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SERIES

Yemen

All the pieces in the series in a single document, in reading order. Updated 11 October 2026.

The war in Yemen, from its origins to today, in four pieces: who the Houthis are, how the war with Saudi Arabia came back and what the parties want, then two in-depth pieces on civilians: the detained UN staff and the children recruited to fight.

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Houthis (Ansar Allah): who they are, where they come from, what they want

When an article on this site talks about "the Houthis", it assumes the reader knows who they are. Often that is not the case: in the news they appear as "pro-Iranian rebels" or as "terrorists", two labels that say little about their history or about what they are asking for. This entry gathers the essential facts. It can be updated: every change is recorded at the bottom, with date and source.

WHO THEY ARE

The Houthis are a political, religious and armed movement from northern Yemen. The official name is Ansar Allah, "the supporters of God". "Houthi" comes from the family that founded it and leads it. Since 2014 they have controlled the capital Sanaa and much of the country's north-west, including the port of Hodeidah on the Red Sea, and they govern there as a de facto authority. The UN-recognised government is based in Aden, in the south.

WHERE THEY COME FROM

The Houthis emerged from within Zaydism, a branch of Shia Islam present in Yemen since the ninth century and different from the Shiism practised in Iran. States led by Zaydi imams ruled northern Yemen, in various forms, until 1962, when the republican revolution overthrew the last imam ([Sana'a Center](#)).

In the early 1990s, in Saada province, a group of clerics launched a Zaydi revival movement made up of lectures, summer camps and recorded sermons. Its leading figure was Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. The movement presented itself as the voice of an oppressed minority and as a response to two developments: the decline of Zaydism's role after the revolution and the spread in the north of Wahhabi Salafism coming from Saudi Arabia ([Sana'a Center](#)). In 2004 the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh tried to arrest Hussein al-Houthi; this started the first of six wars in Saada province, which lasted until 2010. Hussein was killed in the first months of fighting, in 2004. Since then the movement has been led by his brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi.

In 2011 the Houthis took part in the uprising against Saleh under the name Ansar Allah. On 21 September 2014, allied with Saleh himself, they entered Sanaa. On 26 March 2015 a coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened against them ([Sana'a Center](#)). In December 2017 they killed Saleh, who was switching sides.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE

Their motto, the *sarkha* ("the scream"), was according to the Houthis first uttered by Hussein al-Houthi in 2002: "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, a curse on the Jews, victory to Islam". It echoes the mottos of the Iranian revolution and of Hezbollah ([Sana'a Center](#)). It must be quoted in full because it contains an invective explicitly aimed at Jews, not only at the United States and Israel.

At the heart of their political doctrine is *wilayah*: the divine right to lead the community in politics and religion, reserved for the descendants of the al-Houthi family. In the areas they control, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi is the supreme authority over the economic, judicial and security apparatus. According to the Sana'a Center, only a minority of Yemenis accept this conception of power ([Sana'a Center](#)).

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN

The Houthis are part of the "axis of resistance", the network of Tehran's allies that includes Hezbollah. As early as 2021 a UN panel of experts reported growing evidence of shipments of weapons and components to the Houthis by individuals or entities in Iran, in violation of Security Council resolutions ([Fox News, quoting the report](#)). The report speaks of actors in Iran, not directly of the Iranian government.

Alliance, however, does not mean dependence. The Houthis have their own social base, history and doctrine, born in Yemen decades before Iranian support. In 2026 they presented the resumption of the war with Saudi Arabia as a continuation of the Yemeni war, not as a front of the Iran war ([AP, via Al-Ahram](#)).

WHAT THEY DEMAND

Their demands have changed over time. During the 2022 truce and the talks with Riyadh they asked above all for the payment of public-sector salaries in the areas they control, the opening of the ports and of Sanaa airport, and oil and gas revenues ([AFP, via Naharnet](#)). Much of this went into the commitments announced by the UN envoy at the end of 2023 for a peace "roadmap", which then stalled ([UN News](#)). According to the International Crisis Group, in 2026 the discourse shifted to Yemen's sovereignty over airspace, ports and territorial waters ([AP, via Al-Ahram](#)). On 19 August 2026 they told Saudi Arabia that the only way out was to lift the blockade, implement the measures already agreed, pay salaries, withdraw foreign forces and leave natural resources to Yemenis ([Shafaq News](#)).

DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

The Houthis are a party to a conflict in which all actors have violated international law, and this site documents it for all of them. As far as the Houthis are concerned, the documented violations include:

- the arbitrary detention of dozens of United Nations staff since 2024 ([we covered it here](#));
- the recruitment of children as fighters ([here](#));
- the siege of the city of Taiz, which began in 2016 ([AFP, via Naharnet](#));
- since 2023, attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea, which the Houthis present as solidarity with Gaza;
- in 2026, missile and drone attacks on Saudi civilian airports.

In the same conflict the Houthis and the population of the areas they control are also targets of violations by others, from the Saudi coalition's air strikes to the American ones of 2025. We cover them in the dedicated pieces.

WHAT THEY ARE CALLED

No label is neutral. "Rebels" stresses that they rose up against a recognised government; "de facto authority" describes the real control they exercise over millions of people; "terrorists" echoes the designations of some governments. This site normally uses "Houthis" and, when speaking of their administration, "Houthi de facto authorities".

US designations have changed with administrations. In January 2021 the first Trump administration designated them a foreign terrorist organisation; a month later the Biden administration revoked the designation, fearing it would hinder humanitarian aid. In February 2024 the same Biden administration designated them again, but in a narrower category, after the attacks in the Red Sea ([Baker McKenzie](#)). On 4 March 2025 the State Department designated them a foreign terrorist organisation again ([State Department, via GlobalSecurity](#)).

For the UN Security Council, resolution 2216 of 2015 demands that the Houthis withdraw from the areas they seized and imposes an arms embargo on them ([UN](#)).

CHANGE LOG

- 11 October 2026: first version.

Sources: [Sana'a Center](#) · [Fox News, quoting the report](#) · [AP, via Al-Ahram](#) · [AFP, via Naharnet](#) · [UN News](#) · [Shafaq News](#) · [Baker McKenzie](#) · [State Department, via GlobalSecurity](#) · [UN](#)

Airport for airport: how the war between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia came back, and what each side wants

IN BRIEF

- On the evening of 10 October an attack on King Khalid airport in Riyadh killed 12 people, including 8 foreigners, and injured 309, according to the Saudi civil aviation authority. It is the deadliest in an escalation that began in July.
- The trigger: on 13 July a strike hit the runway of Sanaa airport to stop an Iranian plane carrying a Houthi delegation from landing. Yemen's government, allied with Riyadh, claimed it; the Houthis blame Saudi Arabia. Since then the two sides have been hitting each other's airports.
- But the war was not born in July: it has been open since 2014, with Saudi intervention since 2015, frozen by a truce in 2022 and never closed by a peace agreement.
- The Houthis demand an end to the air and sea blockade, public-sector salaries, the withdrawal of foreign forces and control of the country's resources. Saudi Arabia wants to defend its territory and restore the recognised government. Washington has so far refused to intervene.
- It concerns people far away too: with Hormuz down to a fraction of its traffic, Gulf oil increasingly leaves through the Red Sea, and the Houthis are striking precisely those ports.

On the evening of Saturday 10 October, at King Khalid airport in Riyadh, Terminal 3 was evacuated amid ambulances and helicopters. The next day the Saudi civil aviation authority gave the figures: 12 dead, four Saudis and eight foreigners including an American, and 309 injured, some seriously ([ANSA](#)). The news bulletins condemned the attack, as they should. Almost no one explained why a Yemeni armed movement fires missiles at the Saudi capital, or what it asks for in order to stop. We try to do that.

THE FACTS

It is the third attack on Saudi airports in a week. On 6 and 7 October strikes on Riyadh and Abha had killed a Sudanese man, a Moroccan woman and an Algerian woman and injured 36 people; on 8 October three Saudis died in Riyadh, including a Saudia airline captain ([Khaleej Times](#)). The Houthis' military spokesman, Yahya Saree, claimed those attacks and warned airlines that

every aircraft in Saudi airspace is a target, except those bound for Mecca and Medina ([Al Jazeera](#)).

For 10 October the Houthis claimed strikes on "sensitive sites" in Riyadh and on Aramco facilities in Yanbu, without naming the airport, as a response to Saudi attempts to hit Sanaa ([AFP, via TNND](#)). The type of missile and Terminal 3 as the point of impact come from anonymous sources quoted by AFP and the Wall Street Journal ([ANSA](#)): they are not officially confirmed.

HOW WE GOT HERE

The Houthis ([who they are, in our Glossary](#)) are an armed movement born in the 1990s in northern Yemen. Since 2014 they have controlled the capital, and since then the war has never ended ([Council on Foreign Relations](#)).

Date	Event
2004-2010	Six wars between the Houthis and the government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
September 2014	The Houthis take Sanaa.
March 2015	A coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervenes on behalf of the recognised government. In April UN Security Council resolution 2216 demands that the Houthis withdraw and imposes an arms embargo on them (UN).
End of 2021	According to the UN Development Programme, the war has caused 377,000 deaths, 60% from hunger and disease (Al Jazeera).
April 2022	UN-brokered truce. It expires in October but holds in practice: the Houthis stop striking Saudi Arabia (DAWN).
December 2023	The UN envoy announces the parties' commitments to a "roadmap": ceasefire, public-sector salaries, oil exports, reopening of roads, ports and the airport (UN News). The plan stalls with the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea, launched over the war in Gaza. US strikes follow in 2025 (here).

The trigger of 13 July. That day a strike hits the runway of Sanaa airport and prevents an Iranian plane carrying a senior Houthi delegation from landing; after Omani mediation the plane lands in Hodeidah ([AP, via Al-Ahram](#)). Who struck is disputed. AP speaks of a Saudi strike and the Houthis blame Riyadh; the defence ministry of Yemen's government, in Aden, says instead that its own forces did it. Saudi Arabia has not commented ([Al-Monitor](#)). The government says the

flight was carrying personnel and dual-use equipment: an accusation not independently verified, to which Tehran has not replied ([The National](#)). From there the spiral: missiles on Abha airport, the naval blockade declared by the Houthis on 20 July ([here](#)), offensives towards Taiz and Bab el-Mandeb, then the airports. By early October more than 200,000 people had been displaced in this new phase, according to the International Organization for Migration ([Al Jazeera](#)).

WHY IT CONCERNS EVERYONE: TWO STRAITS

Before the war with Iran, which began on 28 February, about 125 large commercial vessels passed through Hormuz every day; on Tuesday 6 October, according to Kpler data, there were seven commercial vessels, the lowest number since July ([Reuters, via AAP](#); [here](#) our piece on the strait). Oil has found other outlets: 6.7 million barrels a day leave from the Gulf of Oman coast and the Red Sea, more than double the pre-war level ([Reuters, via AAP](#)). For Saudi Arabia the outlet is Yanbu, on the Red Sea. According to Kpler data, between March and July 2026 an average of 3.8 million barrels a day left Yanbu, about five times the earlier level; in August, as Houthi attacks resumed, 1.5 million ([AFP, via Al-Ahram](#)). In September an attack halted exports from Yanbu for a week. General traffic in the Red Sea, on the other hand, is holding up: 280 ships a week at Bab el-Mandeb in the month to 27 September, against 316 in June ([Lloyd's List Intelligence](#)). The Houthis deny wanting to close the strait; according to the Institute for the Study of War their target is Saudi Arabia's ability to export oil ([AFP, via Al-Ahram](#)).

The risk, then, is not a total blockade today. It is that both outlets for Gulf oil remain under threat at the same time.

WHAT THE PARTIES WANT

We report the declared positions, not attributed motives.

Party	What it says it wants
Houthis	On 19 August they said the only way out for Riyadh is to lift the blockade, implement the measures already agreed to end the conflict, pay salaries, withdraw foreign forces and leave natural resources to Yemenis (Shafaq News). The statement does not say which measures: the only agreed measures made public are those of the 2023 UN roadmap. According to the International Crisis Group, they have moved from asking for confidence-building measures, such as salaries, to presenting the conflict as a question of sovereignty over airspace, ports and waters (AP, via Al-Ahram).
Saudi Arabia and the coalition	To defend Saudi territory and "Yemen's sovereignty", meaning that of the recognised government. Riyadh rejects the accusation of a siege and says it let more than 300 ships through to Houthi ports in the first half of 2026 (here). In September Mohammed bin Salman asked Trump, in two phone calls in a single day, to strike the Houthis (Axios).
Yemen's recognised government	The restoration of its authority over the country, on the basis of resolution 2216. It is divided: between December 2025 and January 2026 southern separatists attempted a secession that Riyadh attributes to support from the Emirates (here).
Iran	An ally of the Houthis. We found no official statements from Tehran on the attacks on the airports. The Houthis present the escalation as a Yemeni war, not as a front of the Iran war (AP, via Al-Ahram).
United States	No intervention so far: Trump offered only intelligence and targeting data, fearing, according to a former Pentagon official, a Houthi reaction at Bab el-Mandeb and a rise in oil prices (Axios). After 10 October he called the attack "not acceptable": "We'll make a decision" (ANSA).
Pakistan	Islamabad's foreign ministry spokesman said Pakistani troops will not cross the border to attack the Houthis but will act in defence of the territory (Al Jazeera).

LEGAL READING AND SYMMETRY TEST

Airports are civilian objects, in Riyadh as in Sanaa. International humanitarian law requires states and armed groups always to distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects ([ICRC, rule 7](#)). A civilian airport loses protection only if it is used for military purposes, and even then an attack must not cause civilian harm that is excessive in relation to the expected advantage. A missile on a terminal, with 12 dead and 309 injured, is hard to justify by this standard; the same goes for the threat against any civilian aircraft in Saudi skies. But the rule

also applies to the runway in Sanaa. Yemen's government says the flight was carrying military equipment: if this were proven, the embargo in resolution 2216 would give the action a basis. But there is no public evidence, and an unproven accusation does not turn a civilian airport into a target.

The blockade. The one declared by the Houthis and the one the Houthis attribute to Riyadh follow the same rules: a blockade is unlawful if it starves civilians or if the harm to civilians is excessive in relation to the military advantage. For both, independent verification is lacking.

The condemnations. The October attacks were condemned by the United Nations and by many governments ([Aviation Week](#)), including Qatar, Oman, Egypt ([Al Jazeera](#)) and the Emirates ([Khaleej Times](#)); after 10 October the UN envoy Hans Grundberg spoke of a grave escalation ([ANSA](#)). Saudi Arabia and Yemen's government asked the Security Council to act ([Al Jazeera](#)). The strike on the Sanaa runway was not explicitly condemned by anyone at the Security Council on 14 July: the UN warned that unilateral measures do not bring peace closer, the United States blamed Iran ([The National](#)). And the same yardstick applies to the whole war: more than 25,000 coalition air strikes since 2015, with nearly 19,000 civilians killed according to the [Council on Foreign Relations](#); the Houthi siege of the city of Taiz, which began in 2016 ([AFP, via Naharnet](#)).

EDITORIAL JUDGEMENT

This section expresses the site's position. It is separate from the facts set out above.

Condemning a missile on an airport is a duty, and we reaffirm it. But a condemnation without context makes the war look like an outburst of madness. This war has a long history and precise demands, many of which were already written into the UN roadmap of 2023: salaries, ports, the airport, oil. The parties had said yes to it, and in August the Houthis asked for the measures already agreed to be implemented. Then Gaza, then the war with Iran, then a runway hit to stop a flight.

There is also a lesson about selective memory. Hitting the runway in Sanaa and hitting the terminal in Riyadh are acts of the same kind, even if with very different consequences: using a civilian airport to punish the adversary. Al Jazeera's correspondent in Sanaa summed up the logic declared by the Houthis like this: "airport for airport". Whoever condemns one and stays silent about the other is not defending the law: they are choosing a side.

One question remains about Washington. Trump said no to Riyadh for months, out of fear of a new front and of the price of oil, according to the sources. The midterm elections in November may be another reason, but no source we have read documents it: we flag it only as a

hypothesis. After 10 October that caution could end. If the United States enters this war, it is worth remembering that a document already exists to which both sides had said yes.

WHAT TO WATCH

- Trump's decision on an intervention alongside Saudi Arabia.
- An explicit Houthi claim for 10 October and the official Saudi report on Terminal 3.
- Exports from Yanbu and traffic at Bab el-Mandeb.
- The fighting around Taiz and Mokha and the number of displaced people.
- The initiatives of the UN envoy and of Oman to reopen negotiations.

Sources: [ANSA](#) · [Khaleej Times](#) · [Al Jazeera](#) · [AFP, via TNND](#) · [Council on Foreign Relations](#) · [UN](#) · [Al Jazeera](#) · [DAWN](#) · [UN News](#) · [AP, via Al-Ahram](#) · [Al-Monitor](#) · [The National](#) · [Reuters, via AAP](#) · [AFP, via Al-Ahram](#) · [Lloyd's List Intelligence](#) · [Shafaq News](#) · [Axios](#) · [Al Jazeera](#) · [ICRC, rule 7](#) · [Aviation Week](#) · [Khaleej Times](#) · [AFP, via Naharnet](#)

Yemen: 73 UN staff still arbitrarily detained by the Houthis, as Hodeidah bleeds again

«These actions violate international law, cause deep suffering to families.» — António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, 12 June 2026

THE FACTS

On 5 July 2026, Houthi fighters attacked Yemeni government force positions in the Hodeidah region (Hays area), on the Red Sea coast, using mortars, drones and sniper fire: 16 soldiers killed and 22 wounded, according to medical and military sources cited by Al Jazeera — the fiercest clashes in years along a frontline frozen since 2022. The same day, a commercial vessel was attacked off Hodeidah, with no claim of responsibility. In parallel, and over a longer period: as of 12 June 2026, 73 United Nations staff — all Yemeni nationals — remained arbitrarily detained by the Houthi de facto authorities, as part of an arrest campaign that began in May 2024 and has never concluded; one World Food Programme worker died in Houthi custody on 11 February 2025. On 29 January 2026 the WFP announced it was terminating the contracts of all 365 of its staff in Houthi-controlled northern Yemen — where 70% of the country's humanitarian need is concentrated — explicitly citing the operating environment made unsafe by arbitrary detentions. On 27 January 2026 the UN Security Council voted a final extension, to 31 March, of the mission supporting the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), which was then shut down: the United States pushed for its closure, arguing Houthi obstruction had made it ineffective; China and Russia voted to keep it. In the background, 21.6 million people remain in need of assistance (11 million children), 4.5 million are displaced, and the 2026 UN humanitarian appeal of \$2.16 billion was only 29% funded in 2025.

LEGAL COMMENTARY

The arbitrary detention of UN staff — often without a warrant, with cases of enforced disappearance lasting months and one death in custody never clarified — violates [Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention), to which Yemen has been a state party since 1987, as well as the immunities recognised for UN personnel acting in their official capacity. The systematic obstruction of humanitarian access — which already forced the WFP to suspend operations in Saada governorate — falls instead within the scope of the [Geneva Conventions](#) and their Additional

Protocol II, which prohibit impeding humanitarian relief to civilians in non-international armed conflicts. The two violations are distinct but reinforce one another: those who should guarantee access to aid are detained, and in doing so the very crisis that access should relieve is worsened.

IMPLICATIONS — THE SYMMETRY TEST

The principle — humanitarian personnel are not arbitrarily detained, relief access is not obstructed — applies to the Houthis exactly as it would to any other actor this site has already covered. But Yemen has no single culprit, which is what makes it a textbook case for symmetry: the Saudi-led coalition has conducted more than 25,000 air strikes since 2015 and caused nearly 19,000 civilian casualties according to the Council on Foreign Relations; the United Arab Emirates is accused by Riyadh of having armed the Southern Transitional Council's secessionist bid between December 2025 and January 2026, later repelled by pro-Saudi forces; the United States and the United Kingdom have struck Houthi targets directly since 2024. Applying the criterion only to the Houthis because they are the most visible actor at this moment — while staying silent on the coalition, the Emirates, and the Anglo-American strikes — would not pass the test.

APPENDIX: THE "ROUGH RIDER" CAMPAIGN AND THE SA'ADA STRIKE (MARCH-APRIL 2025)

An earlier episode, documented but not yet covered on this site, deserves reconstruction here because it sheds direct light on the symmetry principle applied above. Between March 15 and May 6, 2025, the United States conducted a campaign of air and naval strikes against Yemen, codenamed "Operation Rough Rider," in response to Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea: according to estimates by the independent organization Airwars, the US strikes killed at least 224 civilians.

On April 28, 2025, a US air strike hit a migrant detention centre in Sa'ada, north-western Yemen, killing and injuring dozens of African migrants held there by Houthi authorities. An Amnesty International investigation concluded that the strike constitutes an indiscriminate attack, to be investigated as a possible war crime. Asked by Amnesty, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said it was "assessing all reports of civilian harm" from that period; by the end of 2025 the results of that assessment had not been made public.

In the same timeframe, the Houthis resumed missile and drone attacks on Israel — a missile injured 4 people near the main terminal of Ben Gurion airport (May 4, 2025), a drone injured over 20 people near a hotel in Eilat (September 24, 2025) — alongside attacks on commercial

shipping in the Red Sea, sinking two vessels (Greek-owned, Liberian-flagged) and killing at least three crew members.

Sources (appendix): [Amnesty International](#)

Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) · [UN News](#) · [UN Secretary-General statement](#) · [Al Jazeera](#) · [Security Council Report](#) · [Congressional Research Service](#) · [CFR Global Conflict Tracker](#) · [Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies](#) · [ICCPR official text \(OHCHR\)](#)

Yemen: war intensifies again and fuels child recruitment, as the UN warns of famine risk

«This reflects a systematic policy of child recruitment.» — Ali Hazazi, Human Rights Office of the Presidency, Aden

THE FACTS

Over the past week, more than 100 fighters from both sides have been killed in clashes between Houthi forces and government/pro-Saudi forces along the western Taiz and southern Hodeidah fronts (Kadha front) — the most intense escalation in years along the same frontline already reported on this site in July 2026. Over the same period, Hazazi documented 62 new child-recruitment cases in the second quarter of 2026 in Houthi-controlled provinces, calling them "only a fraction" of the real phenomenon, since most cases go unreported. SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties, which monitors human rights violations in the country, recorded 11,310 children recruited or used across 19 governorates between 2014 and 2023, including 6,269 aged 8 to 11.

Individual cases collected by Al Jazeera show explicit financial compensation for enlistment: around 50,000 Yemeni rials (210 dollars) as a one-off payment, or a monthly wage of around 45,000 rials (80 dollars) — slightly above the local average wage, in a country where more than four in five rural children live in poverty. Pro-government forces have captured numerous Houthi child soldiers, including on the al-Dhale front; the sources consulted for this cycle show no comparable cases of recruitment on the government side (see the symmetry test below).

In the background, UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher told the Security Council in mid-August 2026 that 6 million people face "emergency" levels of deprivation bordering on famine. A joint report by ACAPS/FAO/UNICEF/World Bank/WFP/WHO from early 2026 ranks Yemen fourth worldwide for food insecurity, with 18.3 million people projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse. The UN Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2026, published by OCHA on 18 March 2026, estimates 22.3 million people in need of assistance and protection in the country, including 5.2 million internally displaced people. Yemen also appears on the International Rescue Committee's 2026 Emergency Watchlist, published in December 2025 — that is, before any of this week's news.

On 20 July 2026 the Houthis declared a naval blockade against Saudi Arabia, calling it an "eye for an eye" response to what they describe as a Saudi land, sea and air siege lasting around 12 years

— a declaration that came after a Saudi strike on Sanaa airport, amid renewed regional tensions over Iran's role. Saudi Arabia rejected the siege accusation the following day, saying more than 300 ships carrying food, goods, fuel and construction materials had passed through the ports of Hodeidah, Salif and Ras Isa in the first half of 2026, and announced measures to protect maritime traffic in the Bab al-Mandab strait. Neither side has so far provided independent verification of how the Houthi-declared blockade is actually being enforced.

LEGAL COMMENTARY

Recruiting and using children under 15 in combat is a war crime under the Rome Statute, art. 8(2)(b)(xxvi) and (e)(vii); the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Yemen is a state party, extends the recruitment ban up to age 18. It should be noted that some of the documented cases involve 17-year-olds: an age bracket where international law still bans use in combat, but not under the same absolute threshold set for under-15s — a legal distinction that should not be flattened. Both the Yemeni government (with a UN action plan signed in 2014) and the Houthis (with a similar agreement in 2022) had committed to ending the practice; the evidence gathered in this cycle shows the Houthi commitment remains largely unmet.

IMPLICATIONS — THE SYMMETRY TEST

The principle — no recruitment of children, by any actor — would apply equally to Houthi forces as to government or pro-Saudi forces: this is not a judgment reserved for one side. But applying it honestly here also means saying what this cycle's sources do not show: unlike the case already covered on this site in July (where the Saudi coalition, the UAE and the US/UK shared comparable, documented responsibility), the sources available for 2026 child recruitment are concentrated almost entirely on the Houthi side — pro-government forces appear to be capturing children recruited by the Houthis, not recruiting them in turn in this cycle. A known precedent (recruitment also by the Yemeni army during the 2011 uprising against Saleh) shows the phenomenon has never been exclusive to one actor in the past — but applying that to the present without a comparable 2026 source would be a manufactured symmetry, not a found one. The asymmetry is therefore stated rather than papered over. On humanitarian access, by contrast, the picture remains two-sided, as in the July case already published on this site: the Houthis accuse Saudi Arabia of a years-long siege, Riyadh denies it and claims hundreds of ships transited Houthi ports in the same period — neither version has been independently verified, and both should be reported as competing claims, not as an established fact favouring either side.

JUDGMENT

Stated as such, separate from the facts above: poverty does not justify child recruitment — it remains a crime regardless of who commits it or the economic conditions of those who consent to it — but it explains why the "choice" keeps presenting itself as one. A payment of 80 dollars a month, in a country where four in five rural children live in poverty, is not a neutral incentive: it is the difference between a meal and no meal for a family. Poverty does not help families choose otherwise when the immediate alternative is hunger — it does not absolve those who recruit, but it narrows the real space of choice for those who consent.

Sources: [Al Jazeera — child recruitment and the Taiz/Hodeidah offensive](#) · [Al Jazeera — Tom Fletcher's remarks to the Security Council](#) · [OCHA/ReliefWeb — Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2026 \(18/3/2026\)](#) · [SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties](#) · [International Crisis Group — Ahmed Nagi, Senior Analyst Yemen](#) · [IRC — Emergency Watchlist 2026](#) · [ACAPS/FAO/UNICEF/World Bank/WFP/WHO — Yemen Joint Monitoring Report](#) · [CFR Global Conflict Tracker](#) · [Al-Ahram \(AP\) — Houthi naval blockade declaration, 20/7/2026](#) · [Arab News — Saudi response, 21/7/2026](#)

Verification note: the naval blockade is reported as competing claims (announced by the Houthis on 20/7/2026, rejected by Riyadh on 21/7/2026); no independent verification of its actual enforcement is available. For the number of people in need of assistance we use the most recent OCHA figure (22.3 million, March 2026), which supersedes the 21.6 million cited in the July piece.

N3R1-70 — I Will Not Look Away — Online version: <https://iwillnotlookaway.org/s/en/series-yemen-full-text.html>