



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Yemen – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

10 July 2023

UN Security Council: Increased danger from landmines

In its monthly report on Yemen of 02.07.23, the UN Security Council names landmines and unexploded ordnance as a growing danger for the population. Due to the decline in fighting, more and more people are returning to the former fighting areas, some of which are heavily mined. Children are particularly at risk. In 2022, a child was killed or injured by a mine or unexploded ordnance every second day on average (2018: every fifth day).

17 July 2023

Economic situation

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, addressed the UN Security Council on the deteriorating economic situation in Yemen on 10.07.23.

The currency in the areas under the control of the internationally recognised government has lost much of its value and roadblocks have more than doubled transport costs, he reported. A large part of the Yemeni population is dependent on humanitarian aid, which is drastically underfunded.

During the ceasefire from April to October 2022, food insecurity and malnutrition briefly declined, but the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) predicts that food insecurity will rise again in the second half of 2023 due to food and fuel price increases and underfunding of aid programmes.

24 July 2023

WFP staff killed

On 21.07.23, the head of the local WFP office in the town of Taizz was killed by unknown persons. The WFP staff member was shot dead in the middle of the street by two armed men on a motorbike and succumbed to his injuries a short time later. The perpetrators initially managed to flee, but on 22.07.23 the police arrested two suspects and ten other people on suspicion of complicity. The background is still unclear.

31 July 2023

Gender segregation at university

Gender segregation has reportedly been introduced in the Faculty of Communication at Sanaa University, with courses for women and men held on different days of the week.

The decision was made in agreement between Houthi leadership and the university, allegedly to avoid cases of sexual harassment and to comply with Islamic moral standards. Meanwhile, a report about the alleged negative effects of mixed courses appeared in media loyal to the Houthis on 26.07.23. The Houthis continue to restrict

women's rights in the areas under their control, including by restrictive dress codes and a ban on women travelling without a male relative.

14 August 2023

Suspected AQAP attack on Southern Transition Council

On 10.08.23, an explosion occurred in the south of Abjan Province, killing a commander and three soldiers of a militia allied with the Southern Transition Council. No exact details were released. Several members of the Southern Transitional Council, speaking on condition of anonymity, believe that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was responsible for the explosion.

21 August 2023

Ethiopian migrants regularly shot dead at the Saudi border

On 21.08.23, HRW published a report on incidents at the Saudi-Yemeni border. It documented various incidents in which Saudi border guards opened fire on unarmed migrants with machine guns, mortars and the like. Several mass graves and massacres were documented. The documented casualties amount to several hundred over the course of the last few years, although HRW assumes that many more people have been killed in incidents that have gone unnoticed.

11 September 2023

Increase in measles and rubella

In a press release published on 31.08.23 WHO expressed concern about the increase in measles and rubella cases in Yemen.

According to WHO, more than 34,000 measles cases were reported between the beginning of January and the end of July 2023, 413 of which were fatal. This is a significant increase compared to 2022, when around 27,000 cases (220 fatal) were reported for the whole year. Younger children are particularly affected. The rising number of cases is caused by low vaccination rates and cramped living conditions in refugee camps, among other reasons. The Yemeni health system is functional to a limited extent only, especially since the outbreak of the conflict in 2014.

Médecins Sans Frontières: Contact lost with two staff members

On 28.08.23, the aid organisation Médecins Sans Frontières announced that it had lost contact with two staff members in the Marib governorate.

The staff members are nationals from Germany and Myanmar. While Médecins Sans Frontières did not provide further details, local media reported an abduction by several armed men on the road connecting Marib and Hadramaut governorates. Kidnappings of staff of international organisations are not uncommon in Yemen. As recently as mid-August 2023, five UN staff members were released after being held hostage for 18 months, following their abduction by al-Qaeda in February 2022.

09 October 2023

Houthi: Restrictions on freedom of movement for NGO personnel

On 30.09.23 the director of Mwatana, a Yemeni NGO based in Sanaa, was detained and questioned together with four of his staff at Sanaa airport before being forbidden from leaving the country for Amman, Jordan. No explanation was provided by the Houthi authorities. Mwatana is accusing the Houthi government of arbitrarily restricting the freedom of movement.

Airline suspends Sanaa-Amman service

The state airline, Yemenia/Yemen Airways, announced on 01.10.23 that it was discontinuing the service between Sanaa and Amman, Jordan. The airline stated that it was taking this action because the Houthi authorities were withholding around US\$ 80 million. The Sanaa-Amman service was the only direct air link abroad from the Houthi-controlled territories. It was introduced in 2022 as part of the ceasefire agreement, most recently operating several commercial flights a week to Amman.

23 October 2023

Houthi drones intercepted by US destroyer

On 19.10.23 a US navy destroyer stationed in the Red Sea intercepted three cruise missiles and a number of drones. According to a US Defense Department spokesman, these had been fired in a northerly direction by the Houthis in Yemen and were probably aimed at Israel.

A few days after the beginning of the current hostilities in Gaza, the leader of the Iran-backed Houthis, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, had threatened rocket and drone attacks, should the USA intervene in the conflict. The Houthis' official motto is "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam".

30 October 2023

NGO employee dies in prison

On 26.10.23 Save the Children confirmed the death of Hisham Al-Hakimi, the NGO's security director in Yemen. Al-Hakimi was arrested in Sanaa on 09.09.23. Neither his family, lawyers or Save the Children were able to communicate with Al-Hakimi in prison. No charges were brought against Al-Hakimi and no grounds were stated for his arrest. Yemen's capital, Sanaa, is controlled by the Houthis, and arbitrary arrests are common there. Prison conditions also breach all international standards on all levels. In reaction to its staff member's death, Save the Children has suspended its work in northern Yemen for the time being.

13 November 2023

Attacks on Israel

On 09.11.23 the Israeli air defence system Arrow 3 intercepted a missile over the Red Sea which was allegedly aimed at the city of Eilat in the south of Israel. According to the Israeli military, the missile was fired from Yemen.

The spokesman for the Houthis announced on the same day that a number of missiles had been fired at Israel. Since the beginning of the Gaza war the Houthis have fired a number of missiles in the direction of Israel, none of which have reached their targets to date. The Houthis have an explicitly anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic agenda, their motto being "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam".

US drone shot down

On 08.11.23 the Houthis shot down a US drone over the water close to the Yemeni coast; this has been confirmed by the USA. Along with Israel, the USA is the Houthis' principal ideological adversary.

20 November 2023

Houthi hijack merchant ship with link to Israel

On 19.11.23 the Houthis seized a British merchant ship by force and took the crew of 25 comprising various (non-Israeli) nationalities hostage. The ship was en route from Türkiye to India and was passing through the Red Sea at the time of the incident. The link to Israel stems from a company founded by an Israeli businessman which is a part owner of the ship. The Houthis' leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, announced on 14.11.23 that as part of the attacks against Israel ships with links to Israel would also be considered legitimate targets.

Houthi attacks on Israel and US navy

On 14.11.23 a Houthi spokesman said further missiles had been fired at Israeli territory, including the coastal city of Eilat. The Israeli military announced on the same day that it had shot down a missile over the Red Sea.

On 15.11.23 a US navy destroyer on the Red Sea intercepted a drone from Yemen which according to initial assessments was homing in on the destroyer. It is not known whether the drone was armed.

27 November 2023

Red Sea: Attack on another merchant ship with link to Israel

On 26.11.23 armed actors attempted to bring a merchant ship under their control in the Gulf of Aden. The container ship belongs to a British company whose owners are Israeli nationals. A US navy destroyer located in the vicinity

responded to the emergency call from the container ship and was able to apprehend the five attackers. Two missiles were fired at the US destroyer from the direction of the Houthi-controlled territories. They missed their target by several sea miles, however, and thus caused no damage or injuries. No group has claimed responsibility for the incident to date. At the time of the attack the ship was in coastal waters which are under the control of Yemen's internationally recognised government. The Yemeni government is blaming the incident on the Houthis. On 19.11.23 the Houthis hijacked a merchant ship with links to Israel and threatened to carry out similar attacks (cf. BN of 20.11.23).

04 December 2023

Incidents in the Red Sea

On 29.11.23 a US Navy destroyer shot down a drone in Bab el-Mandab Strait which was fired from the direction of the Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen. A US military spokesman said that the drone which was headed for the destroyer was produced in Iran.

A series of missile and drone attacks took place in the Red Sea on 03.12.23. In all, three merchant ships were hit, two of which incurred minor damage while the third was more severely damaged. No casualties were reported. In parallel to the missile attacks, a US destroyer shot down a total of three drones which were approaching it. The Houthis have claimed responsibility for two of the attacks on the merchant ships, describing these as "Israeli". The USA holds the Houthis responsible for all the stated attacks.

The Houthis have attacked a number of merchant ships with links to Israel in recent weeks (cf. BN of 27.11.23), citing the continuing war in Gaza as the reason for the attacks.

11 December 2023

Houthi territories: WFP suspends food distribution

The WFP announced on 05.12.23 that it was suspending the distribution of food in territories under the Houthis' control, where around two thirds of Yemen's population live. The WFP blamed this step on drastic funding shortfalls and disagreement with the Houthi leadership. The WFP had already been forced to reduce food rations in Yemen substantially last year.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen is precarious, particularly in the areas of food security, health care and access to clean water.

Security situation in the Red Sea

A Houthi spokesman announced on 09.12.23 that with immediate effect all ships destined for an Israeli port were considered legitimate military targets for the Houthis. He justified this by reference to the shortage of food and medicine in the Gaza Strip. Since November 2023 the Houthis have attacked a number of ships which were passing through the Red Sea, using missiles and drones. One ship has been hijacked.

According to information from the French military, on 09.12.23 a French frigate in the Red Sea shot down two drones which were headed towards the frigate from the direction of Yemen. In addition to merchant vessels, a number of US warships have also been the targets of suspected Houthi attacks (cf. BN of 04.12.23). The French military has not released any information about the perpetrator of the most recent attack, however.

18 December 2023

Measles and rubella spreading

The UN OCHA reported a marked rise in cases of measles and rubella in Yemen in a bulletin on 17.12.23. Around 50,700 cases of measles and rubella were recorded from January up to and including November 2023, representing a rise of more than 85 % compared to the previous year. Cases of measles and rubella in Yemen have been rising continually since 2021. This is attributable in part to low vaccination coverage in broad areas of the collapsed health care system and overcrowding at refugee camps, which promotes the spread of infectious diseases.

Security situation in the Red Sea

On 12.12.23 a Norwegian tanker was attacked in the Red Sea by a missile from Yemen. No casualties have been reported. The ship was en route from Malaysia to Italy and would potentially have made a stopover in Israel in January 2024. The Houthis have confirmed that they were responsible for the attack.

On 13.12. and 14.12.23 respectively, missiles were fired at two different merchant ships from the direction of the Houthi-controlled territories in Yemen. Both missiles missed their targets and landed in the sea.

Two other merchant ships were hit by missiles coming from the direction of the Houthi territories on 15.12.23. The extent of the damage caused and any casualties is not yet known.

On 16.12.23 a US and a British war ship shot down a total of 15 combat drones over the Red Sea which, according to the British and the US navy were targeted at merchant ships.

The Houthis have been attacking merchant ships with links to Israel on a regular basis since November 2023. The Houthis say that they are carrying out the attacks because of the war in Gaza (cf. BN of 04.12. and 11.12.23). Such a link is not always evident in the most recent attacks, however. The Houthis have claimed responsibility for most of the attacks and threatened further attacks on ships with links to Israel. They have also warned ships against ignoring instructions from the Houthi authorities. In response to the continuing attacks, a number of shipping companies have suspended operations through Bab el-Mandab Strait.

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration
Briefing Notes
BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de