



# THE YEMEN TREND

**January  
2017**

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The Yemen Trend is a monthly digest that highlights Yemen's key economic and humanitarian trends and political and military developments, providing context and analysis where necessary in order to facilitate informed discussion deeply rooted in the facts.

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# Executive Overview

The humanitarian catastrophe underway in Yemen showed no signs of subsiding in January, with the UN and international humanitarian NGOs warning famine is a possible scenario for 2017. The offensive up the western coast of Taiz governorate by Hadi-aligned forces, with heavy air support from the coalition, left several hundred fighters dead and thousands of residents displaced. The way is being paved for an offensive on Hodeidah governorate, which could close the Hodeidah Port and cut off vital imports to the country's northwest. Yemen is now described as the "largest food security emergency in the world" and with millions in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, there are worries the closure of Hodeidah Port could lead to famine.

Throughout January the UN envoy travelled to several of the coalition member states' capitals before meeting President Hadi in Aden and the Houthi/Saleh alliance in Sana'a. He attempted to convene the 12-member De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC) in Amman to hash out a joint implementation plan for a ceasefire, which after two weeks of planning would be put into effect and the DCC would relocate to Dhahran Al-Janoub in Saudi Arabia to monitor it. However, by the end of January the UN envoy reported neither side had shown real progress since he last met with them. Hadi-aligned forces demonstrated their intention to make further military gains before entering into a new round of talks, and Houthi/Saleh forces appeared unwilling to submit a plan for how they would withdraw and hand over heavy weapons as stipulated in the roadmap.

Meanwhile, on the military front Hadi-aligned forces continued to build on the major escalation put in motion at the beginning of December, most notably with their advancement into the port town of Mocha in a major offensive up the west coast dubbed Operation Golden Arrow. This was the single biggest military gain by either side in several months, but with much of Taiz still in the hands of the Houthi/Saleh alliance and slow progress on the moderate gains made elsewhere in December, the national power balance has not shifted considerably. In response to the escalation by the Hadi government and its coalition allies, the Houthis launched a massive military recruitment campaign in Sana'a called "Strong against the infidels."

# Timeline

- Jan. 6** Major escalation in Dhubab district of Taiz by Hadi-aligned forces
- Jan. 16** UN envoy meets President Hadi in Aden
- Jan. 23** UN envoy meets Houthi and GPC officials in Sana'a
- Jan. 23** Hadi-aligned forces announce control of Mocha Port, clashes continue
- Jan. 26** UN envoy reports no substantial progress to Security Council in New York
- Jan. 29** US commando raid in Al-Baydha kills around 14 AQAP militants, several civilians

# Humanitarian and Economic Trends

Yemen is described as “the largest food security emergency in the world” by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) in a January report titled “[Improved humanitarian access and trade support needed to limit famine risk](#).” FEWS NET, a US government-created and funded body, warned that “should conflict, commercial import levels, and humanitarian and market access continue at current levels, the size and severity of the current emergency is expected to persist during 2017.” Seven to ten million people are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse and require urgent assistance, and of these, at least two million are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) “and face an increased risk of mortality.”

The cumulative total of reported cholera cases reached 17,334 as of January 18, with 99 associated deaths, 11 of those confirmed to have been caused by cholera, [according](#) to the WHO. This is up from 15,658 reported cases only a week earlier. Suspected cases have been recorded in at least 156 districts in 15 of Yemen’s governorates, according to a January 15 [joint report](#) by the Yemen Cholera Taskforce, which is led by the WHO. According to that report, 841 suspected cases have been tested, and of these 180 tested positive, with some results still pending. If this ratio of positive tests to suspected cases is representative of the total population, it would mean well over 3,000 Yemenis have, or have had, cholera. The report does, however, say the “epidemic curve shows a declining trend of incidences” from December 18, 2016 forward.

**An estimated 63,000 children died of preventable causes in Yemen in 2016**, UNICEF [announced](#), which is 10,000 more than the previous year. In January UNICEF also said it had recorded nearly 1,400 children killed and over 2,140 injured since the conflict escalated in March 2015. UNICEF Representative in Yemen Meritxell Relano said in a [statement](#) that the real figures are likely much higher. The statement came in response to two coalition airstrikes earlier that day near a school in Nehm district of Sana’a governorate, which left at least five dead. UNICEF’s representative added that nearly 2,000 schools are no longer functioning due

to damage or destruction, or due to being used as housing for IDPs or for military purposes.

## **Analysis: Hodeidah and the impending step toward famine in Yemen**

With forces aligned to President Hadi and his coalition backers nearly in control of Yemen’s port town of Mocha, the governorate of Hodeidah, just 40 km to the north, is now within their reach. Foreign diplomats and international humanitarian NGOs are increasingly worried an attack is now imminent on the governorate.

The Hodeidah Port is estimated to bring in up to 80 percent of national imports, and millions of Yemenis are already in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian implications of an attack on Hodeidah Port is therefore expected to be devastating if alternative arrangements for essential food imports and their distribution are not taken.

*Read the [full analysis](#) on the DeepRoot Blog.*

**The World Bank announced two new grants totaling \$450 million** to fund two nationwide projects over the next three years. The projects are aimed at providing access to essential health and nutrition services, income opportunities, and vital social services to Yemen’s most vulnerable. The [grants](#) come from the International Development Association (IDA), which is the World Bank’s fund for the poorest, and is part of a major shift in the Bank’s worldwide strategy to give grants for projects in conflict-affected states. Furthermore, rather than work through the Yemeni government, the World Bank is partnering with UN agencies and strengthening its support for independent, quasi-governmental institutions like the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the Public Works Project (PWP).

**Around \$2 billion in urgent funding is required for 2017**, Jamie McGoldrick, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [said](#) at a press conference in Sana’a on January 16.

The appeal is to alleviate the suffering of Yemen's most vulnerable, which McGoldrick pegged at around 10 million people. The 2016 appeal was for \$1.8 billion to cover 8.6 million people, and only 60 percent of it was funded.

Relatedly, based on figures presented by McGoldrick at the same press conference, it was widely reported that the UN made a new announcement that 10,000 people have been killed since March 2015, with several newspapers citing this as the new "[civilian](#)" death toll. However, McGoldrick's [statement](#), that "the estimates are that over 10,000 people have been killed in this conflict and almost 40,000 people injured," was not an update and does not distinguish between civilian and combatant. The 10,000 figure was given in [August](#) 2016. When questioned why the toll has not been updated since then, McGoldrick [responded](#): "I would like us to be able to put out an updated figure but unfortunately it's very difficult," referencing the fact that 55 percent of the health facilities in Yemen which normally record casualties are no longer functioning. Then, in a reversal, UN OCHA head Stephen O'Brien told the Security Council at the end of January that as of December 31, "7,469 Yemenis had been killed and 40,483 injured due to the conflict."

**Qat cultivation now accounts for around 15 percent of agricultural land** and has expanded during the conflict, according to an [article](#) in the non-profit Science and Development Network. Quoting statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, the article says annual spending on qat by Yemenis has reached \$12 billion. Qat cultivation is said to use up around 38 percent of all water used in the agricultural sector, and the number of wells dug during the war have nearly doubled due to lacking oversight.

**Human Rights Watch presents counter-evidence for five of the incidents** investigated by the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT), in a January 13 [letter](#) to its legal advisor. The JIAT, which was established by the Saudi-led coalition, has only investigated five of the 78 attacks Human Rights Watch has documented as "apparently unlawful coalition attacks in Yemen since March 2015," and each investigation thus far has contradicted the assessments made by independent human rights organizations and fallen short of international standards.

**Newly printed Yemeni riyal arrived in Aden from Russia** on January 6, Foreign Minister Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi [said](#), the first such shipment since the Central Bank of Yemen was moved from Sana'a to Aden in September 2016. The foreign minister also said his government had received "excellent cooperation" from international banks. The Prime Minister announced the end of the liquidity crisis and that the government would pay salaries in all governorates based on 2014 records. Funds were [reportedly](#) sent to Sana'a for government salaries to be paid.

## Political Developments

**Speaking to the UN Security Council on January 26, Ould Cheikh** criticized both warring parties and reported no significant progress. In his [speech](#), the UN envoy said Houthi/Saleh representatives have not provided him any plans, nor shown any progress on withdrawals or the process of handing over heavy weapons since the last time he visited them. Meanwhile, he said "President Hadi continues to criticize these proposals without agreeing to discuss them and this will hinder and impede the path toward peace."

### Background

The UN envoy met Hadi in Aden on December 1, where the president reportedly made several demands, including that he should remain president to oversee the transition process until a new leader is elected, and for Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi and Ali Abdullah Saleh to be exiled. Into January the Hadi government maintained its opposition to the roadmap on the basis that it does not conform to the so-called three references: UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which calls on the Houthis to withdraw and hand over heavy weapons, as well as the GCC initiative and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. Houthi and GPC officials expressed willingness to engage with the roadmap since mid-November, though without agreeing to any specific conditions.



On December 18 the quad – the foreign ministers of the US, UK, UAE, and Saudi Arabia – convened for the fourth time since August, joined by the Omani foreign minister and the UN envoy. They released a [joint communiqué](#), which made no reference to Hadi's demands or the new proposal requested by his foreign minister, Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi. Instead, it "reaffirms" the original October 23 roadmap and issues key points which appear to have incorporated some of the president's concerns. The main difference appeared to be that Hadi would remain president until after full withdrawals by Houthi/Saleh forces. The joint communiqué urged all parties to immediately agree to the April 10 ceasefire conditions which was to be enacted "two weeks after representatives of the parties arrive in Amman to begin planning and preparations for the cessation." However, no progress was announced for the remainder of December.

*For more details, see DeepRoot's [December 2016](#) issue of *The Yemen Trend*.*

**The UN envoy travelled to Aden on January 16 and met President Hadi**, Prime Minister Ahmed Bin Dagher, and Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi. The trip followed visits by the envoy to the capitals of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman. In a [note to correspondents](#) later that day, Ould Cheikh said what is needed is "the renewal of the Cessation of Hostilities followed by consultations to develop a comprehensive agreement." The UN envoy said he "asked the president to act swiftly and engage constructively with the UN's proposal for the sake of the country's future," but did not make clear whether he presented an updated plan to Hadi, as demanded by his delegation head, Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi. The following day, Secretary of State John Kerry said during his last [press session](#) that there is "a plan for peace on Yemen that's on the table now. President Hadi just accepted it a couple of days ago." Kerry gave no further details as to what Hadi supposedly agreed to.

**The UN envoy met with Houthi and GPC officials in Sana'a** on January 23. [According](#) to the UN, "The meetings focused on the full and comprehensive

political settlement of the crisis, the restoration of the Cessation of Hostilities, [and] the security plan required for the peace agreement." Ould Cheikh renewed his call for a ceasefire and two apparent steps toward that process are mentioned in his statement:

- The UN envoy called on the Houthis and GPC to urgently "provide a well elaborated plan on security, withdrawal and handover of medium and heavy weapons." This plan constitutes an essential part of the comprehensive peace agreement we are aiming to implement," he said. "What we need at this stage is more than words, what we need is commitment and results."
- Referencing the humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the closure of Sana'a airport, Ould Cheikh called on the Hadi government "to allow the resumption of commercial flights to Sana'a without further delay."

Relatedly, a letter was reportedly given to the UN envoy from the Houthi/Saleh government, Sana'a-based Saba news [reported](#) on January 10. Repeating the demand the group's foreign minister gave in December, the letter reportedly calls on "the countries of the aggression to demonstrate their good intentions" by taking the first step in lifting restrictions on Sana'a airport and opening it to civilian and commercial traffic.

**Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi criticized the UN envoy's trip to Sana'a**, calling some of his meetings in Sana'a "unacceptable" and "inconsistent with his obligations." In a series of [Tweets](#) on January 23, Al-Mekhlafi, who also serves as the head of Hadi's delegation for the peace process, specifically pointed to Ould Cheikh's meeting with Hisham Sharaf, his rival foreign minister in the unrecognized Government of National Salvation in Sana'a. Al-Mekhlafi said "the envoy's meetings should be limited to the coup party representatives in the consultations," referring to the Houthi and GPC delegates that have been taking part in consultations before the two groups formed a joint presidential body and subsequently a cabinet. For these reasons, Al-Mekhlafi said his government issued a formal protest to the envoy.

Earlier in the month, Al-Mekhlafi in effect said further military gains were necessary before peace talks are held. Speaking of the Dhubab offensive in Taiz governorate, on January 9 Al-Mekhlafi [called](#) it

“important to reignite the political process.” He said “the Houthis will not accept dialogue” unless they are forced into talks by a “change on the ground.”

**British Member of Parliament Andrew Mitchell travelled to Sana’a** and met with Supreme Political Council head Saleh Al-Sammad, as well as GPC head Ali Abdullah Saleh and Foreign Minister Hisham Sharaf. Following his trip, he [wrote](#) in the Middle East Eye that the Houthi/Saleh alliance told him they would “accept Britain chairing and mediating any Yemeni-Saudi negotiations within a UN structure.” He also said he was told by the Houthis that if there was a ceasefire they would withdraw from Saudi territory “and accept a 20 km demilitarized zone within Yemen.”

**The parliament is ordered to relocate to Aden**, according to a presidential [decree issued](#) by Hadi on January 28. The very next day, Sana’a-based Saba News [reported](#) that Yahya Al-Raei, the speaker of parliament, chaired a meeting and announced the parliament would resume its sessions on February 4 in Sana’a.

**On January 30 the UN envoy reported that The De-escalation and Coordination Committee (DCC) building in Dhahran Al-Janoub was “[attacked](#),”** although he refrained from placing blame. Saudi media [reported](#) the building was struck by a Katyusha rocket fired by the Houthis. The building is intended to be used by the DCC to monitor a ceasefire which the UN envoy is attempting to broker.

## Military and Security developments

**At night on January 6 an escalation began to retake Dhubab district of Taiz**, located 30 km north of Bab Al-Mandeb. The offensive began in December 2016 and involves five brigades, armored vehicles supplied by the UAE, and bombing support from air and sea from the coalition. Major General Fadhl Hassan, who is the commander of the Fourth Military Region based in Aden and active in Taiz, [said](#) the following day the national army had “liberated almost all the Dhubab and Al-

Waziya regions.” However, the Houthi-run Al-Masira TV station aired [footage](#) of Houthi/Saleh fighters destroying several armored vehicles in Dhubab and walking around freely, bringing into question the Hadi government narrative. Brigadier Omar Subaihi, commander of the Third Brigade and a prominent Southern Movement supporter, was [killed](#) on January 7 reportedly by sniper fire.

By January 9 Hadi-aligned forces took the strategic Al-Ameri military base, located 35 km north of Bab Al-Mandeb. It was [reported](#) by medical officials that in less than four full days of fighting around 71 Houthis and 35 Hadi-aligned soldiers were killed. During this period the port of Mocha was under heavy bombardment from coalition helicopters and warships in preparation for the expected advance there by Hadi forces. By January 21 Hadi forces were 5 to 6 km from Mocha, still fully under Houthi/Saleh control. One resident who had fled Mocha [said](#) the Houthis were allowing people to leave but were arresting anyone out past curfew. Thousands of [landmines](#) planted by Houthi/Saleh forces delayed their advance, and snipers killed several soldiers checking for them.

On January 23 Hadi-aligned forces [announced](#) their capture of Mocha port, which had been controlled by Houthi/Saleh forces since November 2014. Despite the proclaimed liberation of Mocha, toward the end of the month Houthi/Saleh forces were still [said](#) to be holed up in the center of the city, though cut off from the rest of Taiz. High death tolls were reported throughout the month, and citing medical sources AFP said on January 26 that nearly 230 fighters from either side had been killed since January 7.

**In Nehm District of Sana’a, Hadi forces and allied tribesmen** claimed to have made gains on January 4, taking Al-Hamra mountain with the help of heavy coalition airstrikes. “We seek to purge Al-Houthis from their last pockets in Nehm district and mount another push to take the neighboring Bani Hushaish district,” a spokesman for the forces [said](#). The district of Bani Hushaish [borders](#) Nehm and the capital Sana’a, and is therefore of great strategic importance. On January 1 Ali Abdullah Saleh [met](#) with several prominent political and tribal figures from the district and spoke at length about their commitment to fighting the “aggression.”



**Shelling by Houthi/Saleh forces killed ten civilians in Taiz city on January 18.** A house in the resistance-held Al-Noor neighborhood was [reportedly](#) shelled, killing three people, and seven of the volunteer rescuers were killed by further shelling once they had arrived on the scene. The next day Houthi/Saleh forces fired two rockets in the Al-Monoura district of Taiz city, killing [nine](#) more civilians, again using double-tap tactics to kill rescuers.

**At least six US drone strikes were reported in January,** including on the first three days of Trump's presidency. A strike killed an alleged AQAP operative in Al-Baydha governorate on January 8, according to a US Central Command [statement](#) released days after. Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook [said](#) the strike killed Abd Al-Ghani Al-Rasas in an airstrike that "removes an AQAP senior leader and facilitator in the area." Then, [according](#) to the US Department of Defense, strikes were launched in Al-Baydha governorate on January 20, 21, and 22. Three alleged militants were said to have been killed on January 21, and one on each of the other days. Lastly, on January 30 a suspected drone strike in Bayhan district of Shabwa was [reported](#) to have killed two alleged AQAP militants.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism released its annual [data](#) for drone strikes. According to the Bureau, at least 38 US strikes hit Yemen in 2016, the second highest number since the drone campaign began in 2002. An estimated 147-203 alleged members of AQAP were killed, and no civilians were reported to have been killed or injured. Relatedly, Yemeni human rights organization Mwatana released a short documentary titled [Waiting for Justice](#) which involves interviews with family members of civilians killed by drone strikes.

**US commandos carried out a raid on January 29 in Al-Baydha governorate,** killing 14 alleged members of AQAP and at least ten women and children. One US serviceman died and several were injured. Senior AQAP militant Abdulraoof Al-Dhahab was killed in the mission, which Trump called a success. Responding to allegations of a high civilian death count, Defense Department spokesman Jeff Davis [said](#) "there were a lot of female combatants who were part of this."

**Houthi/Saleh fighters hit a Saudi warship off the coast of Hodeidah** on January 30. Saudi officials [claimed](#) it was a "suicide gunboat" belonging to the Houthis which damaged the ship, killing two crew members and injuring three. However, the Houthis said they hit the boat with a rocket and a [video](#) put online by the Houthis shows a massive explosion which appears to come from a rocket.

**Hadi-aligned forces reportedly made gains in the Houthi stronghold of Sa'ada,** [taking](#) over the 101st Infantry Brigade and gaining control of the eastern intersection that links Saudi Arabia, Al-Jawf, and Sa'ada. From Saudi Arabia, the only other road to the governorate capital, also called Sa'ada, is through the northern district of Baqim, where Hadi-aligned forces hold some territory.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

- [“We Lived Days in Hell”: Civilian Perspectives on the Conflict in Yemen](#), a report authored by Nadwa Al-Dawsari for the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), documents patterns of civilian harm in Aden, Hadhramout, Marib, Sana’a, and Taiz governorates.
- Citing Yemen’s vast archaeological history and the rate at which new sites are being discovered, in this short article many archaeologists express their hope that [A no-strike list may shield Yemen’s ancient treasures from war](#).
- Oxfam released a policy paper titled [We Won’t Wait: As war ravages Yemen its women strive to build peace](#). The toll the ongoing conflict has had on women is highlighted and suggestions are given for how women can play a greater role in the peace process.
- In a deeply personal story that ties in statistics from IOM in Yemen, the Associated Press writes [African Migrants Face Torture, Blackmail Amid Yemeni Chaos](#).
- For the Middle East Institute, Charles Schmitz opines the [Trump Admin to Shift Toward Saudi Position on Yemen War](#).

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