



WCYS 1st Annual Yemen Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill

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**Advancing Strategic Engagement for a Prosperous Yemen:
Addressing Yemen's Urgent Challenges and Fostering
Partnerships for Progress**

Legislative Agenda
Congressional Leave Behind Document



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About Us

The Washington Center for Yemeni Studies (WCYS) is a dedicated research center that strives to empower the Yemeni people and foster positive change in Yemen. Through extensive research, analysis, and advocacy, we aim to deepen the understanding of Yemen's political climate, address the humanitarian crisis, and tackle social inequities. Our ultimate goal is to amplify the Yemeni voice, facilitate constructive dialogue, and forge strategic partnerships that contribute to sustainable development while enhancing stability and strengthening bilateral relations between the United States and Yemen.

Our Vision

The vision of the Washington Center for Yemeni Studies:

- 01** Serve as a trusted resource for policymakers, researchers, and journalists seeking reliable, unbiased information on Yemen.
- 02** Collaborate with national and international organizations to support initiatives that promote peace, stability, and sustainable development in Yemen.
- 03** Become a globally recognized hub for Yemeni studies, promoting Yemen's rich cultural heritage and intellectual contributions.

Our Mission

The mission of the Washington Center for Yemeni Studies:

- 01** Promote academic research and scholarship in Yemen by providing a knowledge exchange and collaboration platform.
- 02** Facilitate a deeper understanding of Yemen's history, culture, and societal dynamics through interdisciplinary studies.
- 03** Foster dialogue and engagement among scholars, policymakers, and the public to address Yemen's complex challenges.
- 04** Contribute to developing evidence-based policies and sustainable solutions to address Yemen's socio-economic and political issues.



Yemen. A Strategic Call to Congress

It is crucial to acknowledge that comprehending and mitigating the influence of the Houthis, as an armed group with significant autonomy, remains a challenge for the international community. Congressional involvement and understanding of this issue are crucial for fostering a balanced regional peace and stability approach.¹

Historically, efforts have been concentrated on urging key actors such as Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates towards better conduct and accountability. This focus has, indeed, engendered tangible improvements in their conduct and commitment to human rights.² However, it is crucial to note that these efforts have not effectively translated into a reduction of human rights violations by the Houthis. In some instances, this has unintentionally strengthened their position. An illustrative example of this dynamic is the rescission of the terrorism designation of the Houthi movement. Unfortunately, this measure did not produce the anticipated outcomes and instead has been associated with the group's territorial expansion and consolidation.³

Therefore, a balanced approach is critical. While maintaining the pressure on all external actors for accountability, it is equally important to address the Houthi influence strategically. A comprehensive strategy should involve continued diplomatic negotiations, strong pressure for adherence to international law and human rights norms, and a concerted international effort to hold all parties to the conflict accountable.

Navigating the Houthi Influence: The Unpredictability Factor and Iran's Role

The Houthi movement's actions not only have profound regional implications but also have the potential to affect international security, including that of the United States.⁴ Their conduct can be unpredictable, and their connection to the Islamic Republic of Iran compounds this unpredictability.

While the Houthi movement has its origins within Yemen's historical and societal context, there is significant evidence to suggest that the group operates predominantly under Iran's influence, acting largely in alignment with Iran's regional strategy.⁵ This relationship isn't recent; the Houthis' alignment with Iran traces back to their inception and formative years.⁶ Influenced by an Iranian model of social mobilization during the Houthi leadership's time in Qom in the 1990s⁷ The movement has since maintained a consistent connection with the Islamic Republic.

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the Houthis effectively function as a significant instrument of Iran's regional strategy, serving Iranian interests more than any other influence. Thus, in effect, the Houthi movement could be seen as an Iranian product, reflecting a deep-seated and lasting alignment with the Islamic Republic. Iran's influence over the Houthis, including providing them with resources that can destabilize the region, is well-documented⁸. Yet, attempting to sever this relationship might be an unrealistic endeavor, given the current geopolitical dynamics. Iran's objectives in the region and its strategic positioning in Yemen should, therefore, remain a point of acute concern for Congress.

1. U.S. Congressional Research Service, Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43960.pdf>

2. Amnesty International, Arms Suspension and Human Rights <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/06/usa-yemen-moratorium>

3. For Yemen'S Houthis, The Status Quo Is The Key To Power". 2023. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/yemens-houthis-status-quo-key-power>.

4. Washington Institute, Houthis and the U.S.: A History of Ambiguity <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/houthis-and-us-history-ambiguity>

5. Iran's Role in Yemen and prospects for peace <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-role-yemen-and-prospects-peace>

6. Iran's Increasing Support for the Houthis in Yemen, The Washington Institute <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-increasing-support-houthis-yemen>

7. Hummel, Kristina. 2018. "The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War To State Capture – Combating Terrorism Center At West Point". *Combating Terrorism Center At West Point*. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/houthi-war-machine-guerrilla-war-state-capture/>

8. Reuters: Iran's Steps up support for the Houthis <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-iran-houthis/exclusive-iran-steps-up-support-for-houth>



However, focusing on weakening Iran's influence on the Houthis should not be the only strategic concern. It is equally, if not more important, to invest in empowering the recognized government of Yemen. By bolstering Yemen's autonomy and resilience, the U.S. can contribute to minimizing foreign influence and fostering stability within the country.⁹

Houthis terrorism designation

The Houthi movement fostered a long list of dangerous infractions, which include international law violations such as targeting civilians, recruiting child soldiers, and obstructing humanitarian aid. Furthermore, their aggressive conduct, including missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, has significantly destabilized the region. Their close relationship with Iran's IRGC, known for sponsoring terrorism, which has provided them with weapons and military training, strengthens the case for this designation. Adopting tactics typically associated with terrorist groups, including hostage-taking and planting landmines, the Houthis fit the classification of a terrorist entity. Designating them as such could have important implications for accountability, potentially discouraging other groups from adopting similar methods. It should be noted that while concerns have been raised about the impact of such a designation on humanitarian aid delivery, there are mechanisms and exemptions to ensure that crucial assistance reaches those in need, even in terrorist designations. Therefore, a well-calibrated approach can simultaneously address the Houthi's destabilizing actions while ensuring the provision of humanitarian aid to Yemen's civilian population.

Improving humanitarian coordination and response through accountability

The US Congress and the international community must urgently recognize and address the necessity of holding the Houthi movement accountable for its conduct in areas under its control. It is a grave concern that the Houthis have strategically relied on external entities to deliver essential public services to the Yemeni population under their control. This reliance has enabled them to divert their resources towards bolstering their military power rather than investing in public services and infrastructure. Furthermore, they have continued to exploit the already impoverished Yemeni people through excessive taxation, further entrenching the cycle of poverty and deprivation. This flagrant disregard for their governance duties undermines basic human rights and compromises the well-being and future of the Yemeni population. The international community, through various diplomatic channels and pressures, should demand greater accountability from the Houthi leadership, particularly in terms of human rights observance and delivery of public services

Supporting Yemen's government in its attempts to build capacity, improve governance, and meet the needs of its people is an essential pathway toward a more stable Yemen. Through its legislative power and influence, Congress can play a critical role in enabling these efforts. A more robust and self-reliant Yemen would ultimately be less susceptible to external manipulations and could significantly contribute to a more balanced and stable region.

9. "Paths To Recovery In Yemen". 2023. United States Institute Of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/events/paths-recovery-yemen>.



Recommendations:

1. Increase awareness and congressional understanding of the actors' involvement in Yemen's war and their broad long-term aims for the United States, the region, and Yemen.

A Holistic Understanding and Engagement: A comprehensive understanding of the Houthi movement, its historical origins, motivations, and international ties, particularly with Iran, is vital¹⁰. This understanding should form the basis for crafting effective engagement and mitigation strategies for a better secure environment for Yemenis and Americans.

B Balanced Pressure: While maintaining the pressure on all external actors for accountability has yielded positive dividends on human rights approaches, there should be an equal emphasis on dealing with the Houthi influence. All parties to the conflict, including the Houthis, should be held accountable for their actions, particularly concerning human rights abuses.

C Supporting Good Governance: Empowering the recognized government of Yemen is crucial. Congress needs to build up on the existing pluralistic culture of Yemen, recognizing the different political parties. By understanding the potential that Yemen can bring through its diverse political landscape, there could be more significant potential to conduct practical and more realistic discussions around humanitarian and political issues.

D Diplomatic Engagement: Continued diplomatic engagement with all relevant actors is critical. Still, diplomatic engagement with the Houthis must remain prudent not to empower them and deepen their control in Yemen and the region. Understanding US policies' impact on Houthis' positioning and proclaimed self-image is important. Diplomatic engagement could involve negotiating ceasefires, facilitating humanitarian aid access, and mediating peace talks.

2. Hold Houthis accountable for human rights violations and public services.

A Addressing the Landmine Issue: Landmines in Yemen pose a significant humanitarian threat. Congress should advocate for international cooperation to support demining efforts while pressuring the Houthis to halt the use and production of these indiscriminate weapons. Assistance in the form of funding, resources, and expertise should be provided to support Yemen in this critical task.

¹⁰. Weekly Briefing: It will take more than a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement to resolve the Yemeni Conflict". 2023. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/blog/weekly-briefing-turkey-looks-set-greater-instability-erdogan-wins-reelection#alarar>.



Recommendations:

B Mitigating the SAFER Oil Tanker Crisis: Given the potential environmental, economic, and humanitarian disaster posed by the deteriorating SAFER oil tanker, it is vital that Congress supports diplomatic efforts that can facilitate access for UN teams to assess and repair the tanker. Additionally, pressure should be exerted on the Houthis to grant unconditional access to the tanker.

C Supporting Prisoner release initiatives: The immediate release of prisoners of conscience held by the Houthi militia, including women, minors, journalists, activists, and minority groups like the Baha'is, as well as Yemenis imprisoned in secret prisons run by the UAE-backed STC, should be the utmost priority. While prisoner exchange, in general, has been moving among the conflict parties with international mediation, more attention should be given to prisoners of conscience and Houthis' policy of arbitrary arrests following prisoners' exchanges. International mediation processes should also seek justice and accountability for Yemenis imprisoned in secret prisons.

D Addressing Iran's Influence: Given the Houthi movement's alignment with Iran, addressing Iran's influence in Yemen is vital. This could involve diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and multilateral engagement to discourage Iran's destabilizing actions. At the same time, it's essential to acknowledge the geopolitical dynamics that might limit the effectiveness of attempts to sever the Iran-Houthi relationship.

3. Establishment of a U.S. Consulate in Yemen

To alleviate hardships faced by the Yemeni American community, Congress should support the establishment of a U.S. consulate in Yemen or finding efficient mobile or virtual methods for Yemeni Americans. This move would facilitate administrative tasks, support the reunion of families, and signify the U.S.' commitment to a stable future for Yemen.



Congressional Fact Sheets



Congressional Fact Sheet 1

Addressing the Decaying Oil Tanker in the Red Sea

Expediting a solution for the decaying SAFER oil tanker crisis and preventing its resources from falling into the hands of armed factions that threaten the US and the region's stability.

Overview

The FSO Safer is a decaying oil tanker moored off the coast of Yemen, holding 1.1 million barrels of crude oil.¹¹ It poses a grave threat to the environment, humanitarian situation, and livelihoods of millions of people in Yemen and the Red Sea region. The tanker has not been maintained since 2015 when the conflict in Yemen escalated as the Houthis took control of the area where it is anchored. The UN has been negotiating with the Houthis for years to allow access to the tanker and prevent a catastrophic oil spill, but the process has been fraught with delays and challenges. In June 2023, a salvage vessel finally reached the Safer to start the emergency phase of transferring the oil to another tanker and towing the Safer to a recycling yard¹². WCYS is concerned about the efficiency of the process, the continued delay, and the Houthis' bargaining for more power and resources from the international community, which is coming at a high cost to the Yemeni people and the environment.

Core issues and considerations:

1 Environmental impact:

The potential of an oil spill from the SAFER tanker in the Red Sea would have devastating ecological impacts. It would significantly harm marine life, including fish populations and coral reefs, which are crucial for the biodiversity of the region. The Red Sea is known for its rich and unique biodiversity, and an oil spill would result in long-lasting damage that could take decades, if not centuries, to fully recover.

Beyond the immediate marine environment, the spill would also affect the broader ecosystem. The coastal areas of Yemen, as well as other countries bordering the Red Sea, rely on their marine environments for both food and tourism. An oil spill would not only destroy these environments but would also release a significant amount of greenhouse gasses, exacerbating the ongoing global climate crisis.

11. Operation to empty Yemen Safer oil tanker set to begin, UN says. (2023, May 31). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/operation-empty-yemen-safer-oil-tanker-set-begin-un-says-2023-05-31/>

12. FSO Safer Saga Enters Endgame With Launch Of UN-Coordinated Oil-Removal Operation". 2023. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2315286/a>



2 Humanitarian Impact:

The humanitarian implications of an oil spill from the SAFER are equally severe. Yemen is already grappling with one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, and an oil spill would only add to these woes. An estimated 17.8 million¹³ People in Yemen are dependent on the import of food, medicine, and other essential goods via the Red Sea ports. A major oil spill could force the closure of these ports, further impeding the import of essential goods and exacerbating the current crisis.

Moreover, the destruction of marine life and the fishing industry would directly impact the livelihood of thousands of Yemenis who depend on it. The added health risks due to pollution and contamination of water sources would put an additional strain on the already fragile healthcare system.

Yemen's economy, heavily reliant on fishing and agriculture along the coastal areas, would be gravely impacted. With the coastal and marine ecosystem severely damaged, the livelihoods of millions of Yemenis would be in peril. Fishing communities would lose their primary source of income, and agriculture would be affected by the contamination of water and soil.

3 The Dangers of Delay

The longer the international community waits to address this issue, the greater the risk becomes. The tanker is deteriorating rapidly, and without urgent intervention, it's not a question of if, but when, it will leak. The resultant disaster would dwarf any cleanup costs that preventive action might entail¹⁴. Moreover, such delay further exposes the tanker to the risk of being caught in the crossfire of the conflict in Yemen, potentially precipitating the disaster.

4 The Problem of Politicization

The tanker's oil should not be seen as a political tool to be used by armed groups. The SAFER issue should transcend political and military considerations, given the immense humanitarian and environmental implications at stake. Houthis using this as a political weapon only exacerbates an already complex humanitarian situation and could lead to a further escalation of the conflict.

The oil in the tanker should be used to benefit the people of Yemen directly, particularly in a humanitarian context. This could include funding for food, medical supplies, clean water, and other humanitarian relief efforts. The international community needs to press

13. 10 Things To Know About The Crisis In Yemen". 2023. NRC. <https://www.nrc.no/perspectives/2019/why-yemen-is-the-worlds-worst-humanitarian-crisis/>.

14. Joint Response To Yemen'S Supertanker Crisis". 2022. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/18/joint-response-yemens-supertanker-crisis#:~:text=The%20UN%20estimated%20that%20the,billion%2C%20excluding%20broader%20economic%20consequences.>



upon all involved parties the importance of resolving the SAFER issue swiftly and responsibly, bearing in mind the severe implications of any further delays.

The Safer issue is not only an environmental disaster waiting to happen but also a humanitarian and security crisis that could worsen the already dire situation in Yemen. Yemen is facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 20 million people in need of assistance and protection. A major oil spill from the Safer could disrupt the supply of food, fuel, and other essential goods that enter Yemen through the ports of Hodeidah and Saleef, which are vital lifelines for millions of people. It could also expose millions of people to toxic air pollution, damage their health and livelihoods, and destroy the rich marine biodiversity of the Red Sea. Moreover, it could spark further conflict and instability in Yemen, as armed groups could use the oil in the tanker as a bargaining chip or a source of revenue.

The international community has mobilized its resources to resolve this issue. Still, delays continue to act swiftly and decisively to resolve the Safer issue and prevent a disaster that could cost billions of dollars and take decades to recover from. The UN has mobilized \$114 million from donors, private companies, and crowdfunding to fund the operation, but it still needs another \$29 million to complete it. The US Congress should support this effort by providing additional funding and diplomatic pressure on all parties to cooperate with the UN and allow unhindered access to the tanker. The US should also work with other countries in the region and beyond to enhance contingency planning and preparedness in case of a spill and to support long-term recovery and resilience efforts for the affected communities.





WCYS call to action

WCYS has conducted several outreach efforts to experts dealing with the SAFER Tanker and roundtable discussions with policymakers and concerned Yemeni-Americans. WCYS believes that the Safer issue should not be politicized or exploited by any party but rather treated as a humanitarian emergency that requires urgent attention and resolution. The oil in the tanker belongs to the Yemeni people and should be used for their benefit, not for fueling more violence. Recognizing the gravity of the issue, WCYS emphasizes the necessity to depoliticize the Safer situation, treating it as an immediate humanitarian crisis in need of urgent resolution. We assert that the oil aboard the Safer is an asset of the Yemeni people, and its utilization should prioritize their welfare, not contribute to further violence and distress. In light of this, WCYS urges the international community to prioritize the following action steps to mitigate the burgeoning disaster:

- 1** WCYS urges the U.S. Congress to exercise vigilant oversight of the UN-led operation tasked with securing the Safer. This includes advocating for and ensuring the implementation of measures to prevent an environmental catastrophe in the Red Sea. Congress's active involvement will ensure that the actions taken are timely and reflective of the urgency of the situation.
- 2** We call for robust international coordination to amplify Yemeni voices, particularly those from civil society and the private sector, in deciding the allocation of the tanker's oil resources. Such an inclusive approach is crucial to ensure that these valuable resources do not fall into the hands of non-state actors who have previously misused financial resources to fuel conflict and consolidate power,
- 3** Lastly, we strongly advocate for the transparent management and allocation of the oil resources from the tanker, placing a specific focus on community-based initiatives that directly benefit the Yemeni people. This could include support for local healthcare, educational facilities, infrastructure development, and other critical public services.



Congressional Fact Sheet 2

Landmines in Yemen

The Need for an Efficient Mechanism for Landmine Removal in Yemen

Overview

The widespread use of landmines by Houthi forces in Yemen has transformed the nation into one of the most heavily mined countries worldwide. These landmines are a persistent threat to civilian lives. The Houthis' widespread use of landmines is a clear breach of international law. These weapons, however, serve a pivotal role in the strategic and financial aspects of the Houthi cause. Landmines, which are relatively cheap to manufacture, are used by the Houthis as a defensive measure to protect territories and hamper the movements of their opponents. Their presence creates tangible and psychological barriers. These Landmines are increasingly found in densely populated areas in Yemen and present a significant challenge for Yemen, not only from a humanitarian perspective but also as a source of funding and strategic advantage for the Houthis. Consequently, an efficient mechanism for landmine removal is critical to addressing this ongoing crisis.

Core issues and considerations:

1 Landmine Contamination in Yemen

The protracted conflict in Yemen, initiated in 2014, has been accompanied by rampant use of landmines, unexploded ordnances (UXOs), and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the Houthis¹⁵. These weapons have served to exacerbate an already severe humanitarian crisis. It's reported that the Houthi militia has disseminated extensive minefields throughout the country, making Yemen one of the most heavily mined nations globally.

The extensive mine contamination has a multitude of adverse effects. It has been responsible for numerous civilian casualties across multiple Yemeni governorates. Moreover, minefields often impede the delivery of humanitarian aid by blocking safe access routes to affected populations¹⁶.

15. Yemen: Landmine Use Escalates", Human Rights Watch, March 2017 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/22/yemen-landmine-use-escalates>.

16. Yemen: Houthi Landmines Kill Civilians, Block Aid". 2019. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/22/yemen-houthi-landmines-kill-civilians-block-aid>.



These weapons also pose significant hindrances to economic development. The fear of triggering a landmine renders agricultural lands, roads, and other infrastructural elements unsafe for use. This climate of uncertainty undermines post-conflict recovery efforts and maintains an atmosphere of fear within the civilian populace.

The landmine crisis in Yemen is not merely a security issue. It represents a substantial impediment to peace-building initiatives and the provision of desperately needed humanitarian aid.¹⁷

2 The Role of Landmines in Houthi Strategy and Finances

The Houthi's widespread use of landmines is a clear breach of international law. These weapons, however, serve a pivotal role in the strategic and financial aspects of the Houthi cause. Landmines, which are relatively cheap to manufacture, are used by the Houthis as a defensive measure to protect territories and hamper the movements of their opponents. Their presence creates tangible and psychological barriers, significantly impeding the advancement of enemy forces.

3 Houthis do not possess a landmine map

The issue of landmines in Yemen is compounded by the fact that the Houthi forces reportedly do not possess comprehensive maps detailing the locations of landmines they have laid. Landmine mapping is a crucial aspect of the clearance process. Without these maps, the task of finding and neutralizing landmines becomes exponentially more challenging, time-consuming, and dangerous. It turns a systematic process into a search for a needle in a haystack, and it places clearance workers in a situation where every step could be their last.

Moreover, Yemen's topography and climate further exacerbate the problem. The nation is prone to flash floods during the rainy seasons, which often displace landmines from their original locations. As a result, landmines can move into civilian areas such as neighborhoods and agricultural lands that may have previously been deemed safe. In these unexpected areas, children playing or adults going about their daily lives can inadvertently trigger these hidden dangers. This situation underscores the necessity for comprehensive, well-funded, and long-term demining efforts. Without a concerted international response, the landmine issue in Yemen will continue to pose a serious threat to the safety, well-being, and development of Yemeni communities.¹⁸

17. "Landmines Block Humanitarian Aid Delivery In War-Torn Yemen: UN". 2023. Aa.Com.Tr. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/landmines-block-humanitarian-aid-delivery-in-war-torn-yemen-un/2907167>.

18. Landmine Monitor: Yemen <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2021/yemen/mine-ban-policy.aspx>



WCYS call to action

WCYS has conducted several meetings with policy officials in Yemen and subject matter experts and coordinated with several Yemeni American groups working on justice and accountability in Yemen who call for the prioritization of the demining issue. WCYS stresses that only a comprehensive approach addressing both the physical removal of landmines and building local capacities can lead to a long-term resolution of the landmine issue in Yemen. To address these challenges, an efficient, comprehensive, and sustainable approach to landmine removal in Yemen is needed. The U.S. Congress should consider the following recommendations:

- 1** **Provide Funding and Technical Support:** U.S. should increase its funding and technical support to organizations specializing in demining activities
- 2** **Promote Accountability:** Work with international partners to collect and document evidence of landmine use by the Houthis to hold them accountable for their actions in international courts
- 3** **Enhance Detection and Removal Technology:** Invest in research and development to improve landmine detection and removal technologies.
- 4** **Strengthen Sanctions:** Enhance existing sanctions on the Houthis and those providing them with material support, specifically targeting the illegal landmine trade

Releasing Prisoners of Conscience in Yemen

The Need to publically call for the unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and ensure clear differentiation between prisoners of war and civilians

Overview

Prisoner exchanges in Yemen present a complex challenge with dual realities. While exchanges are conducted periodically, the Houthi forces reportedly arrest civilians as leverage for future negotiations. While internationally-mediated humanitarian initiatives provide relief for some detainees, they are unable to counter the effect of the arbitrary abductions of civilians by the Houthis. Prisoners of Conscience who the Houthis detain are regularly exchanged with Prisoners of War, which often encourages the Houthi forces to capture more civilians as leverage for future negotiations. Moreover, Prisoners of conscience in Yemen who are imprisoned locally by forces loyal to the UAE are not a part of any international mediation process and are not part of any due process that would bring justice and accountability.¹⁹

Core issues and considerations:

1 Arbitrary arrests of civilians, including former US Embassy staff

- Reports suggest that the Houthis continue to arrest civilians for maintaining their bargaining position in prisoner exchange negotiations. This practice blurs the line between prisoners of war and civilians, violating international humanitarian laws
- Prisoner exchanges are further complicated by discrepancies in record-keeping and identification of detainees
- Yemeni personnel who were detained by the Houthis continue to be neglected and do not receive any form of compensation or support to their families.

19. Timeline: UAE'S Role In Southern Yemen'S Secret Prisons". 2018. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/timeline-uaes-role-in-southern-yemens-secret-prisons/>.



2 Local Solutions and Accountability

- Locally-led initiatives may succeed better in implementing prisoner exchanges, given their understanding of the context and potential influence on involved parties. Some of these actions could be delayed in awaiting a more extensive mediation process or by tying it to an internationally UN-led initiative. In these instances, prisoners end up in detention for longer times with their health and security compromised and are lost in a bureaucratic process instead.²⁰
- Houthi forces conduct unlawful arrests and detentions irrespective of any formal deals. The Houthis must be called out for these arrests in order to safeguard civilian rights and maintain the integrity of prisoner exchange processes.²¹
- Besides a few involved Civil Society Organizations and government, as well as Houthi committees, there is a lack of structured committees for overseeing prisoner exchange, represented by all parties involved, which has often resulted in disputes and challenges during the exchange process.²²
- Detention of Women under prostitution charges and men in secret prisoners must be addressed as part of an internationally mediated process with the UAE-backed STC forces. The US should ensure transparency around its role with the UAE in backing these prisons and bringing any suspects to justice.²³

20. Prisoner Exchange: A Local Approach to Peacebuilding in Yemen," Yemen Policy Center, accessed December 6, 2022, <https://www.yemenpolicy.org/prisoner-exchange-a-local-approach-to-peacebuilding-in-yemen/>.

21. Yemen: Abusive Detention Rife Under Houthis. 2016. Human Rights Watch.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/17/yemen-abusive-detention-rife-under-houthis>

22. Yemen & Saudi Arabia: Families Reunited As More Than 970 Conflict-Related Detainees Released In Two Operations Over Four Days". 2023. International Committee Of The Red Cross. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/yemen-and-saudi-arabia-families-reunited-more-than-970-conflict-related-detainees-released>.

23. <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-business-prisons-only-on-ap-yemen-4925f7f0fa654853bd6f2f57174179fe>



WCYS call to action

WCYS maintains relationships with local mediators on the ground, such as Abductees' Mothers Association, and works on bringing more awareness in addressing prisoners' release. Congress should consider the following actions to address this challenge:

- 1** Advocate for the unconditional release of prisoners of conscience everywhere in Yemen, including former employees of the US Embassy that have been detained by the Houthis
- 2** Support Local Initiatives: Provide financial and diplomatic support to locally-led initiatives facilitating prisoner exchanges.
- 3** Promote Accountability: Collaborate with international bodies to document and report unlawful detentions by Houthi forces.
- 4** Advocate for Unconditional Release of activists: Publicly call for the unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and ensure clear differentiation between prisoners of war and civilians. The international community must ensure that its efforts in exchanging prisoners are accompanied by guarantees eliminating the abduction of innocent civilians in Houthi areas. The Yemen conflict poses a complex and sensitive challenge for the international community regarding prisoner exchanges. One possible way to address this issue is to promote locally-led prisoner exchange initiatives, which can leverage their contextual knowledge and trust-building potential within the conflict zones. At the same time, it is crucial to hold the Houthi authorities accountable for their unlawful abductions of civilians and demand their respect for international law
- 5** The international community should adopt a two-pronged approach in dealing with this issue. On the one hand, it should facilitate prisoner exchanges as a vital humanitarian objective and a confidence-building measure. On the other hand, it should ensure that these actions do not inadvertently fuel more civilian kidnappings in Houthi-controlled areas. Congress should emphasize the importance of creating a safe environment for the civilian population and a conducive atmosphere for peace negotiations. This nuanced approach ensures that our actions do not harm the people we seek to protect.



Congressional Fact Sheet 4

Opening a US Consulate in Aden

Alleviating hardships on the Yemeni-American community and strengthening US-Yemen ties

Overview

Due to the ongoing conflict and security threats, the U.S. embassy and consulate in Yemen have been closed since 2015. This has left many Yemeni Americans without access to consular services or assistance. A diplomatic mission could significantly bolster U.S.-Yemen relations, enhance regional stability, safeguard the interests of American citizens in Yemen, actively uphold American democratic values, and notably alleviate hardships faced by the Yemeni American community in the United States.

Core issues and considerations:

1 Strengthening U.S.-Yemen Relations

The establishment of a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in Yemen could act as a concrete symbol of America's commitment to strengthen diplomatic ties with Yemen. This enhanced engagement could promote dialogue, collaboration, and cooperation on a multitude of issues. It would serve as a concrete indication of the U.S.'s dedication to fortifying its bilateral relations with Yemen.

This heightened level of engagement would encourage consistent interaction and partnership across a range of areas, including security enhancement, counter-terrorism strategies, commerce facilitation, humanitarian aid provision, and fostering regional equilibrium. Such a diplomatic representation would offer the U.S. a channel to express its policy goals, promote reciprocal comprehension, and cultivate a sense of trust between the U.S. and Yemen.



2 Yemeni American Services

Due to the current absence of a U.S. diplomatic mission in Yemen, Yemeni Americans often bear high travel costs and suffer the inconvenience of accessing necessary consular services in Djibouti. Establishing a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in Yemen would save these individuals considerable time and money, making it more feasible to handle consular matters.

3 Obstacles Faced by Yemeni Diaspora

Yemenis in the diaspora also face challenges in consular work and long processing times. Countries with large Yemeni diaspora, such as Egypt, are no longer accepting immigration processing for Yemenis and require them to interview or process their paperwork in Cairo. This unnecessarily adds to the hardship Yemeni-American families face and the expenses incurred.



WCYS call to action

WCYS is in touch with the Yemeni-American community across the United States and in Yemen. It is helping to bring more awareness to the impact of the lack of consular services in Yemen could impact Yemeni Americans. The re-establishment of a U.S. diplomatic mission in Yemen is undeniably fraught with security challenges due to the ongoing conflict in the country. It's imperative to take a pragmatic and cautious approach while addressing this issue. We seek to find practical solutions that will balance all the complex challenges of this issue. We urge the U.S. government to reopen a consulate in Aden, the temporary capital of Yemen, to provide vital support for Yemeni Americans in Yemen. The reopening of a consulate would also signal the U.S. commitment to the peace process and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The Houthis, who control most of northern Yemen, have repeatedly violated the ceasefire and attacked civilian targets, including the airport in Aden. The U.S. should not allow the Houthis to dictate its diplomatic presence in Yemen and should stand by its allies in the region. Establishing a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in Aden, Yemen, would address the present challenges faced by Yemeni Americans, providing them with a local point of access to vital consular services.

- 1** Provide some tax relief or tax-deductible programs that could help offset the costs and burdens of consular processing for Yemeni Americans in Yemen or their families abroad.
- 2** Expand Online Consular Services: The U.S. State Department should enhance its online service offering, making consular services more accessible for Yemeni Americans.
- 3** Temporary Mobile Consular Services: Pending the establishment of a permanent diplomatic mission, deploying temporary mobile consular services to Yemen could offer immediate relief.

Through these actions, the U.S. would demonstrate its commitment to all its citizens, including the Yemeni American community, affirming the principles of equitable access to consular services and the fundamental importance of family reunification.



WCYS is a research center dedicated to empowering the Yemeni people and driving positive change in Yemen. Through comprehensive research, analysis, and advocacy, we strive to deepen the understanding of Yemen's political climate, humanitarian crisis, and social inequities. Our mission is to amplify the Yemeni voice, foster dialogue, and build strategic partnerships to contribute to sustainable development, enhance stability, and strengthen bilateral relations between the United States and Yemen.

If you have any questions or require more information, contact us at info@wcys.org or reach out to one of our team members:

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