

Briefing Note – 2 April 2015

Yemen:

Escalation of Conflict



	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Urgent
Need for international assistance				X	
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major
				X	

Crisis Overview

- The escalation of the conflict between the Shi'ite Houthi movement and its allies, and President Hadi's anti-Houthi coalition, backed by Western and Gulf Cooperation Council allies, intensifies urgent protection concerns for the civilian population. Local partners estimate the number of internally displaced due to recent fighting at 100,000 persons.
- Conflict has escalated since 23 March, affecting 13 out of 21 governorates. Fragmentation and complex, at times transitory, alliances characterise the conflict. Several local militias have supported the Government. Armed Sunni tribesmen and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have also been fighting the Houthi advance, while AQAP continues to oppose the Government. Attacks by Islamic State and AQAP, and AQAP's territorial expansion are aggravating the situation.
- Widespread armed clashes occurred on 26 March and are ongoing in Al Dhale'e, Lahj, and Aden governorates.
- On 26 March, Saudi Arabia, backed by a coalition of other countries, launched Operation Decisive Storm with air attacks on Houthi positions, mainly in Sanaa, Aden, Taizz and Sa'ada. Despite airstrikes, Houthis appear to continue advancing southwards. Ground forces are reportedly a possibility. On 1 April, the Yemeni Government called for ground troops from the Saudi-led coalition. Yemeni President Hadi had fled to Saudi Arabia by 27 March.

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale Fighting is expected to increase in scope and scale, leading to increased protection concerns. Analysts expect the conflict to last at least several weeks. Ground troop interventions by neighbouring countries are possible as well as further material and financial support for Houthi militias. So far, an estimated 100,000 people have been displaced by fighting.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- Protection, particularly in conflict-affected areas.
- Health, particularly emergency health.
- Mass casualty management.
- WASH.
- Emergency shelter and NFIs.

Humanitarian constraints Access constraints due to active fighting, airport closures and restricted access to ports.

Lack of information on the size of the affected population, displacement, and the humanitarian situation due to conflict.

Crisis Impact

Conflict has escalated since 23 March, affecting 13 out of 21 governorates. Over 20 March–1 April, at least 360 people were killed and around 1,400 injured, many of whom are civilians (AFP 01/04/2015). This includes at least 62 children killed and 30 injured (UNICEF 31/03/2015). Airstrikes have killed at least 70 civilians.

Humanitarian needs in Yemen were critically high before the recent escalation of the conflict, with 15.9 million people in need of humanitarian aid (HNO 22/12/2014). Needs are expected to increase, particularly in the protection, health, WASH, and shelter sectors.

Numerous people have died or been injured during anti-Houthi protests.

Access to Essential Services

Protection: Saudi coalition airstrikes have reportedly hit residential areas and killed civilians. On 30 March Mazraq IDP camp in Hajjah was hit by a coalition airstrike. At least 45 civilians were killed (Reuters 30/03/2015). The health clinic, food area and the administration building were destroyed (ECHO 31/03/2015). A dairy factory in Hudaydah was bombed, and 29 employees were killed (Yemen Times 01/04/2015). Ten staff dies as a cement factory in Lahj was hit (Yemen Times 01/04/2015). On 26 March, 25 people, including at least six children, were killed in airstrikes on Sanaa, according to Amnesty International. The crowded, low-income suburb of Bani Hewat near Sanaa International Airport, was badly damaged (IRIN 26/03/2015).

In Lahj, local partners report that AQAP has placed land mines in Al Hamra area of Al Hawta District in order to guard against any Houthi advance (OCHA 31/03/2015).

Indiscriminate shelling by the Houthi-allied 33rd Brigade has continued in Al Dhalee (mainly in Al Jalilah, Sanah and Al Dhalee city) since 25 March. Homes, public buildings and the local market have been targeted (OCHA 31/03/2015).

Protesters against the Houthi takeover have been illegally detained and tortured, according to several reports, and several have been shot at demonstrations (Reuters 24/03/2015). One protester was reported dead on 14 February, after sustaining severe injuries while being detained by Houthi militias (AFP, 14/02/2015; Amnesty, 16/02/2015). In Taizz, violent demonstrations reportedly left eight dead and over 140 injured (ICRC 26/03/2015).

Health: Conflict has increased needs for trauma and surgical care. More than 8.4 million people are in need of health services across the country and the health sector suffers from a huge funding gap. Absorbing further shocks, such as the rapid increase of

patients in need of emergency care, is likely to be difficult (WHO 26/03/2015). Hospitals in all affected governorates are in urgent need of medicines and equipment, including oxygen supplies, supplies for treating trauma wounds, equipment, health staff and bed capacity. There are concerns about the ability of ambulances and other vehicles to transport injured people to hospitals, as well as the availability of fuel for ambulances and generators (WHO 01/04/2015). In Marib, health services have very limited functionality. The second largest hospital in Sanaa has been evacuated for fear of shelling. In the south, mass casualty management remains the most pressing need. Hospitals are overwhelmed with casualties, including people who have been shot or are suffering from severe burns. In Aden, the presence of dead bodies in the streets has raised serious health concerns. Malnutrition treatment services have been suspended in Lahj (OCHA 31/03/2015).

WASH: If fuel shortages in Aden continue, water pumps will not be able to operate, and water could be cut off in all districts within three to five days. This would affect 1 million people. In Lahj, water and electricity have been cut off since 24 March. Residents who have fled to villages in Al Hawta district are relying on open wells. In Al Dhale'e, recent clashes have exacerbated water scarcity, as water trucking becomes more difficult. Incoming displacement has also placed a significant additional burden (OCHA 31/03/2015).

Shelter: Airstrikes reportedly destroyed several houses in Sanaa on 26 March (Amnesty 26/03/2015). Displacement may increase temporary shelter and NFI needs. Almost all IDPs are reportedly staying with relatives near their areas of origin. Parties to conflict have reportedly taken shelter in private residences in the south by force (OCHA 31/03/2015). Reports indicate that about 700 people are staying in five schools in Khanfir district, Abyan governorate (OCHA 31/03/2015). In Lahj, mud houses in Al Hawta district have been destroyed by indiscriminate shelling. Many families have been displaced to live with relatives and are in need of NFIs. Host community stocks are inadequate (OCHA 31/03/2015).

Food security: Food prices have sky-rocketed and are out of reach for the most vulnerable (ECHO 01/04/2015). Rising fuel prices and difficulties transporting fuel and other imports – including the 90% of food that is imported – are expected to reduce people's access to food and water. Food supplies in Aden markets are reportedly declining (OCHA 31/03/2015). IDPs will need food aid (OCHA 31/03/2015). In Lahj, an estimated 200 IDP families (1,400 people) need food aid. Host communities also require assistance.

Impact on Critical Infrastructure

Fighting has led to airport closures in Aden and all flights from Sanaa, Hudaydah and Sa'ada airports were cancelled after airstrikes on 26 March (IRIN 26/03/2015).

There are reports of wide-scale targeting of civilian infrastructure including water supply networks, electricity stations, food supply stores. Random shelling is damaging schools (ECHO 01/04/2015).

Displacement

- Unconfirmed reports indicate that thousands of people have been leaving Sana'a daily, and heading for rural areas. Displaced people are again relocating from other major cities, prime targets for the air campaign, to surrounding villages. Local partners estimate the number of internally displaced at 100,000 (ECHO 01/04/2015).
- The most affected governorates are Al Dhale'e, where at least 63,000 people (9,000 families) have been displaced; Sa'ada, where at least 15,700 people have moved to neighbouring governorates; Hajjah, where IDPs have fled to surrounding areas; and Sanaa, where large numbers have reportedly left the city. Abyan has reportedly received 21,000 people from neighbouring governorates (ECHO 01/04/2015).

Vulnerable Groups Affected

- Minors are being recruited into armed groups. In January, 48 cases of recruitment and use of under 18s were recorded (UNICEF 31/01/2015). On 29 March, 17 fighters under age 18 were reportedly captured by an opposing party in Aden (OCHA 31/03/2015).
- 334,000 IDPs, and 915,000 vulnerable migrants and refugees. In Aden, concerns have grown that refugees and migrants could be susceptible to forced recruitment (OCHA 31/03/2015). In case of a ground offensive by Saudi Arabia, IDPs – the majority of whom reside in northern governorates – will be particularly vulnerable.
- Urban populations, where conflict is concentrated.

Humanitarian and Operational Constraints

- All international airports are closed and port access is heavily restricted, making it almost impossible to deliver humanitarian aid (MSF 31/03/2015).
- Insecurity prohibits access in governorates affected by fighting, particularly Taizz, Ibb, Lahj, Aden, and Sanaa. The provision of aid to areas affected by the conflict is limited and many organisations are operating remotely.
- Extreme access constraints prevail in Hadramaut, Shabwah, and Marib governorates due to active conflict or other insecurity (OCHA, 22/12/2014).
- Humanitarian activities at Al Tuwal border crossing have been suspended. Basic medical services, food and NFIs were provided to Yemenis deported from Saudi Arabia (OCHA 31/03/2015).

- On 30 March, one aid worker was shot dead (ICRC 31/03/2015). One aid worker was killed in 2014, and one was kidnapped in February 2015. Since 1999 there have been 66 attacks on aid workers, including 44 abductions (Aid Worker Security 03/2015).

Aggravating Factors

Economic Crisis

Oil production represents over 70% of total government revenue (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 19/07/2013). Production was suspended in January in the major oil-producing governorates of Shabwah and Hadramaut, and is likely to be disrupted in Marib. Oil revenues had already declined almost 30% between January 2013 and January 2014 (Al Arabiya 16/10/2014; IRIN 01/12/2014).

Saudi Arabia and other regional partners have suspended much of their assistance to Yemen, due to the country's political instability, placing further pressure on government revenue (FEWSNET, 18/02/2015).

Malaria

The malaria transmission season will begin in early July, and community-level malaria control activities are needed now. However, the current security situation makes it largely impossible to undertake these activities (OCHA 31/03/2015).

Contextual Information

Drivers of the Current Conflict

Shi'ite Houthi forces from northern Yemen, based in Sa'ada governorate, took over the capital city Sanaa in September, having expanded their territory southward since February 2014 (BBC 27/09/2014). Cuts to fuel subsidies in July 2014, and subsequent price increases, are believed to have increased popular support for the Houthis (Al Jazeera 01/08/2015). Despite a peace agreement in September, violence persisted (Al Jazeera, 22/09/2014). UN negotiations to end the crisis did not yield results. On 6 February 2015, the Houthis dissolved Parliament and replaced the Government with a presidential council (Reuters 06/02/2015). President Hadi, who had resigned, escaped house arrest and fled to the southern city of Aden, where he rescinded his resignation on 21 February.

On 14 March, Hadi called for the mobilisation of 20,000 troops in the south (Yemen Times, 16/03/2015). On 22 March, the Houthis announced a general mobilisation for war. Militias and military convoys under Houthi control moved towards the governorates of Taizz, Al

Dhale'e, Marib, and Al Bayda following the announcement (Yemen Times 23/03/2015). Houthis took over parts of Taizz governorate, including a military airbase. They deployed 5,000 fighters to Ibb governorate. On 25 March, Houthis captured Lahj governorate. They advanced on Aden, seizing Al Anad airbase, and forces loyal to the Houthis took over Aden airport. On 25 March, Houthis and Sunni tribesmen struck a truce in Marib governorate (Yemen Times 25/03/2015). On 26 March, Saudi Arabia, backed by a coalition of 10 countries, began airstrikes on Houthi positions in Aden, Sanaa and Sa'ada (Washington Post 26/03/2015). Reportedly, the strikes debilitated the Houthis' air force (Washington Post 26/03/2015). As of 1 April, reports indicate the Houthis are advancing into the centre of Aden (Stratfor 01/04/2015) and Yemeni Government called on the Saudi-led coalition to send ground troops (Stratfor 1/04/2015). Fighting on the ground has intensified with the southern governorates of Aden, Abyan, Lahj, ad-Dhale and Shabwa experiencing intense fighting (ECHO 01/04/2015).

Relevant Stakeholders

Houthis (Ansarullah): The Houthis, also referred to as Ansarullah, are based in Sa'ada governorate. Houthi insurgents have de facto control over Sa'ada, Hajjah, Amran, Al Hudaydah, Al Mahwit, Raymah and Sanaa (Yemen Times, 01/01/2015). In late March, Houthis pushed south towards Aden. The forces allied with the Houthis include members of the former central security force, a unit seen as loyal to ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh (ABC, 23/03/2015).

Yemeni Armed Forces: Certain factions in the deeply divided Yemeni army have allied themselves with the Houthis against President Hadi (Reuters, 12/03/2015). On 14 March, Hadi called for the recruitment of 20,000 southerners into the army. Hundreds of young men have since been recruited (Yemen Times, 16/03/2015).

Southern Movement: Rallies in the south calling for secession gained momentum from October due to the increasing tensions in the capital and the north (Yemen Times, 19/10/2014; AFP, 01/01/2015). The Southern Movement's two existing councils merged in October to represent all southerners, calling for the south's full independence (Yemen Times, 28/10/2014). In Aden, southern secessionist movement Al Hirak and local militias have reportedly agreed to form a common front to oppose the Houthis. However, signs have also emerged of tensions among southern groups (ICG 27/03/2015). Armed militias professing loyalty to President Hadi have clashed several times with official security forces in apparent attempts to control Aden and government institutions (OCHA 10/03/2015).

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: AQAP, based in the south and east of the country, has expanded its presence in Hadramaut. According to analysts, the Houthi advance has bolstered support for AQAP and Salafi extremist group Ansar al Sharia: tribes in

Ibb and Al Bayda, for example, who are opposed to the Houthi advance, have allied themselves with Ansar al Sharia (Reuters, 09/11/2014). According to the national security service, around 1,000 AQAP militants from 11 Arab and non-Arab countries are in Yemen (AFP, 17/01/2015). On 20 March, AQAP briefly took control of Lahj's capital, Al Hawta, from government forces, killing 20 soldiers (Yemen Times 22/03/2015; Guardian 21/03/2015).

Islamic State: On 20 March, three suicide attacks on mosques in Sanaa, targeting Shi'ite worshippers, killed 142 people and wounded at least 351. Islamic State claimed responsibility (AFP, 21/03/2015). IS also claimed responsibility for an attack in Lahj on the same day, which killed 29 police (ABC, 24/03/2015).

International and Neighbouring Countries' Relationship to the Conflict

The conflict between Houthi forces and the Yemeni Government is largely regarded as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia and the GCC have so far promoted confrontation rather than compromise, adding pressure to possible negotiations and providing large-scale support to Hadi. Although the Houthis are less dependent on Tehran than Hadi on Riyadh, the Houthis' relative self-sufficiency is unlikely to last long (ICG 27/03/2015).

Saudi Arabia-led coalition: Saudi Arabia firmly backs President Hadi. UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar are supporting Hadi's forces by providing fighter jets. Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan said their forces were involved in the operation, with Sudan pledging ground troops as well as warplanes. Morocco declared its support for the Saudi-led operation, but did not confirm or deny earlier reports that it had sent fighter jets. Pakistan said it had not decided whether to heed a request for military support from Saudi Arabia, but reaffirmed its support for the kingdom. Turkey also expressed its support (Reuters 27/03/2015). Saudi Arabia has demanded the Houthis step down and President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi be reinstated (IRIN 26/03/2015). The air campaign includes over 100 jets targeting air fields and bases near Sanaa and Aden (Washington Post 26/03/2015). Saudi Arabia has mobilised 150,000 troops and said it is prepared to launch a ground invasion if necessary (NBC 26/03/2015; IRIN 26/03/2015).

Iran has been accused of backing Houthi militants financially and with material support, a claim the Iranian Government denies. Iran condemned the Saudi Arabian intervention.

US: The US Government stated it had authorised the provision of logistical and intelligence support to the Saudi Arabian coalition's military intervention (Amnesty 26/03/2015). Yemen has been an important ally to the US in the fight against Al Qaeda. The US has waged a longstanding drone campaign against AQAP in Yemen (AFP 25/03/2015).

Past Conflicts and Displacement

Conflict: Saudi Arabia launched a military offensive against the Houthis between 2004 and 2010, fearing Shi'ite control over states on its borders (Yemen Times 10/07/2014). Since 2009, there have been protests and attacks on government forces by the southern secessionist movement. The Yemeni Government, in alliance with the United States, has been fighting Al Qaeda since 1998. Yemen witnessed civil war in 1994, between the north and south. Yemen has little history of sectarian strife.

Migrants and refugees in Yemen: In 2015, an estimated 915,000 refugees and migrants require multi-sector humanitarian assistance – an increase of 16% on 2014's estimate (HNO 22/12/2014)

Internally displaced persons (IDPs): As of end December 2014, there were 334,000 IDPs in Yemen (HNO 22/12/2014). Most are in five governorates: Sa'ada (103,014 people); Hajjah (88,603 people); Amran (71,548 people); Sanaa (46,228 people); and Al Jawf (24,700) (OCHA, 11/2014). 90% are estimated to live outside camps (OCHA, 03/09/2014).

Over 2014, localised conflicts displaced approximately 100,000 Yemenis, mostly for days (USAID, 13/02/2015).

Key Characteristics of Yemen

Demographic profile: The population is estimated to be 25.9 million in 2015 (WFP 28/02/2015). An estimated 73% of the population live in rural areas (UNFPA country profile 2015). 15.9 million are in need of humanitarian assistance (WFP 28/02/2015).

WASH: An estimated 13.4 million people do not have access to safe water and sanitation (OCHA, 10/03/2015). 55% of the urban population has access to improved sources of drinking water (47% rural and 72% urban). Access to improved sanitation is 53% (93% urban and 34% rural); (UNICEF/WHO JMP 2012). Every year, 14,700 people die of diarrhoea (Global alliance for clean cookstoves 2015).

Health: Infant mortality rate: 40.4 per 1,000 live births; under-five mortality rate: 51.3 per 1,000 live births; maternal mortality ratio: estimated 270 per 100,000 live births (World Bank 2013); Life expectancy: 64 years (OCHA, 10/03/2015).

Nutrition: In early February, 61 out of 333 districts in Yemen were reported to have critical levels of GAM (over 15%) and another 105 with serious levels (10–14.9% GAM) (OCHA, 12/02/2015). 840,000 children are acutely malnourished including 170,000 children are severely malnourished (OCHA, 10/03/2015).

Food security: More than five million people are severely food insecure (WFP 28/02/2015). Most areas of Yemen are expected to remain in Crisis food insecurity (IPC Phase 3) through June 2015, with increased need for humanitarian assistance as the lean season and political crisis continue (FEWSNET, 28/02/2015). Nearly half of the rural population and over one quarter of the urban population are food insecure (Comprehensive Food Security Survey, 11/2014). More than 40% of Sa'ada governorate's population is severely food insecure (Comprehensive Food Security Survey, 11/2014).

Livelihoods: (2010) GDP per capita: USD 1,209; child labour rate (5-17 years): 17%; population living under poverty line: 54% (OCHA 10/03/2015).

Education: In 2015, 1.1 million people will require education services (OCHA, 22/12/2014). Over 350 damaged schools require rehabilitation or reconstruction, affecting some 72,000 children (Yemen Times, 04/11/2014). An estimated 200,000 children have been affected by attacks or closure of schools. Girls are most affected, as they are more likely to be kept at home by their parents because of insecurity and poverty (UNICEF 26/03/2015).

Cooking sources: Gas is the most commonly used cooking fuel (58.9%). In rural areas, 52.7% of the population uses solid fuel against less than 5% in urban areas (Global alliance for clean cookstoves 2015).

Literacy: 66.4% adults (World Bank 2012).

Response Capacity

Capacity of national NGOs and authorities varies widely. Concerns also persist about the independence and neutrality of some local organizations and their ability to deliver principled humanitarian aid, especially those perceived to be partial to parties to conflict (HNO 22/12/2014).

Several organisations had to suspend their activities or move to operate remotely due to fighting. Crisis response efforts are focusing primarily on supporting mass casualty management. As of 31 March, the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) was only 8% funded (OCHA 31/03/2015).

WHO and the Ministry of Health pre-positioned additional supplies of emergency health provisions as well as basic medicines in February 2015. Both the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières provided additional medicines and medical supplies (WHO 26/03/2015).

Population Coping Mechanisms

- People flee from urban to rural areas to escape shelling, air strikes, and fighting (Reuters 31/03/2015).
- Several Yemeni refugees and Somali returnees have arrived in Somalia, after fleeing violence (Daily Star 01/04/2015). Djibouti has also received Yemeni refugees. Other East African are also anticipating refugee influxes from Yemen (ACT Alliance 30/03/2015). This reversal of migration flows indicates a complete depletion of mechanisms to cope with the deteriorated situation locally.

Information Gaps and Needs

- Updated information on the sectoral impact of the crisis.
- Impact of the conflict on infrastructure.

Lessons Learned

- Assistance strategies have to take into account not only the consequences of armed conflict but also Yemen's chronic state of humanitarian emergency and structural vulnerabilities.
- Resilience has been exhausted by protracted conflict and chronic humanitarian needs.

Map of Affected Area

