapse, and social fragility have produced unprecedented levels of poverty, displacement, and violence, especially for vulnerable populations such as women and children. These groups bear the brunt of instability in a context where even the most basic services and safety nets are absent, particularly in rural and frontline districts.

In response to this reality, a series of integrated humanitarian and social interventions are needed, centered on the following priorities:

1. Promoting Community Awareness and Combating Gender-Based Violence

With the rise in domestic violence and violations against women and children in Hudaydah, there is an urgent need for sustained awareness campaigns targeting conflict-affected communities. These campaigns should be implemented in partnership between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and local civil society organizations, with the active engagement of religious endowment offices, media outlets, and technical support from international organizations such as UNICEF and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The aim is to foster behavioral change and enhance protective mechanisms within communities.

2. Establishing Specialized Centers for Psychosocial Support

The lack of mental health and psychosocial services remains a critical gap, particularly for displaced women and children. To address this, specialized community centers should be established under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, in coordination with local councils and implemented by international organizations such as Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). These centers would provide psychological counseling, mental health services, and emergency interventions within a safe and culturally sensitive environment.

3. Economic Empowerment of Women and Support for Vulnerable Families

Given the sharp rise in poverty, especially among female-headed households, targeted economic empowerment programs must be prioritized.

The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, UN Women, and the UNDP should lead initiatives in partnership with local development organizations and technical education offices.

These programs should include vocational training, microenterprise support, and the promotion of context-appropriate income-generating activities that strengthen family resilience and long-term recovery.

4. Providing Cash Transfers and Emergency Assistance to the Poorest Families

With many families in Hudaydah Governorate lacking any form of stable income, there is a pressing need to expand the coverage of cash transfer programs. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, in coordination with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Social Fund for Development (SFD), should scale up emergency cash assistance, linking it to education, health, and nutrition services to form a temporary humanitarian safety net that helps stabilize vulnerable households.

5. Integrating Gender Issues into the Educational Process

To foster a more equitable educational environment, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Training and Rehabilitation Sector and international educational partners such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), must revise school curricula and develop teacher training manuals. These materials should equip educators to address cases of violence and embed the values of equality, dignity, and mutual respect within school culture.

6. Engaging Men and Youth in Societal Change

Creating lasting social transformation requires the active involvement of men and youth in reshaping gender norms and promoting a culture of tolerance and inclusion. Awareness programs targeting male youth should be developed by civil society organizations in partnership with the Ministry of Endowments and Guidance, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and local media platforms. These initiatives aim to challenge stereotypes and foster broader community acceptance of gender equality.

7. Providing Safe Spaces for Women and Girls and Child-Friendly Centers

In light of the fragile protection environment, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in coordination with local councils and in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and child protection organizations, must establish safe spaces and multi-service centers in Hudaydah Governorate. These facilities should ensure psychosocial protection for vulnerable groups and offer educational and nutritional support to children, particularly those affected by displacement and conflict.

8. Enhancing Women's Representation in Decision-Making Positions

To promote inclusive local policymaking in Hudaydah Governorate, the Ministry of Local Administration and the Ministry of Human Rights, in coordination with local councils and women's organizations, should work to empower women's participation in councils and community initiatives. This includes providing targeted training and ensuring equitable access to leadership and decision-making roles.

9. Updating Legislation to Protect Women and Children

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Legal Affairs must lead a comprehensive review and reform of legal frameworks related to the protection of women and children. With technical support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), this process should aim to criminalize harmful practices and address legal gaps that undermine protection within the governorate.

10. Forming Pressure Groups from the Governorate's Residents

Civil society organizations, professional unions, and local media outlets play a vital role in establishing grassroots advocacy coalitions in Hudaydah Governorate. These groups should work to champion the rights of women and children, influence public discourse, and pressure relevant authorities to adopt and enforce protective legislation and inclusive policies.

It is important to note that the humanitarian, social, and economic measures proposed for Hudaydah Governorate cannot be implemented in isolation. They require a broader enabling environment: a cohesive social fabric that embraces these reforms, a stable and inclusive political climate, and a consensus among key actors that prioritizes the interests of citizens and the nation. Achieving these goals will depend on a strong and capable state that can implement a phased, context-sensitive roadmap aligned with both the timing and geography of post-conflict recovery.

Final Remarks

Recent developments following the ceasefire in Hudaydah Governorate demonstrate that the security situation remains fragile, casting a persistent shadow over local communities and hindering efforts toward peacebuilding and post-war recovery. Day-to-day security incidents, coupled with deep-rooted structural challenges, continue to pose serious threats to stability. Key challenges include the ongoing closure and destruction of roads, the degradation of natural and extracted water resources, the restriction of grazing areas, the suspension of energy production, the vandalism of public infrastructure, and the halt of basic services such as health centers and schools.

Achieving sustainable peace and stability in Hudaydah requires a comprehensive approach that addresses local, regional, and international dimensions. Improving security and economic conditions through sustainable development initiatives and ensuring the inclusive participation of all segments of society, particularly in vital sectors, are essential steps toward restoring local peace. Equally important is strengthening and revitalizing the role of the United Nations Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). As previously noted, serious and sustained commitment to implementing the Stockholm Agreement remains a key entry point to stability in Hudaydah and could serve as a solid foundation for lasting peace across Yemen.

In contrast, the continuation of a “no-war, no-peace” status quo – or a relapse into armed conflict – represents one of the gravest threats to both local peace and national recovery. Closing off all avenues that could lead back to war has become an urgent necessity. Only through cohesive, coordinated efforts can the governorate be protected from a renewed cycle of violence and steered toward a safer, more stable future for its people.

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