

The Yemen Conflict and the Maritime Environment

**Commander Lee J Williams Royal Navy
Maritime Security Advisor (Yemen)
28 November 2019**

Scope

- Conflict History
- United Nations Vessel Verification & Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM)
- The ports and the Bab al Mandab Traffic Separation Scheme (BaM TSS).
- Maritime Threats
- The Houthis.....
- Humanitarian
- Summary

Conflict History - Key Events

- Feb 12 - Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi became President after Ali Abdoullah Saleh was forced to resign.
- Sep 14 - Supporters of Mohammed Ali al-Houthi and Saleh take over Sana'a.
- Mar 15 - Hadi flees to Saudi Arabia and conflict begins to restore legitimate Government of Yemen (GoY).
- Dec 17 - Saleh killed by Houthi fighters and his son called for separation of Houthi and Saleh forces.
- Jan/Feb 18 - indication that Saudi led Coalition (SLC), GOY and Houthi supporters willing to talk.



Conflict History - Key Events

- Mar 18 - new UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths arrives to re-invigorate peace process.
- Dec 18 – Stockholm Agreement signed.
 - Agreement on the city and ports of Hodeidah, Saleef and Ras Isa.
 - A statement of understanding on the governorate of Taiz'z
 - To develop a prisoner exchange mechanism
- Introduction of the Hodeidah Agreement to support the truce called for in the SA, overseen by the UNMHA.



Conflict History - Key Events

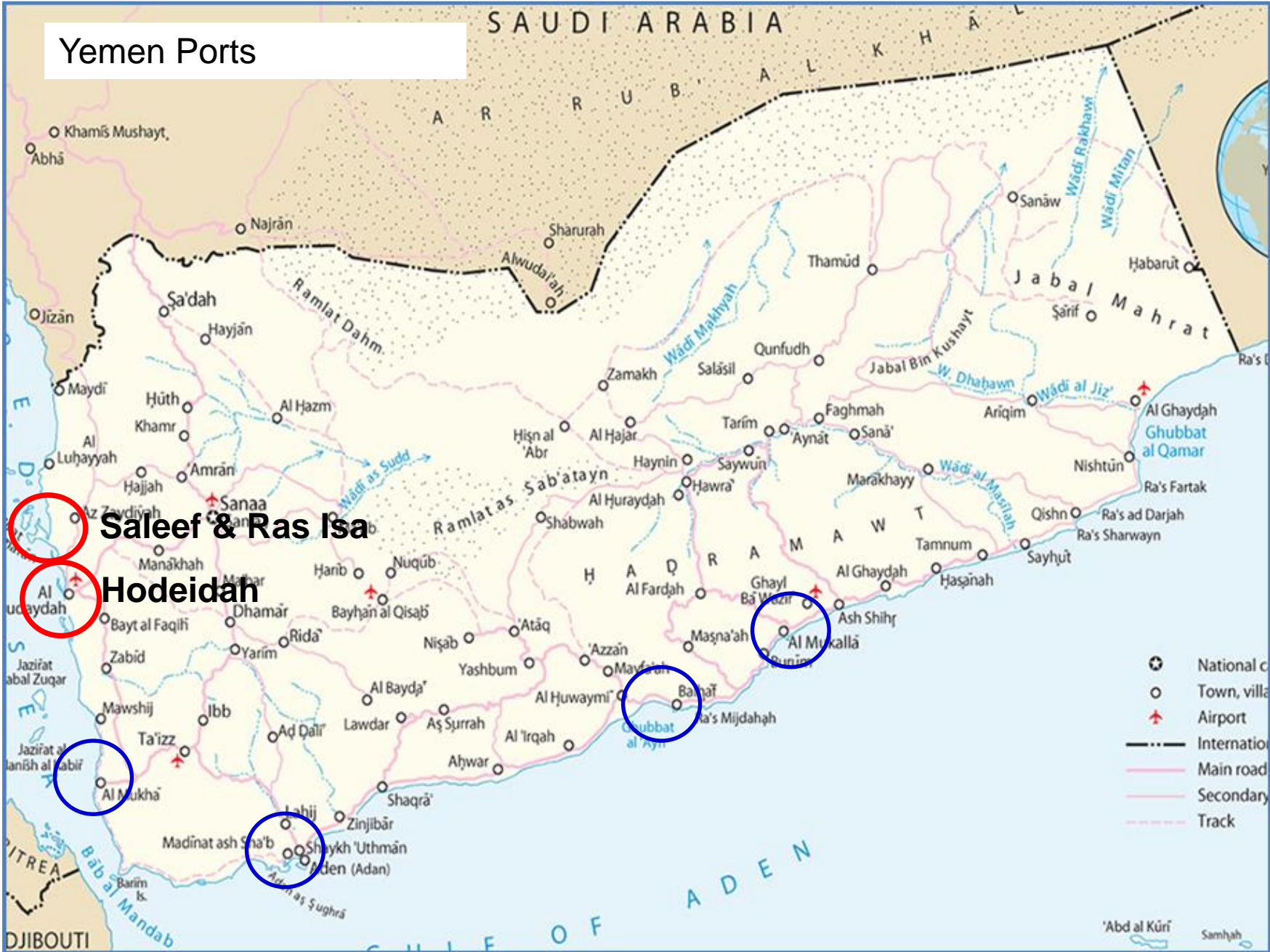
- Aug 19 – STC offensive seized all government facilities in the south (Aden) then pushed into Abyan and Shabwah, both strategically important. GoY counter offensive push STC into Aden but government remain out of country.
- Sep 19 – Drone attacks claimed by the Houthis cause fires at two major oil facilities run by Saudi Aramco. Houthis claim a self imposed 'ceasefire' for cross border attacks. Later investigation strongly suggests this was a Iran led attack.
- Nov 19 – After lengthy talks between the GoY and the STC (Jeddah Talks) an agreement is finally brokered between the 2 parties by KSA and signed in Riyadh, now known as the Riyadh Agreement.
- Nov 19 – GoY PM + 5 arrive in Aden 18 Nov 19.



UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM)

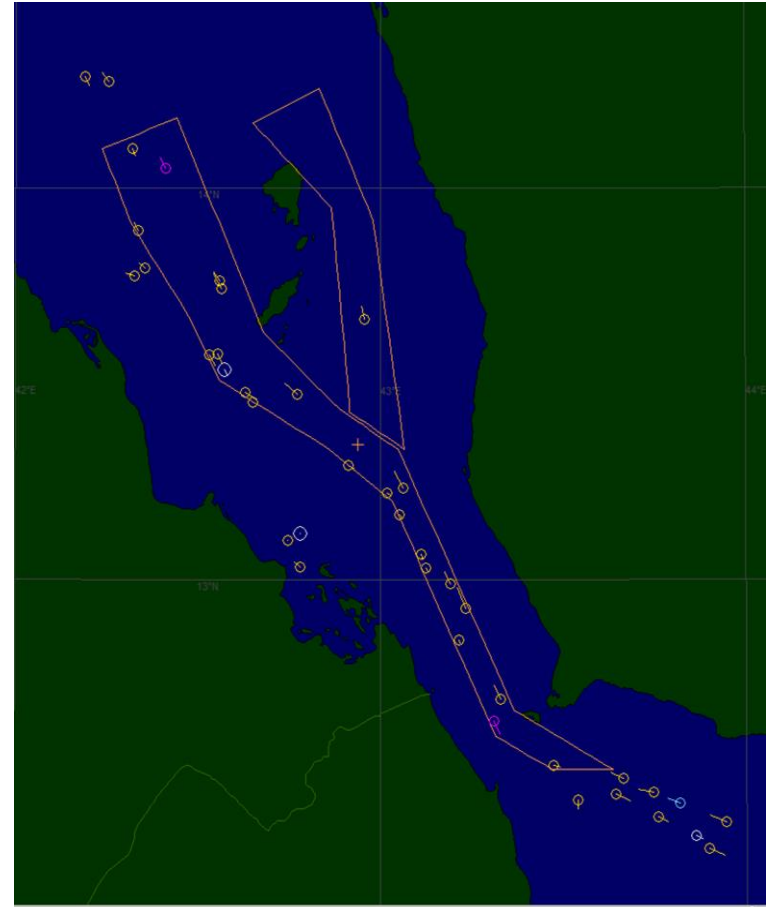
- Since May '16 UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) for Yemen provides a structure and process for commercial ships to gain access to Red Sea ports.
- Recognise need to maintain confidence in the shipping industry whilst acknowledging security concerns of KSA (UNSCR 2216)
- Process UNVIM - Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Cell (EHOC) - SLC warships.
- The Port controls the order in which the ships are called to berth. The International community has no role in this.
- WFP ships are exempt this process.
- Expanded role in Hodeidah under the Stockholm Agreement

Yemen Ports



Guidance for transiting the Bab al Mandab (BaM) Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS)

- 6 Sep 17 - CMF released additional guidance to transit the BeM with the establishment of a Maritime Security Transit Corridor (MSTC).
- Current guidance recommends vessels use the western TSS to transit the BeM, and staying west of the Hanish Islands.



Maritime Threats

Missiles

- 1 Oct 16 - Missile attack, allegedly fired from land by the Houthis at the MV SWIFT, a UAE chartered catamaran vessel.
- 9-12 Oct 16 - Missiles launched against US Warships on separate occasions over the period. Counter-measures taken.
- 25 Mar 18 - Saudi tanker reportedly attacked by Houthi RPG in TTW off Hodeidah.
- 3 Apr 18 - VLCC ABQAIQ allegedly struck by missile, causing minor damage.



Maritime Threats

Missiles

- 10 May 18 - Turkish bulk carrier INCE INEBOLU damaged, SLC report that it was struck by missile/rocket 70nm west of Saleef.
- 25 Jul 18 - VLCC ARSAN attacked in Southern Red Sea, allegedly struck by missile/rocket; suspension of KSA oil shipments through BAM until 4 Aug.
- 10 Nov 18 – Houthis alleged to have launched a missile into the Red Sea from vicinity of Hodeidah. Target unclear, no reports of any vessel being struck.
- 11 Oct 19 – Iranian tanker SABITI missile attack of the coast of Jeddah



Maritime Threats

Water-Borne IED (WBIED)

- 30 Jan 17 - SLC report WBIED attack on RSNF HMS MADINAH (killing two RSNF personnel and injuring three)
- 25 Apr 17 - WBIED exploded at the entrance to Jizan harbour (KSA) after being engaged by Saudi Border Guards.
- 12 Aug 17 - WBIED targeting Al Mukah port reportedly intercepted and destroyed.
- 14 Sep 18 - SLC report finding a WBIED west of Hajjah coast on Al-Fasht Island.
- 30 Sep 18 - SLC report intercepting and destroying 2 x WBIED targeting Jizan Port.



Similar WBIED found Hajjah coast in August 2018

Source: Twitter Yemen Observer @YemeniObserv



Maritime Threats

Sea Mines

- 9 Mar 17 - Yemen Coast Guard Vessel Sana'a sank after reportedly making contact with a mine (two crew killed).
- 8 May 17 - Saudi forces report presence of mines off Maydi.
- Oct 18 - Houthi forces claim to have manufactured their own sea mines for use against SLC forces.
- 26 Nov 18 - SLC spokesperson states that SLC forces have discovered and destroyed numerous naval mines since the beginning of military operations.



The Houthis....

- Are aware that targeting merchant vessels will significantly harm their cause internationally and may;
 - result in further international condemnation.
 - result in the potential application of economic sanctions against key members of the organisation and escalation in military hostilities against them by the SLC.
 - escalate the humanitarian situation in Yemen further and thus create unrest in an already troubled land.
 - Result in a loss in revenue, which unsurprisingly is a significant factor!

Humanitarian



**24m
people**

require humanitarian assistance in Yemen. That is over **80 % of the population** and an **increase of 9%** since January 2018.



**20m
people**

require food assistance, This is nearly **65% of the total population** in Yemen and is an **18% increase** compared to last year.



**240,000
people**

are at **high risk of death** due to a lack of access to food. This is the first time that Yemen has faced this level of severity.

Summary

- Building and maintaining commercial shipping confidence remains key to feeding and fuelling Yemen.
 - Demand for commercial access to Red Sea Ports has continued to increase month on month this year.
- Balancing the requirement for necessary Maritime Security whilst ensuring Commercial/ Humanitarian access.
 - During September and October 2019, for the first time in recent history, the international community and shipping companies have managed to deliver approximately 125% of the food requirements, of which 70% enters through Hodeidah and Saleef.
 - Only 75% of the fuel has been achieved and this is one of the highest reported figures, however most enters through Aden and does not make it to the North where 70% of the population live.

Summary

- Although a risk to commercial shipping still exists, especially from misidentification.
- Credible threats to maritime security in the Red Sea continue to exist, such as missiles (sea or land based), Water Borne Improvised Explosive Device (WBIED) and sea mines.
- The international community are working closely with the UN and the Yemen Coast Guard to rebuild the capacity, develop skills and improve the capability to ensure it can meet its commitments to the shipping industry.