



THE YEMEN TREND

**JANUARY
2018**



RESEARCH . ANALYSIS . ADVISORY

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.

Executive Overview

In January, the Houthi/GPC government in Sana'a further stabilized at its new power-sharing equilibrium following the death of Ali Abdullah Saleh, while the feud in Aden between the Hadi government and UAE-sponsored separatists erupted into full-blown conflict. The GPC-Sana'a confirmed Sadeq Abu Ras as its new president during UN Deputy Envoy Muin Shreim's five-day trip to the capital to resume discussions with the de-facto authorities. At the end of the month, Houthi delegation head Mohammed Abdulsalam travelled to Muscat for talks with UN officials.

Meanwhile, in Aden the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and Security Belt Forces, both sponsored by the UAE, clashed with forces loyal to the Hadi government. The fighting broke out on January 28, which marked the end of a week-long deadline given by the pro-STC forces, collectively referred to as the Southern Resistance Forces (SRF), for President Hadi to replace Prime Minister Ahmed Bin Dagher and his cabinet. Days later, mediation from Saudi Arabia brought an end to the fighting. The Yemeni government deemed the clashes a "failed coup attempt," but rather than seek to overthrow the government completely, the SRF's objective may have been to limit Hadi's power in Aden, including by preventing a national parliament from convening in the south, and positioning the STC to be included in the UN-sponsored peace process.

On the humanitarian front, several positive developments took place throughout January: USAID-funded mobile cranes were delivered to Hodeidah port; Saudi Arabia announced it will deposit \$2 billion into the Aden-based Central Bank of Yemen, and coalition member states pledged \$1.5 billion to the Humanitarian Response Plan, amounting to a little over half the total amount required to fund humanitarian operations in 2018. How quickly the above developments will translate into tangible relief for suffering Yemenis, however, remains an open question. The number of cumulative Diphtheria cases passed 600 by the end of January and aid agencies voiced concerns that not enough has been done to shield further breakouts of cholera, malaria and other diseases from the coming rainy season.

Timeline

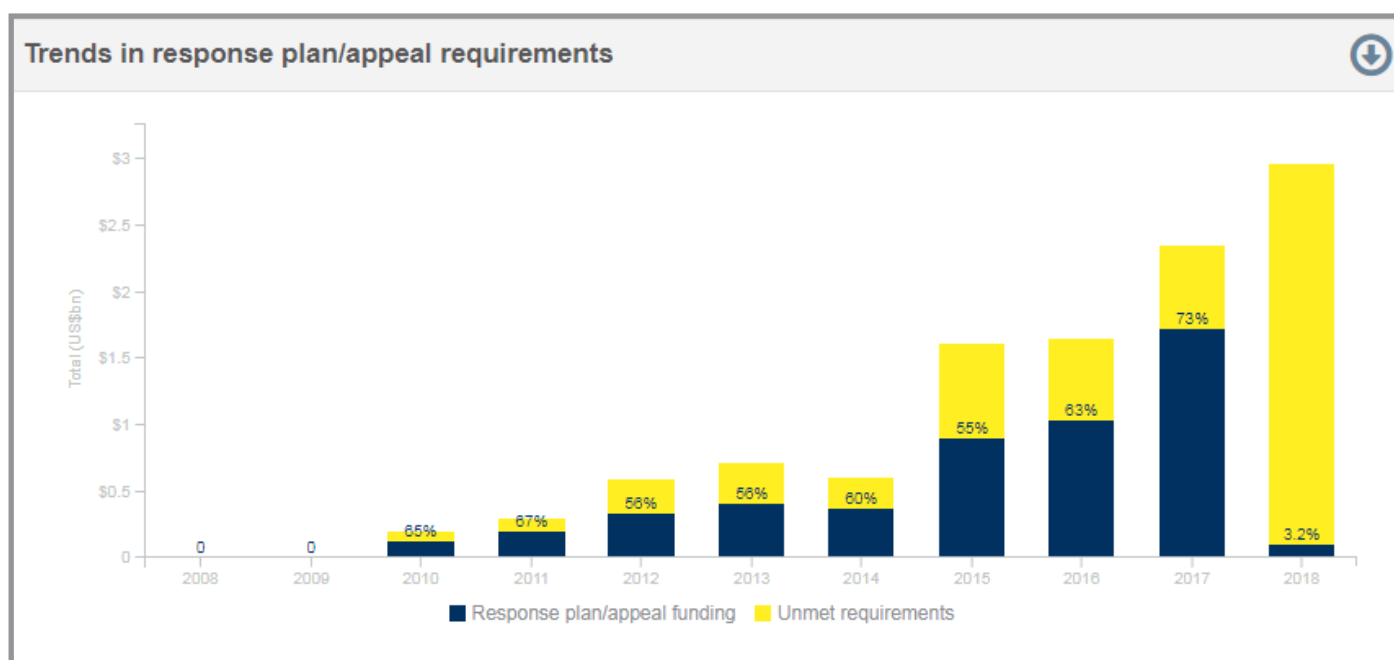
- Jan 06** Deputy UN Envoy Muin Shreim begins a five-day trip to Sana'a
- Jan 07** Sadeq Abu Ras confirmed as president of the Sana'a-based GPC Party
- Jan 15** WFP delivers USAID-funded mobile cranes to Hodeidah port
- Jan 17** Saudi Arabia announces it will deposit \$2 billion into the Aden-based CBY
- Jan 21** Humanitarian Response Plan 2018 calls for \$2.96 billion to assist 13.1 million people
- Jan 21** The internationally recognized government sets its first budget since 2014
- Jan 21** Separatists in Aden declare state of emergency, demand new government within a week
- Jan 23** The ministerial quartet meets in Paris, prioritize discussions on humanitarian situation
- Jan 25** Houthi delegation travels to Oman to hold talks with UN officials
- Jan 28** Clashes erupt in Aden between STC-aligned fighters and Hadi government loyalists

Humanitarian and Economic Trends

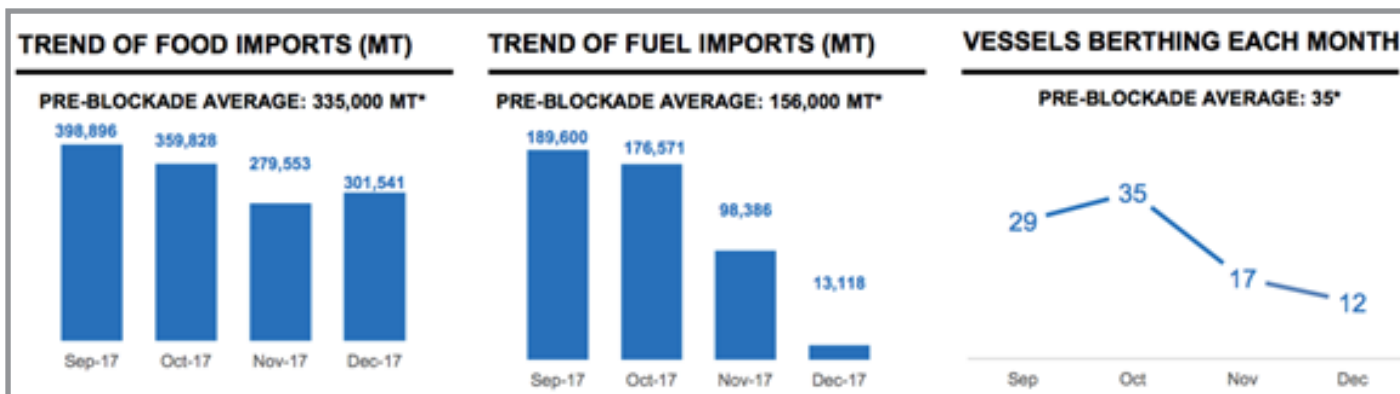
Saudi Arabia announced it will deposit \$2 billion in the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY). The announcement came just one day after Prime Minister Ahmed Bin Dagher made a [plea](#) on January 16 for financial assistance to prevent further economic collapse and to stabilize the riyal. The \$2 billion had been pledged by Saudi Arabia in November 2017, and by mid-January the riyal had [reportedly](#) plunged to around 500 riyal to \$1.

On January 21 the Hadi government set its first budget since 2014. The government expects revenues of YER978 billion (\$2.22 billion) and spending of YER1.45 trillion (\$3.32 billion), [according](#) to the prime minister. "It includes salaries for the military and civilians in 12 provinces," Bin Dagher was [quoted](#) as saying. "Salaries in Houthi-dominated areas will be limited to the education and health sectors."

The 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan was launched on January 21. The [2018 YHRP](#), based on the [2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) and accompanied by an [interactive site](#), requires \$2.96 billion and aims to assist 13.1 million people nationwide. This marks a major increase in funding demands from the 2017 YHRP, which was only 73% funded and itself marked a significant increase from 2016. The graphic below shows the amount required and percent funded for each plan between 2008 and 2018, [according](#) to the UN-managed Financial Tracking Service, as of the end of January. On January 22, the foreign ministers of the coalition member states [pledged](#) to donate a total \$1.5 billion, which will cover slightly more than half the requirements once paid in full.



Mobile cranes arrived in Hodeidah almost a year after being purchased. Four USAID-funded mobile cranes were delivered to Hodeidah port on January 15, [according](#) to the WFP, which purchased and transported the cranes. It is hoped the cranes will help to partially compensate for the reduction in port capacity that resulted from the destruction of the original cranes by coalition airstrikes in August 2015. "Right now, it takes around a week to unload a large cargo ship," the US State Department said in a [blog post](#). "The cranes will cut that down by three or four days because each crane can move up to 60 metric tons at once," according to its logistics expert, who estimated the mobile cranes could increase the port's capacity by up to 40 percent. Relatedly, [data](#) from the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), visualized in the graphic below by UN OCHA, shows the blockade imposed on November 6 resulted in a clear decline in food and fuel imports.



Hodeidah port is to remain open for another 30 days, but its longer-term status remains unclear. "Pursuant to the coalition's goals of ending the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the decision was reached to extend the opening of the port of Hodeidah for another 30 days, allowing shipments of aid, including fuel and food shipments, to get through," a January 22 [statement](#) by the Saudi government reads. The coalition originally re-opened the port to commercial vessels for a 30-day period on December 20, [saying](#) this period was for the UN envoy to implement his proposals concerning Hodeidah. As that deadline approached in mid-January, senior humanitarian officials voiced confusion over the status of the port. "The port in theory is going to be open to the 19th of this month," [said](#) Meritxell Relano, UNICEF's representative in Yemen. "Then we don't know if the coalition will close or (leave) it open," she said, echoing the Norwegian Refugee Council, which [stated](#) "shipping companies, importers and vendors are left without assurance that the port will remain open, and this is serving to sustain inflation that makes food unaffordable for most Yemeni people."

On January 10, coalition spokesperson Turki Al-Malki [renewed](#) his call for "the United Nations to take charge of the Red Sea port of Hodeidah." The details of this demand remain unclear, but the spokesman listed supervising the operation of the seaport, ensuring the orderly delivery of aid, and preventing arms smuggling to the Houthis, saying "the Iranian-backed militias are training their member terrorists on targeting marine navigation."

The number of cumulative Diphtheria cases has topped 600 nationwide, with 48 associated deaths amounting to an alarming eight percent fatality rate. The WHO [said](#) millions of doses of diphtheria vaccination were airlifted to Yemen after the coalition partially lifted its blockade in December,

but negotiations to start the vaccination campaign are stalled as health authorities on the ground continue to negotiate access and which areas of the country to prioritize. The vaccine-preventable disease re-appeared in late 2017 following a 25-year absence from Yemen. Relatedly, with the rainy season soon approaching, Yemen's Health Ministry and aid agencies are [concerned](#) cases of Malaria could also increase.

Three million babies have been born in Yemen since March 2015, according to a UNICEF report titled [Born Into War](#). The report notes that more than 5,000 children have been killed or injured since the coalition intervention escalated the conflict on March 26, 2015, and "nearly every child in Yemen" now requires humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian fallout is particularly brutal on the young: Of the average 3,000 babies born each day in Yemen, 25 percent do not live past their first month; 30 percent are born underweight, and 40 percent are born premature.

Political Developments

Deputy UN Envoy Muin Shreim made a five-day trip to Sana'a, as the envoy's office seeks to renew the peace process in the wake of the Houthis-Saleh split in early December. The envoy's office provided few details of the trip, which was from January 6 to 10, other than to [say](#) "Shreim was encouraged by the commitment and cooperation of his Yemeni interlocutors to the resumption of the peace process." Supreme Political Council president Saleh Al-Sammad [told](#) the deputy envoy that "any partial plans related to Hodeidah are wasting time," later warning "we will cut off the international shipping route in the Red Sea if the Saudi-led aggression coalition will not stop attacks against the port city of Hodeidah," Saba News [reported](#). Shreim

also [met](#) separately with the Sana'a-based foreign minister, Hisham Sharaf, whose inclusion in the UN-sponsored peace process has previously been criticized by the internationally recognized foreign minister, Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, who serves as the head of the Hadi government's peace talk delegation.

[According](#) to the independent Security Council Report, the Houthis agreed to Shreim's proposal to have joint talks with the UN envoy in Muscat, stating this in a January 14 letter to the UNSC and secretary-general. On January 25, Houthi delegation head Mohammed Abdulsalam flew to Muscat at the invitation of the Omani government, [according](#) to a Houthi official, to prepare for a new round of peace talks under the UN's sponsorship.

UN Envoy Ould Cheikh will not stay on after his mandate ends. After concluding a four-day [visit](#) to Saudi Arabia on January 21, where he discussed the resumption of the peace process with President Hadi and Foreign Minister Al-Mekhlafi, the envoy's office [said](#) "he does not intend to continue in his position beyond the end of his current contract ending in February 2018." In his place, it is [reported](#) that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has told the permanent UN Security Council members that Martin Griffiths is his choice. A British citizen, Griffiths is currently the executive director of the European Institute of Peace. He previously served as a diplomat and has worked as a senior UN official on Syria and several other countries.

Background on the peace process

When clashes between former president Saleh and the Houthis engulfed Sana'a from November 29 to Saleh's death on December 4, it appeared the direction of the UN-sponsored peace process was being fundamentally altered. However, throughout January the governing alliance between the Houthis and the Sana'a-based GPC stabilized, and efforts to resume peace talks – however inconclusive – picked up largely where they left off before the escalation in late 2017. The exception was in the interim capital of Aden, where separatists aligned to the Southern Transitional Council took control of large swathes of territory at the end of the January, and may seek to leverage a spot in future UN-sponsored negotiations.

Though marking a positive step after the escalation in November and December, the deputy envoy's meetings in Sana'a with the Houthis and Sana'a-GPC, and the envoy's meetings in Riyadh with President Hadi and Foreign Minister Abdulmalik Al-Mekhlafi, did not indicate either side is ready to make concessions. Envoy Ould Cheikh has long been proposing the warring parties create a mutually agreed upon military committee to manage Hodeidah port, and in parallel a financial committee to develop a mechanism to have state funds collected from all parts of Yemen and disbursed to public servants on both sides. In January, the coalition spokesman renewed his call for the UN to manage Hodeidah port, while the Supreme Political Council president said partial plans, like Hodeidah, were "wasting of time." With the envoy's term ending in February, it is unlikely any major changes will be introduced until the new envoy takes office.

For more background, see the [End of 2017](#) issue of the [Yemen Trend](#).

The ministerial quartet met for the third consecutive month on January 23. The meeting, held in Paris, was organized by British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and included the foreign ministers of the US, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, but not Oman or the office of the UN envoy. "We talked about the agreed critical goals in Yemen, which are, first and foremost, sustain measures that have been taken over the course of the past weeks to expand access for humanitarian and critical commercial goods; alleviate, relieve, and try to prevent the expansion of and then ultimately reduce the scope of civilian suffering and want in Yemen," [said](#) a senior State Department official who was present in the meeting. Regarding the second step – "to see whether there is a political process that can provide more, rather than less, stability to the country" – the official brought up the security threats posed by the Houthis, Iran, and Hezbollah, and said they hope the outgoing UN envoy "can help at least determine the lines of a possible step forward on the political process."

The Sana'a-based GPC confirmed Sadeq Abu Ras as its president on January 7. Sadeq served as the deputy of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in the GPC, and became acting chairman of the party upon Saleh's death on December 4.

Military and Security Developments

Islah head Mohammad Al-Yadoumi denied his party is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. In an [interview](#) with Asharq Al-Awsat, Al-Yadoumi said “there are no organizational or political relations with the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood.” The month prior, Al-Yadoumi met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and Mohammed Bin Zayed of the UAE in a surprise meeting in Riyadh, purportedly to improve cooperation against the Houthis.

Over 1,000 people detained by the Houthis in December 2017 were reportedly released throughout January. According to [several news reports](#) by the Houthi-controlled Saba News Agency, the detainees were arrested in December for their “sedition” and involvement in the attempted “coup” against the Houthis in Sana’a, and the releases came as result of several “general amnesties” by Supreme Political Council head Saleh Al-Sammad.

An American detainee flew from Sana’a to Muscat with a Houthi official on January 25, [released](#) four months to the day after being imprisoned by the de-facto authorities in Sana’a. This marks the third time since 2016 that the Houthis have released American citizens on the same day their peace talk delegation travelled between Muscat and Sana’a. On October 15, 2016, the Houthi delegation flew from Muscat to Sana’a after being prevented from re-entering Yemeni airspace for over a month, and the return flight carried two American citizens who had been imprisoned. Then Secretary of State John Kerry [called](#) it a “humanitarian gesture” by the Houthis, but a Houthi official [said](#) it was a deal mediated by Oman to allow the delegation to return to Yemen. One of the Americans, Peter Willems, was kidnapped by the Houthis less than a month before the swap. Then on November 6, 2016, the Houthi delegation [travelled](#) from Sana’a to Muscat, accompanied by a former [US Marine](#) who had been imprisoned for over a year-and-a-half.

Southern separatists declared a state of emergency in Aden on January 21. On that day, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, president of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), headed an event in Aden titled “General Meeting for the Leaders of the Southern Resistance Forces,” bringing together a collection of pro-STC separatists, including the UAE-sponsored Security Belt Forces. In his [speech](#), Aidarous reaffirmed the STC’s objective of achieving independence, categorically rejected the possibility of the Hadi government establishing a national parliament anywhere in the south, and voiced support for northern and coalition forces against the Houthis while harshly criticizing the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Muneer Al-Yafa’i, a commander in the Security Belt Forces who is better known as Abu Al-Yamamah, then [read](#) a final statement ([video](#)). He declared a state of emergency in Aden and said efforts would begin to topple the Hadi government and replace it with a technocratic one. He furthermore called for southerners to march on the capital and voice these demands, giving Hadi one week to replace the Bin Dagher government.

Clashes erupted in Aden between the Hadi government and pro-STC fighters on January 28, as protesters began convening in the city to mark the one-week deadline for a new government to be formed. On January 27, the Ministry of Interior, led by key Hadi ally Ahmed Al-Misari, had [banned](#) all demonstrations in the interim capital, saying such actions would be considered destabilizing and against public security. Prime Minister Bin Dagher [labelled](#) the fighting a “coup attempt,” while the STC claimed the government had first fired on peaceful protesters. The STC loyalists, a collection of Hirak separatists and UAE-sponsored security forces being organized under the umbrella of the Southern Resistance Forces (SRF), succeeded in taking over the government headquarters and many state institutions. The Hadi government [reportedly](#) called its loyalists to cease fire and engage in talks with the coalition.

Fighting continued for a second day on January 29, raising the death toll to 36 and bringing the separatists to only 1 kilometer away from the presidential palace. The coalition called for an immediate ceasefire. That evening, Salafi Sheikh Hani Bin Buraik, who serves as both vice president of the STC and as a key figure in the Security Belt Forces, **wrote** “the Southern Resistance Forces were victorious... and told the whole world the South will not be subjected to the militias of Qatar or others that attacked defenseless people.” The SRF were **reported** to have “captured Aden,” having taken control of the Presidential Protection Forces base in Dar Sa’ad district, the last major military outpost of the Hadi government in the city, and surrounded Al-Ma’asheeq Palace, where Bin Dagher’s government is based.

By January 30, the SRF had reached Al-Ma’asheeq Palace but remained at the gate. Saudi troops, stationed there prior to the clashes, **prevented** the palace from being breached. On January 31, the conflict had largely subsided, and through Saudi mediation some military installations and state institutions were **returned** to Hadi-aligned forces. Hadi loyalist Mehran Al-Qubati, commander of the Fourth Brigade in the Presidential Protection Forces, **said** his fighters had retaken the brigade’s camp in Dar Sa’d district of Aden with direct intervention from Saudi Arabia. Earlier on January 31 Al-Qubati **said** “Saudi officials promised to return the camp to its leadership in the next hours,” and he claimed the Fourth Brigade camp was overtaken with the help of Emirati armored vehicles and forces. On February 1, military envoys from Saudi Arabia and the UAE **said** a ceasefire had been achieved, while Yemen’s foreign ministry **commended** Saudi Arabia “for mediating the withdrawal of the rebel militia from government outposts they had seized and bringing the bloodshed to end.”

A military campaign was launched to liberate the city of Taiz. Fighting in Taiz escalated on January 25 as Hadi forces sought to break the siege on the city, with emphasis on opening the western corridor to the city. The operation accompanies the arrival to Yemen of newly-appointed governor Ameen Ahmed Mahmoud. Military sources on the ground **said** coalition airstrikes were playing an important role in the operation, and that progress is being slowed by the Houthis’ widespread planting

of landmines from areas they withdraw from. Relatedly, the UAE-led operation in the southern Hodeidah district of Hays **reportedly** succeeded in cutting the supply line between Hodeidah and Taiz governorates, which presents a strategic advantage to Hadi forces seeking to break the siege on Taiz city.

Iran violated the arms embargo on Yemen, the UN panel of experts found. In its 79-page report, which has not been made public, the experts said there are “strong indications of the supply of arms-related material manufactured in, or emanating from, the Islamic Republic of Iran,” the Washington Post **reported**. The panel does not explicitly claim the Houthis were supplied with missiles from Iran, **according** to the New York Times, but rather “the Islamic Republic of Iran is in noncompliance” with Resolution 2216 because it has failed to keep these arms outside of the country. Russia’s representative to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, cast doubt on the conclusions drawn by the UN experts and the US, **saying** the case for action against Iran has not been made and further evidence is required to establish whether weapons were sent to Yemen from Iran after the embargo was imposed in 2015. “Many countries were competing to supply weapons to Yemen during the time of president Saleh, so I cannot give you anything conclusive,” he said.

Norway and Germany have halted arms sales over the war in Yemen. Norway suspended arms exports to the UAE on January 3, **citing** a growing risk related to Emirati military involvement in the war. On January 1 the Houthis **claimed** to have captured a sophisticated US Navy underwater drone off of the west coast, named the REMUS 600, which is manufactured by Kongsberg Gruppen, a Norwegian company half-owned by the state. However, **according** to Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide, the decision to halt arms sales to the UAE had already been made on December 19. Weeks later, Germany **announced** it would not be approving arms sales to countries engaged in the war in Yemen. Meanwhile, in Finland at the end of January public pressure over images of Finnish-made UAE armored vehicles being used in Yemen **prompted** all eight presidential candidates to state they will halt arm sales to the Emirates if successful in the February election.

Recommended reading:

- The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) released a collection of articles by Yemeni and international researchers focusing on topics related to [Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen](#). The collection is based on a workshop that took place in November 2017, and includes a paper from DeepRoot partner Ala Qasem.
- For the Carnegie Middle East Center, Yemeni tribal specialist Nadwa Al-Dawsari writes about the [Ambiguous ties between Al-Qaeda and Yemen's tribes](#), with focus on the governorate of Al-Bayda.
- In an article for CNN, former Minister of Information Nadia Al-Sakkaf argues the [War in Yemen gives women more responsibility but not empowerment](#).
- A brief article published by the United States Institute of Peace looks at the links between [China and Yemen's Forgotten War](#), discussing the diplomatic efforts China has expended and the potential role it may play in reconstruction.
- Complaining of humanitarian aid being sold in local markets and distribution lists that exclude some of those most in need, residents of Taiz tell the Middle East Eye that [Corruption stops food aid reaching us](#).



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