



مركز اليمن والخليج للدراسات  
YEMEN & GULF CENTER FOR STUDIES

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# Summary of Developments in the Yemeni Scene

Prepared by the Yemen & Gulf Centre for Studies



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## *Comprehensive Yemen Report*

The Yemen and Gulf Centre for Studies endeavours to comprehensively address key developments within the Yemeni landscape through its monthly qualitative publication: *Developments in the Yemeni Scene*. This publication explores political, security, and economic aspects, along with external interactions, aligning with the centre's research mission. The primary objective is to propose nuanced approaches to handling the Yemeni file, providing valuable scientific material to decision-makers, researchers, and journalists. This facilitates their informed engagement with the Yemeni file, aiding policy formulation and rationalisation. Simultaneously, it contributes to staying abreast of Yemen's evolving landscape, complementing other research publications by the Centre.

In dealing with developments in the Yemeni scene over the course of the month, the monthly report of the Yemen and Gulf Centre for Studies focuses on the systematic monitoring and analysis approach, i.e. identifying the most prominent political, security, economic, and foreign developments witnessed by the Yemeni file over the month, and analytically dealing with them, whether within the report or through the centre's other research outputs, including analyses, reports, and assessments of the situation.

### *Executive Summary*

In January 2024, Yemen witnessed many diverse and multidimensional developments that reflected the paths of the Yemeni crisis in the current era. Amidst the heightened security concerns prompted by the Houthi escalation in the Red Sea region following the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation in October 2023, the Yemeni landscape has also witnessed noteworthy political developments. However, the collective impact of these developments has indicated limited advancements in garnering support for the peace process within the country. Such political developments also reflected several crises that Yemen is experiencing, especially with regard to the continuing state of political and institutional division, supported by some separatist tendencies of some parties. The situation has not differed much on the economic level, as indicators of the multi-dimensional economic crisis are still persistent. The division of the country's financial institutions remains a significant factor, contributing to ongoing economic challenges. The current escalation has further exacerbated the situation, particularly impacting specific sectors like fishing, adding to the already dire humanitarian conditions in Yemen.

External interactions in the country have predominantly revealed a shift towards a concentrated effort to mitigate the Houthi escalation in the Red Sea region at the expense of prioritising a political resolution to the Yemeni crisis or addressing the unfolding humanitarian crises comprehensively. The international response seems to be more oriented towards containing immediate security challenges rather than addressing the unprecedented humanitarian crises faced by the country.

**Key trends in the Yemeni political landscape for January 2024 can be outlined as follows:**

## 1 Concerns Regarding the Human Rights Situation in Yemen

Yemen entered the new year burdened by major, multi-dimensional human rights violations committed in the past year. The National Committee for Investigating Alleged Violations of Human Rights (NCIAVHR), a government organisation, has announced the documentation of 2,955 violations across various governorates during 2023. However, contrary to previous reports, it refrained from identifying the parties involved. NCIAVHR stated that throughout 2023, it managed to monitor and investigate 2,955 violations across different governorates, impacting 5,152 victims of all ages and genders. These violations encompassed operations targeting civilians, arrests, extrajudicial killings, forced displacement, and assaults on historical and religious sites.



In a related context, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate issued, on January 7, its annual report on the status of press freedoms in the country in 2023, documenting a series of ongoing violations against those working in the journalism industry. In its report, the syndicate stated that it documented 82 violations between the beginning of 2023 and December 31 of the same year. These violations affected journalists, photographers, media outlets, media headquarters, and journalists' private property. The report also documented 17 cases of restriction of freedom, representing 20.7% of the total violations, followed by 14 cases of trying or summoning journalists, representing 14.6% of the total violations. Moreover, the report noted ten instances of professionals being barred from practising journalism and media outlets facing closure. Other violations varied between preventing the payment of journalists' dues, dismissing them from work, and confiscating property, in addition to hacking websites.



## 2 The Transitional Council's Movements Persist

In January, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) took a significant stride within its objective of “restoring the state of the South.” The inaugural meeting of the Southern House of Commons convened on January 2 in the temporary capital, Aden. During this meeting, Aidarus al-Zubaidi delivered a speech highlighting several key points concerning the council's secessionist aspirations. Notably, he emphasised the Council's dedication to “promote peace, security, and regional stability in alignment with the Abraham Accords,” referencing the normalisation agreements between certain Arab countries and Israel. The importance of this commitment was emphasised in response to statements made subsequent to a report by the Israeli Kan channel in late 2023. The report suggested that southern Yemen separatists, under Aidarus al-Zubaidi's leadership, had indicated a readiness to “collaborate with Israel in countering the Houthi threat.”



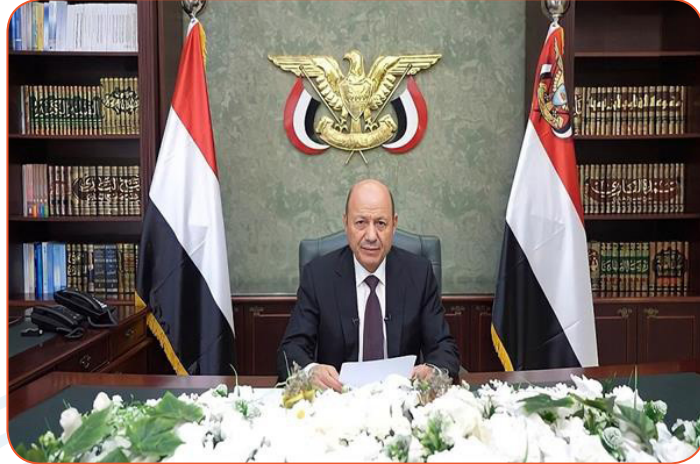
It is worth noting that the House of Commons that convened in Aden is a council formed recently by a decision of the President of the Transitional Council, Aidarus al-Zubaidi. It encompasses various bodies and councils constituting the Transitional Council, including the Presidency, the Supreme Executive Leadership, the General National Assembly, and the Council of Advisors. The House of Commons will serve as the primary body responsible for deliberating on critical matters for the South, including sovereign jurisdiction, thereby solidifying the Council's position as the most significant and extensive political entity within the STC.

On January 25, the STC strongly condemned what it deemed as “the persistence of certain government members in undertaking unilateral actions, aiming to escalate the situation further.” During its regular meeting, the STC Administrative Board reiterated “the Council's steadfast rejection of any unilateral actions and efforts to escalate tensions, reaffirming its commitment to maintaining calm to facilitate the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's efforts in advancing the peace process towards a comprehensive solution under international auspices.” STC's current stance comes amid a series of appointments in diplomatic missions abroad and within the Ministry of Interior. The most recent of these appointments was made by Major General Ibrahim Haidan, the Minister of Interior, who appointed Brigadier General Salim Saleh Al-Mahthi as the Deputy Director of Security in Aden and Commander of the Special Security Forces in the governorate. Notably, Brigadier General Al-Mahthi is not affiliated with the Transitional Council.



### 3 Efforts to Unify the Security Structure of the Legitimate System

On January 4, Rashad Al-Alimi, President of the Yemeni Presidential Council, issued a decision to consolidate several security and intelligence agencies affiliated with various armed sectors and entities in the country into a unified entity called the “Central Apparatus for State Security.” Following a meeting held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, the Presidential Leadership Council, under Rashad Al-Alimi’s leadership, made further decisions to streamline security operations. This involved merging the National Security and Political



Security agencies, creating a single entity named the ‘Central Agency for State Security.’ An independent counter-terrorism agency was also established, and its leader was appointed as part of these restructuring efforts.

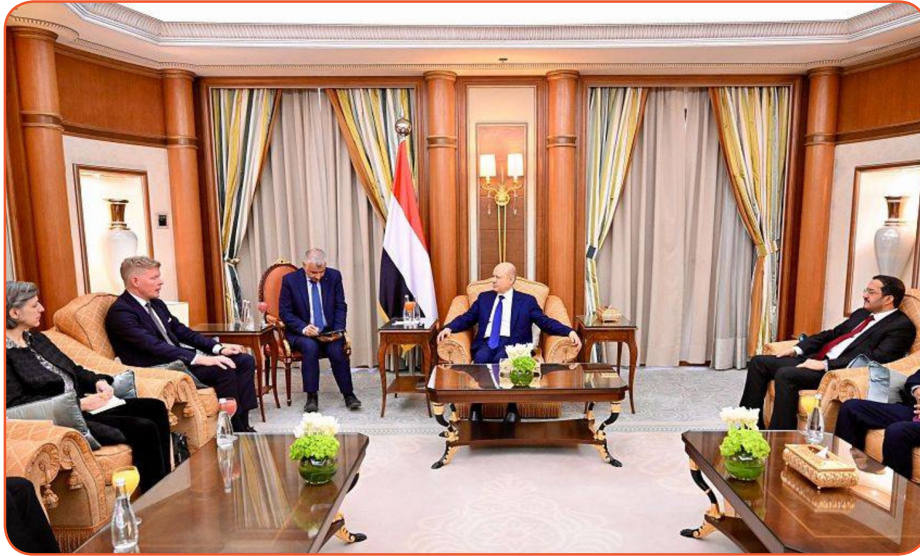
Furthermore, the decision stipulated that the “Central Agency for Political Security, the National Security Agency, and other intelligence entities associated with the STC, the Republican Guard, and the Giants Brigades would be amalgamated into a single intelligence agency named the Central Agency for State Security, headquartered in the temporary capital, Aden; and branches may be established within the Republic’s governorate. This agency is mandated to report to the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council and is accountable before him for executing all tasks and responsibilities outlined in this decision. It is also tasked with receiving directives from the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council.”

This decision was motivated by several key considerations, primarily centred around consolidating security institutions and structures under the umbrella of Yemeni legitimacy. The rationale behind this move lies in recognising that divisions within the security structures hinder the effective response to internal threats. Additionally, the decision can be interpreted as an attempt to restore respect to the sovereign decision of the vertical state authorities after nine years of imbalance, diaspora, multiple military and party loyalties, and the overlap and dispersion of their missions. These factors have weakened the country’s unified stance against the Houthi agenda, ultimately prolonging the conflict.



4

Continuation of Discussions by the UN Envoy



The UN envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, held a series of meetings that continue his efforts to impose the road map on Yemen. On January 7, the president of the Yemeni Presidential Council, Rashad Al-Alimi, welcomed the UN envoy to his residence in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. During the meeting, Al-Alimi received a briefing from the UN envoy on the latest developments in his collaborative efforts with partners to reignite a comprehensive political process in Yemen under the auspices of the United Nations. Al-Alimi reiterated the Council and the governments' backing for the UN's initiatives, expressing a commitment to offer the special envoy all necessary support and facilities. This support aims to enable the envoy to fulfil his duties and responsibilities as mandated by international legitimacy resolutions, notably Resolution 2216. The meeting also discussed developments in the local situation. It emphasised the international pressures necessary to compel the Houthis to engage sincerely in peace efforts, thereby ending the suffering of the Yemeni people and restoring their legitimate institutions.

In a related context, the UN envoy to Yemen held a meeting on January 9 with Mohammed Abdulsalam, the spokesman and chief negotiator for the Ansar Allah movement, commonly known as the «Houthis,» in Muscat. A statement released by the UN envoy's office indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the UN road map aimed at revitalising the parties' commitments to a nationwide ceasefire and implementing measures to enhance living conditions in Yemen. Additionally, the meeting addressed the resumption of an inclusive political process under the auspices of the United Nations. The statement further noted that the UN envoy also engaged in discussions with a group of senior Omani officials in Muscat, focusing on the importance of sustained coordinated regional support for UN mediation efforts in Yemen.



## 5- Establishment of a New Political Entity for the Eastern Governorates

On January 10, in the city of Seiyun, the capital of the Hadhramaut Valley and Desert in eastern Yemen, the formation of a preparatory committee was announced. This committee emerged from the founding body of the Unified Council of the Eastern Governorates in Yemen. Described as a political entity, the Unified Council aims to actively contribute to fulfilling the aspirations, objectives, goals, and demands of the residents of the eastern governorates. The committee specifies these governorates as Hadhramaut, Al Mahra, Shabwah, and Socotra. According to those in charge of this council, it came to represent and bring together under its banner several components, such as the Hadhramaut Coordination Body, the General Council of Al Mahra and Socotra, the Local Authority in Shabwah, the Hadhramaut Inclusive Conference Document, the Hadhramaut National Council, the Hadhramaut Tribal Alliance, the Shabwa Sons and Tribes Alliance, and the sit-in committee in Mahra.

Several Yemeni circles interpret the formation of this council as a response to the increasing secessionist activities of the STC. Particularly noteworthy is the STC's establishment of various political structures to further its secessionist agenda and military manoeuvres to assert control over Seiyun. This area remains outside its influence. The STC's efforts appear directed towards consolidating control over the entirety of the desert and valley of Hadhramaut, seeking to expel northern forces from the region. However, these endeavours have encountered opposition from the leadership of the Saudi-led coalition.



## 6- Discussion Resurfaces Regarding Changing Yemeni Government

In January, discussions resurfaced regarding potential changes within the Yemeni government. On January 14, reports indicated a leaning within the Yemeni Presidential Council towards replacing the current Prime Minister, Maeen Abdulmalik, and appointing a new prime minister. Speculation suggests that if this trend materialises, there is a higher likelihood of selecting a prime minister from the southern region, particularly someone from the Hadhramaut governorate experienced in economic matters. The regional aspect plays a significant role in the selection process for the prime minister, alongside the pressing need to address the economic crisis, which underscores the necessity of having an individual with solid economic acumen in this pivotal position.





## 7- Growing Criticism of the Legitimate Government Towards the Houthis

In January, a state of escalating rhetoric was observed from components of the Yemeni legitimate government towards the Houthis. On January 12, the internationally recognised Yemeni government squarely blamed the Houthis for



transforming the country into a «propaganda battleground.» Later, on January 29, Rashad Al-Alimi, the president of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council, urged the European Union to designate the Houthis as a terrorist organisation, aligning with the classification made by the United States. Then, on January 31, Al-Alimi called upon the international community to take more decisive punitive actions against the Houthis, advocating for the implementation of international resolutions and bolstering support for the legitimate government to restore institutions and liberate Hodeidah.

## 8- Growing Concerns Over Deteriorating Humanitarian Conditions

On January 17, non-governmental organisations expressed «deep concern» regarding the repercussions of military escalation on humanitarian efforts in Yemen and the Red Sea. They highlighted that several humanitarian organisations had suspended their operations due to security concerns following Western strikes on the Houthis. In a joint statement, 26 Yemeni and international organisations, including Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council, expressed their “deep concern about the humanitarian impact of the recent military escalation in Yemen and the Red Sea.” They stressed that humanitarian organisations were already



**Save the Children**

experiencing the consequences of security threats in the Red Sea, as trade disruptions led to higher prices and delays in delivering life-saving goods. With more than 75% of Yemenis dependent on aid for survival, the situation remains dire amid a severe economic crisis resulting from the war, currency collapse, and restrictions on imports and international trade.

In a related context, on January 20, the Houthis declared that US and British personnel working within the framework of UN missions in areas under their control in Yemen had been instructed to leave the country within a month. Authorities in Sana'a, the Yemeni capital under Houthi control, conveyed this directive to the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Yemen, as well as to all humanitarian organisations. US and British employees were given one month to prepare for their departure, raising concerns about potentially adverse consequences for the humanitarian situation in the country.



## 9- Continued Houthi Escalation in the Red Sea

It appears that the series of Houthi employment for military operations in the Red Sea, within the framework of the repercussions of Operation “Al-Aqsa Flood”, will persist until the end of this war. Many indicators of this trend emerged throughout January. On January 5, tens of thousands of Yemenis gathered in Al-Sabeen Square in central Sanaa in a massive public rally in response to the call by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi to support the Palestinian people and Gaza Strip in opposition to Israeli occupation. Similar gatherings took place in squares across other Houthi-controlled governorates, rallying under the slogan “The blood of the free people... on the path to victory.” Additionally, thousands from the city of Saada in the north of the country participated in a massive rally to express solidarity with the Houthi movement’s escalation against Israel and to support the Palestinian people.

In an attempt to diminish the significance of the US-British strikes targeting the Houthis, the movement’s official spokesman announced on January 13 that “these strikes had limited effect.” Furthermore, on January 18, the leader of the Houthis, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, delivered a speech emphasising the movement’s ongoing operations in the Red Sea, including targeting US and British ships alongside those destined for Israel. Al-Houthi asserted that confronting the US-British aggression did not intimidate them. Then, on January 25, in a similar address, Al-Houthi declared that the Houthi’s operations would persist “until aid reaches the Gaza Strip and a ceasefire is implemented in the Strip.”



The principal trends illustrating security developments in Yemen throughout January can be summarised as follows:

#### 4 Qualitative US-British Escalation Against the Houthis



Since January 12th, the United States, alongside Britain, has begun adopting a more escalatory approach towards the Houthi movement, “Ansar Allah,” in response to the repeated attacks it carries out in the Red Sea. Washington, in particular, has begun adopting an approach based on pre-emptive strikes against the movement rather than simply reacting to these attacks, either by drones or ballistic missiles. Throughout the month, the United States, in cooperation with some countries, especially Britain, carried out about ten strikes against the Houthis.

January 12th marked a turning point in the US approach to dealing with the Houthi “Ansar Allah” movement. On this date, Washington, alongside Britain, launched pre-emptive strikes against Houthi locations in five Yemeni governorates: Sana'a, Hodeidah, Taiz, Saada, and Hajjah. The strikes targeted a total of 28 locations and 73 Houthi targets. The joint US-UK operations against the Houthis carried several important implications: First, the strikes focused on targeting drone manufacturing centres, weapons warehouses, radar systems, air defence systems, storage and launch sites for a unidirectional attack on unmanned aerial systems, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. This indicates that the operations were aimed at crippling the Houthis' military capabilities. Second, despite the intensity and precision of the strikes, the resulting casualties were relatively low. This reflects the US's desire to send a message about its ability to target the Houthis' combat and military capabilities while minimising collateral damage and avoiding a reaction that could further escalate tensions in the Red Sea.



## 2- Continued Houthi Operations in the Red Sea

The Houthis maintained an escalatory approach in their security operations in the Red Sea throughout January, both before and after the US strikes that began on January 12th. This was evident in several operations: On January 2nd, The Houthis targeted a Maltese-flagged container ship approximately 24 kilometres southwest of the Yemeni port of Mokha. On January 6th, US Central Command announced that a US warship had shot down a drone launched from Yemen in the southern

Red Sea «in self-defence.» On January 10th (Before the US strikes), the Houthis launched their largest drone and missile attack to date, targeting ships in the Red Sea, prompting the US and British navies to intercept the projectiles in a major naval engagement. On January 15th, US Central Command said it had thwarted a cruise missile attack launched from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen that targeted a US warship in the southern Red Sea. On January 16th, the Houthis launched a cruise missile targeting international commercial shipping lanes in the south of the Red Sea. On January 18th, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree announced that they had targeted a US warship in the Gulf of Aden with multiple naval missiles, claiming a “precise” hit. On January 24th, Saree announced clashes with US Navy ships in the Gulf of Aden and Bab El-Mandab Strait for over two hours using ballistic missiles. On January 26th, UK maritime security company «Ambrey» reported that a missile off the coast of Aden, Yemen, hit a commercial vessel. Ambrey explained that the incident occurred one nautical mile southeast of Aden. On January 28th, British officials said that the British warship «Diamond» thwarted a drone attack launched by the Houthi movement in the Red Sea. On January 31st, US Central Command said that the Houthis fired an anti-ship missile from Yemen towards the Red Sea, adding that a US destroyer in the area intercepted it.





### 3- Continued Targeting of Southern Forces

Attacks on forces affiliated with the STC continued in January, albeit at a lower rate than in 2023. On January 6th, two officers from the STC's "6th Support and Reinforcement Brigade" were killed, and nine soldiers were seriously injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion between the Algoz junction and the Al Qulaytah area east of the Madiyah district in the southern Abyan governorate.

On January 19th, three soldiers were killed, and two others were injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by al-Qaeda elements exploded in a military vehicle belonging to the STC forces in the southern Abyan governorate. The IED detonated as the STC military vehicle was passing on a dirt road in the As Sadarah area, east of the Wadi Omran, in the Madiyah district of Abyan governorate. On the following day, The Shabwah Defence Forces, affiliated with the STC, reported that a civilian was killed and four soldiers from the "1st Brigade of Shabwa Defence" were injured.

These recurring operations have several important implications. First: "Al-Qaeda" still maintains a significant and qualitative presence in southern Yemen. Second, Al-Qaeda relies on low-cost, high-impact operations. Third, Al-Qaeda has begun to escalate its operations against the Southern forces. Fourth: The security fragility in the southern regions makes them vulnerable to exploitation by violent and terrorist groups.



#### 4- Support for the Houthis from IRGC and Hezbollah Elements

Houthi operations in the Red Sea appear to be coordinated and directly supervised by Iran and Hezbollah, particularly in terms of intelligence and advisory support. Four regional sources and two Iranian sources told Reuters on January 20th that Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah leaders are in Yemen to help guide and supervise Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping.

This news reflects several important implications: Iran, through the IRGC and Hezbollah, are providing logistical and intelligence support and assistance to the Houthis in carrying out their attacks in the Red Sea. There are many indications that the level of Iranian logistical and military support for the Houthis has increased amid the current escalation. On January 16th, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that it had seized advanced conventional Iranian weapons that it said were “en route to the Houthis.” CENTCOM noted that investigations revealed that the Houthis had used weapons similar to those seized to threaten Red Sea shipping and that «Iran continues to ship lethal aid to the group».



**Along with Yemen's intensive political and security developments in January, the country experienced several critical economic developments. These developments were undoubtedly affected by those political and security developments mentioned above, and some were a reflection of them. These developments can be summarised as follows:**

## 1 Central Bank's Crackdown on Money Exchange Companies

The Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) has renewed its efforts to tighten measures against money exchange companies that have turned into “safe havens for savers' funds.” These companies have exploited the deteriorating banking situation and the country's divisions since the start of the war nearly nine years ago. This approach was reflected in the warning issued by the CBY at the beginning of January, in which it cautioned against “the danger of exceeding permitted activities by accepting customer deposits at money exchange companies.” The CBY stressed the “need for these companies to adhere to the provisions of the current regulations governing money exchange activities, which have limited their activities to buying and selling foreign currency and financial transfers.”



These companies appear to be engaging in unconventional roles beyond the legal framework. In other words, money exchange companies and establishments have begun to act as commercial banks by accepting customer deposits without a specific ceiling. This imposes additional negative consequences on the general banking sector, especially in pushing the local currency towards further crisis. These activities of money exchange companies pose a significant challenge to efforts to control the markets and end the imbalances suffered due to the country's widening financial, monetary, and institutional divisions, which have disastrous consequences for the deterioration of the local currency.

On January 31st, accusations flew between the CBY and money exchange companies regarding the depreciation of the Yemeni Rial (YER). This development saw the dollar reach its highest value since the bank's leadership took office in late 2021. Responding to the exchange rate exceeding 1600 YER following a 40-million-dollar auction conducted by the CBY, bank officials issued statements asserting that this increase lacked economic justification. They emphasised that the prevailing rate for several months prior to the auction had been 1540 YER per dollar.



## 2- Worsening Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen appears to have significantly worsened. UN estimates confirm this, with data indicating that over 21.6 million people, or 75% of the Yemeni population, require assistance. Seventeen million are in extreme poverty due to food insecurity. Yemen's institutional and geographical divisions, particularly in the financial and banking sectors, exacerbate the economic crisis. The lack of a clear political solution, the ongoing conflict, and the economic repercussions of the Houthi escalation in the Red Sea all contribute to the worsening humanitarian situation in the country.



On January 31st, the United Nations announced that the Houthis had approved their decision to exclude 3 million people from the monthly food rations list. This comes after 1 million people were already excluded in areas controlled by the internationally recognised government due to funding shortages facing the humanitarian response plan. The World Food Programme (WFP) stated that after suspending operations in Houthi-controlled areas in December, it had reached an agreement with the movement that controls the abducted Yemeni capital, Sana'a, to adopt a "more targeted approach" to the distribution of relief aid and reduce the number of beneficiaries to 6.5 million, down from 9.5 million previously.

## 3- Negative Impacts of Escalation on the Fishing Sector

The Houthi escalation in the Red Sea and its related developments have cast a devastating shadow over Yemen's vital fishing sector. Fishing associations sound the alarm on the sector's severe deterioration, citing the expansion of military operations, the deployment of warships in Red Sea waters, and the subsequent impact on fishing grounds in northwestern governorates like Hodeidah, Hajjah, Mokha, Dhubab, and Bab El-Mandeb. This escalation effectively cripples fishing activity and halts crucial fish projects in the Red Sea. Repurposing numerous fish landing centres into military warehouses and sites further exacerbates the sector's existing crises.





**Prominent trends in external interactions towards Yemen in January can be observed as follows:**

**1- Iranian Efforts to Promote Houthi «Independence»**

Since the onset of the current regional escalation on October 7, 2023, following the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, Iran has adopted a strategic approach focused on supporting and empowering its regional proxies while avoiding direct involvement in the ongoing conflict. On January 3rd, Iranian Defence Minister Reza Ashtiani affirmed that the Iranian Navy's presence in the Red Sea "ensures security, and we have no restrictions on that, especially in this region." He further emphasised that Iranian forces are "fully monitoring developments." In statements to Iranian media following the weekly government meeting, Ashtiani affirmed his country's support for the Houthi movement.



He stated, "The Islamic Republic supports Yemen, and we support them on all dimensions, but they are independent and make their own decisions." However, these statements appear to contradict the reality on the ground, which suggests that Iran provides tangible military and intelligence support to the Houthis. Houthi actions in the current escalation appear to align with the region's broader Iranian approach and strategic calculations.

**2- Possible Houthi Foreknowledge of US Attacks**

Several indicators suggest that the Houthis may have had prior knowledge of the US and British attacks carried out on January 12th. On January 3rd, US officials affirmed to the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) that the US military had prepared options to strike the Houthis in response to attacks on ships in the Red Sea. On January 4th, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron stated that attacks in the Red Sea shipping lanes must stop or international action would be taken.



On January 13th, US President Joe Biden announced that his country had privately delivered a message to Iran regarding the Houthi movement, which is allied with Iran and has been carrying out attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea. Some analysts interpreted these statements as a pre-emptive warning of the impending attacks aimed at minimising casualties and reactions and preventing further escalation in the region.



### 3- Rejection of US-British Attacks by Some Countries

Several regional actors have adopted a largely cautious stance towards the US-British attacks on Yemen targeting the Houthis. On January 14th, at a joint press conference with his Egyptian counterpart, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that “The sovereignty of Yemen and the neighbouring countries bordering the Red Sea should be upheld, and efforts should be made to avoid escalating tensions further.” Wang Yi emphasised that his country “pays attention to what is happening in the Red Sea” and called for “stopping the harassment and escalation that are happening in the Red Sea, which threatens the international system.” He also rejected “the use of military force against Yemen.” On January 16th, Qatari Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majid Al-Ansari said, «Qatar is working with regional and international partners to protect international navigation in the Red Sea.” He pointed out that “the continuation of the attacks is a security issue, and the military solution does not provide security for international shipping lanes.” Al-Ansari stressed that the escalation of tensions in the Red Sea cannot be dealt with separately from the war in Gaza, which must be stopped immediately.

### 4- Re-designation of the Houthis as a Terrorist Organisation

Days after the US military escalation against the Houthis, the US administration announced, on January 18th, the re-designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organisation. This decision came after the group was removed from the terrorism list due to concerns that its inclusion would harm the prospects of peace and the Yemeni economy. Critical Observations on the decision can be considered: first, the

US decision designates the Houthis as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist group” under Executive Order 13224. Pursuant to US legislation, this Order “authorises sanctions against foreign individuals engaged in terrorist acts threatening US security, national security, foreign policy, or the economy, or posing a significant risk of such acts”. Compared to the Trump administration’s designation of the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, this decision carries several significant implications: first, the Biden administration’s classification allows the US government to freeze the assets of individuals and entities that support the Houthis from within the US or by US individuals and organisations. Second, the designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation may impede the peace process in Yemen, potentially hindering or preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid. Third, the Biden administration’s classification allows the Houthis to be removed from the terrorism list within a specific timeframe if they cease the activities that led to their inclusion.

### 5- Sanctions Imposed on Four Houthi Officials

As part of their ongoing sanctions approach against the Houthis, the UK and the US announced the imposition of sanctions on four senior Houthi officials for their role in supporting or directing attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea. The two countries have imposed sanctions on Houthi Defence Minister Mohamed Nasser Al-Atifi, Commander of the Houthi Naval Forces, Mohamed Fadl Abdul Nabi, Commander of the Coastal Defence Forces Mohammed Ali Al-Qadri, and Mohamed Ahmed al-Talbi, described by the UK and US governments as the director of procurement for the Houthi forces.



## 6- US Accusations Against Iran for Supporting the Houthis

The United States continued to accuse Iran of supporting and sponsoring Houthi attacks in the Red Sea region. The commander of the US Navy in the Middle East said that Iran is “very directly involved” in the ship attacks carried out by the Houthi group in Yemen. On January 24, WSJ reported that Iran is increasingly sending sophisticated weapons to its Houthi allies in Yemen, which is boosting their ability to attack commercial ships despite US airstrikes on the Houthis. WSJ explained that Iran has provided the Houthis with advanced equipment, including drone jamming devices and parts for long-range missiles and shells, and that Iran and Hezbollah have sent advisers to help the Houthis plan and carry out their attacks.

## 7- US Request for China's Support in Reining the Houthis

The Financial Times reported on January 24, citing US officials, that the US has asked China to urge Iran to rein the Houthis, but has seen little sign of help from Beijing. The report stated that the US repeatedly raised the issue with senior Chinese officials over the past three months. White House National Security Advisor “Jake Sullivan” and his deputy “Jon Finer” reportedly discussed the matter during meetings with the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Liu Jianchao, in Washington recently. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also raised the issue with Liu Jianchao.

However, Reuters reported on January 26, citing four Iranian sources and a diplomatic source, that Chinese officials have asked their Iranian counterparts to help curb Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea or risk damaging trade relations with Beijing. The sources said discussions about the attacks and China-Iran trade occurred during several recent meetings in Beijing and Tehran. An Iranian official familiar with the talks told Reuters on anonymity: “Basically, China is saying (if our interests are harmed in any way, it will affect our business with Tehran. So, ask the Houthis to exercise restraint).”






## مركز اليمن والخليج للدراسات

YEMEN & GULF CENTER FOR STUDIES

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Our mission is to contribute pioneering knowledge that upholds scientific rigour and rationality, particularly emphasising Yemen and its neighbouring regions. We aim to play a key role in shaping public policies, rationalising decision-making processes, and enhancing awareness of the issues we study among the elite and the general public.

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