

# YEMEN

## Aden: Collapse of ceasefire

Anticipatory briefing note – 16 August 2019



### Legend

- Deportation
- Airport affected
- Port affected
- Conflict
- Retaliatory killings and looting
- Governorate capital

### Key risks and anticipated impact



4,500

civilians at risk of death or injury from urban conflict over a period of three months. Over 420,000 people would be trapped in their homes



1 million

people at risk of disruptions to WASH and health services



+50,000

northern traders, workers, and IDPs in need of international protection against execution, deportation and retaliatory violence

Source: ACAPS (08/2019)

**Failure of peace talks leading to prolonged urban fighting in Aden could result in up to 4,500 civilian casualties over three months** and cut access to services and markets for one million people.

The international community needs to work with the Southern Transitional Council to **protect traders, workers and IDPs of northern origin residing in Aden**, who have been targeted by militias for deportation, targeted killing and harassment.

Attempts to resolve the conflict by force risk inflaming historic tribal tensions and cutting off vital fuel, aid and transport services to the rest of Yemen.

### Reliability

Very low Moderate Major

This report is given a moderate level of confidence. Information is based on primary data and secondary data review, cross checked with operational actors in Yemen. However, the situation is fluid and could change rapidly. Risk forecasting is not an exact science.

## Purpose

This report draws on current primary data, a secondary data review of previous conflicts, and discussions with operational actors in Yemen to provide a **rapid estimate of the potential humanitarian impact of prolonged urban conflict in Aden** to support early response planning (until agencies can conduct needs assessments). It also highlights **projected humanitarian implications if the current ceasefire fails**.

## Conflict developments

Forces loyal to the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) ousted the internationally recognised government of Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi, took control of all strategic positions in Aden and declared a new government on 10 August 2019 after four days of intense street battles that left 40 people dead and 260 injured (UN Secretary-General 8/08/2019).

On 12 August 2019, Saudi Arabia announced a ceasefire which (as of 15 August 2019) appears to have restored some sense of calm to Yemen's southern port city of Aden (Reuters 11/08/2019).

The current crisis began on 1 August 2019 when Houthi forces launched a drone and missile attack on the graduation parade of the Security Belt forces in Al Buraiqeh district, Aden, killing at least 36 soldiers, including prominent leader Munir Mahmoud Ahmad Al Mashali Al Yafa'ai, more commonly known as Abu Yamama (Al Jazeera 1/08/2019).

Elements of the Security Belt Forces, linked to Abu Yamama's Lahj based Yafa'ai tribe, initially retaliated against Yemenis of northern origin, rounding up and deporting 2,400 men between 2 to 4 August 2019 (Critical Threats 05/08/2019, MPN 10/08/2019).

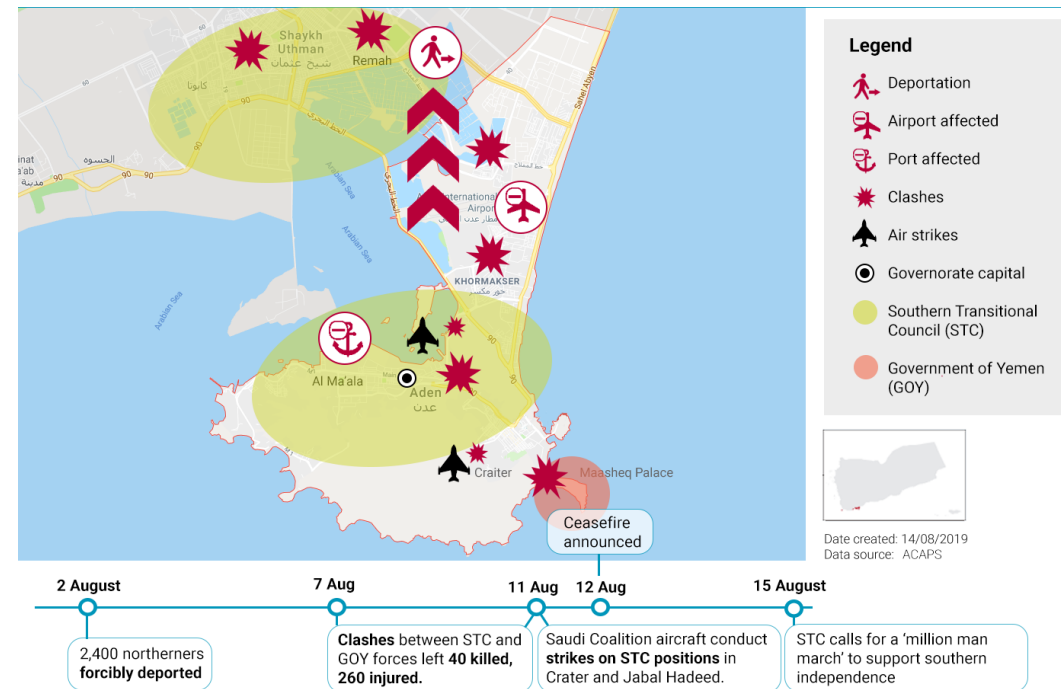
On 6 August 2019, the deputy leader of the STC, Hani Bin Breik, taking advantage of large Yafa'ai and Radfan tribal gatherings in Aden for Abu Yamama's funeral, called for a popular uprising against the Hadi Government. Clashes escalated quickly, culminating in three days of fierce urban conflict in Aden's Khor Maksar, Craiter, and Ash Shaikh Outhman districts (see the timeline for details).

The recent conflict is the most dramatic in a series of recent moves by southern separatists to strengthen their influence. In July 2019, the STC announced a unified military command centre in Shabwah and Hadramaut to strengthen their position in any future political settlement. Several days of street battles broke out in Aden between the STC and pro Hadi forces in January 2018, until they were halted by Saudi and UAE interventions (ACAPS 31/07/2019, Reuters 11/08/2019).

Rapid political efforts to end the fighting appear to have averted a humanitarian emergency for now. Local media report that STC forces are working quickly to try to

restore essential services and encourage the resumption of aid. However, renewed urban fighting in Aden would pose severe humanitarian risks for the civilian population.

### Conflict developments in Aden – August 2019



Source: ACAPS (08/2019)

### Who are northerners in Yemen?

So called 'northerners' are Yemenis who originated from governorates that were part of the historic Yemen Arab Republic. Yemen was divided between a republican north and socialist south from 1967 to 1990.

An estimated 45,000 IDPs of northern origin reside in Aden, alongside thousands of traders and service sector workers (IOM 2/08/2019). Northern traders are prominent in the fresh produce and Qat trade centred around the Al Arood markets in Khur Maksar.

Many southern separatist forces retain historic grievances dating back to the violent unification of Yemen between 1990 and 1994 and have incited violent assaults on people of northern origin over the past decade. More recently, STC aligned forces have accused northerners in Aden of colluding with Houthi forces.

Click here to access a map published by the European Council of Foreign Relations on the historical division of Yemen.

## Anticipated crisis impact

### Renewal of fighting causes civilian casualties and damages key infrastructure and markets

If the ceasefire fails and prolonged urban fighting breaks out between STC and pro Hadi forces in Aden, **the entire population of the governorate (up to one million people) are likely to lose access to aid and services.** The highest civilian impact will be in the densely populated urban and residential areas of **Khur Maksar, Craiter, Al Mualla, and Dar Sad.** Civilians in Al Buraieqeh, and Ash Shaikh Othman districts are also likely to be impacted by fighting due to the presence of critical infrastructure. The trigger for escalation of fighting is likely to be the failure of ceasefire talks initiated by Saudi Arabia. Though the STC has welcomed the call for talks, it is unclear whether the core interests of the key actors – the STC, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Hadi aligned forces - will allow for a stable, negotiated settlement (Al Jazeera 12/08/2019, UN Secretary General 13/08/2019).

If fighting resumes, the number of civilian casualties will depend on the intensity of conflict and the degree to which heavy weapons and airstrikes are used. **The estimated number of casualties is likely to reach up to 1,500 people per month of sustained intense fighting** (calculated based on fighting in Aden in 2015 and 2018: OCHA 31/01/2018, OCHA 15/07/2015). **Most of the casualties are likely to be civilians** trapped by the fighting, particularly in densely populated areas, and injured by explosive weapons, shelling, and airstrikes (MSF 10/08/2019). Mortality is likely to increase due to movement restrictions and lack of access to essential WASH and health services leading to untreated injuries and outbreaks of communicable disease.

**The likelihood of large scale displacement is moderate** if the clashes remain confined to Aden city. Aden's geography – high population density, with many districts hemmed in by water – makes it difficult for civilians to flee to safety. **No large scale displacement was reported during fighting in Aden from 7 to 11 August 2019,** largely because civilians were trapped in their houses. Conflict between Houthi and pro Hadi forces from March to July 2015 in Aden displaced 200,000 people, but the vast majority (185,000) were displaced within the city (OCHA 15/07/2015).

Prolonged fighting is likely to have a major impact on civilian infrastructure and essential services. **WASH and health infrastructure are expected to be the most affected,** however, roads, schools, markets, and businesses would also be impacted, cutting off people's access to basic services and livelihoods and further aggravating humanitarian needs. **All of Aden's one million residence are likely to be in need humanitarian assistance** with food, protection, WASH, and health likely to be the most imminent needs (IRC 11/08/2019, OCHA 13/11/2015).

**The impact of renewed fighting in Aden between the STC and proHadi forces is likely to be higher than in the past.** Recent clashes have been more violent and sustained in character compared to previous fighting in Aden, which was quickly contained by Saudi Arabia and the UAE interventions. STC forces took over all strategic points in Aden, including the Presidential Palace, in only 72 hours of intense fighting. Fighting also spread to areas of the city that had not been affected in previous conflicts (Human Rights Watch 12/08/2019, ECHO 13/08/2019).

**Health:** Prolonged urban conflict in Aden would prevent people from accessing health facilities due to checkpoints and conflict front lines. **Extreme shortages of medical supplies and disruption to electricity will disrupt the functioning of health facilities.** Mobile medical teams, trauma kits, and general medical supplies will be among the most important needs.

In 2015, more than 50% of hospitals in Aden stopped case surveillance mechanisms and most of the facilities lost their emergency disease early warning capacity due fighting between Houthi and pro Hadi forces (ICRC 12/08/2019, OCHA 15/07/2015).

Hospital closures would **aggravate the spread of communicable disease, increasing the risk of cholera.** Cholera in Yemen is particularly present in densely populated and conflict affected areas. Damage to WASH and health infrastructure is a key driver of cholera transmission. Over 3,500 cases have been already reported in Aden in 2019. Dar Sad is the worst affected district (WHO access: 14/08/2019). Prolonged urban fighting would greatly exacerbate the spread of communicable disease. Fighting in Aden in 2015 led to a large outbreak of dengue fever and other viral hemorrhagic fevers, with 150 new cases and 11 associated deaths reported daily. This was mostly due to the breakdown of health services. Dengue fever is endemic in Yemen and spreads easily in urban areas, with recent outbreaks reported in Aden in March 2019 (Emirates News Agency 20/03/2019, OCHA 30/06/2015).

**WASH:** Damage to WASH infrastructure and breakdown of WASH services due to fuel shortages is highly likely in the event of renewed urban conflict in Aden. There is a high likelihood of damage to water networks serving Khur Maksar, Al Mualla and Craiter districts. This would leave up to 375,000 people with no access to water. This number is likely to increase if urban fighting intensifies and spreads to other areas of the city. Most of the Aden population depends on small household water tanks which only hold enough water for two days. Any disruption to water networks lasting beyond five days is likely to push people into dangerous levels of water insecurity (NRC 9/08/2019, OCHA 15/07/2015).

**Protection:** An estimated 427,500 civilians would be trapped in their homes in conflict hotspots such as Craiter, Mualla, Dar Sad, and Khur Maksar if prolonged urban conflict breaks out in Aden. These civilians would be at a particular risk of serious or fatal injuries from indirect fire, heavy weapons, and mortars. The use of mortars in densely populated

civilian neighbourhoods is extremely dangerous as they are difficult to fire with accuracy. Human Rights Watch reported a case during the August 2019 fighting of a woman who lost both her legs when a mortar shell hit the family's home (Human Rights Watch 12/08/2019).

Humanitarian actors report that people trapped in their homes in Aden during the recent conflict did not have enough time to stockpile food and water (NRC 9/08/2019).

Civilians in Aden are particularly impacted by movement restrictions and checkpoints, as many Aden suburbs are situated on the coast and are connected by only a few major roads with limited alternative routes.

Civilians in Aden are also at risk of violence from armed groups, based on perceived political or tribal loyalties. The Security Belt Forces have been accused of retaliatory killings, torture and forced disappearance in their security facilities run in cooperation with the UAE (ACLEED 12/2018, Human Rights Watch 22/06/2017, Associated Press 9/07/2018, Amnesty International 12/07/2018). Retaliatory killings and looting have been reported by both sides in past conflicts in Aden, prolonging the impact of fighting and reinforcing social and tribal animosity.

**Food security and livelihoods:** A break in humanitarian food aid due to prolonged conflict is likely to lead to famine like conditions (IPC 5) in Dar Sad, while the rest of the governorate will face Emergency (IPC 4), up from its current level of Crisis (IPC 3). In the beginning of 2019, approximately 57% of Aden's population faced severe acute food insecurity. Dar Sad and Al Buraiqeh were the most food insecure districts. IPC reporting from 31 July 2019 suggests that scaled up food aid, combined with increased seasonal food production, has been successful in lifting people in Dar Sad out of Catastrophe (IPC 5) and Emergency (IPC 4) food insecurity. These gains could be reversed by any prolonged disruption in food aid (FEWSNET 06/2019, IPC 20/12/2018, IPC 31/07/2019).

Prolonged urban conflict in Aden would result in constrained access to markets, livelihoods and imports, increasing food prices. Local sources already reported an increase of up to 200% for local fresh produce in August 2019 following the deportations of many traders and merchants from the north (Akhbarten 10/08/2019). In 2015, the price of wheat in Aden more than doubled following conflict between Houthi and coalition forces in the city (OCHA 15/07/2015).

Loss of livelihoods is likely to particularly affect people from the north of Yemen. Multiple closures of businesses employing people from the north (such as restaurants, plumbing shops, laundry, construction or electrical shops) have been reported since the beginning of August (NTH news 5/08/2015).

**Shelter and NFIs:** Shelter needs are likely to increase due to damage to civilian houses and IDP sites. Many houses were damaged and looted following conflict between Houthi and coalition forces in Aden in 2015. Shelter conditions, particularly for IDPs and

returnees, are very difficult. Many houses do not meet minimum standards and have limited access to electricity and water. The risk of shelter loss is particularly high for IDPs, particularly those forcibly displaced or living in spontaneous sites. IDPs from the north often face threat of eviction from landowners.

There is a high risk of shortages of fuel and electricity due to import and distribution disruptions. Aden port has the capacity to import 25% of Yemen's fuel requirements each month (50,000 MT). Prolonged urban conflict in Aden would close the port, hindering the supply of fuel and humanitarian aid. Previous port closures in Al Hudaydah led to a doubling of fuel prices. A similar impact would be expected in Aden if the port was closed for a long period (OCHA 11/11/2017, OCHA 13/11/2017). Lack of diesel would impact on milling capacity for imported grain, hospital services and water supply, impacting Aden's entire population (one million people). Aden's main oil refinery, located in Al Buraiqeh district, would likely be a key target in future fighting. In 2015, a massive fire broke out at the refinery after it was hit by rockets, causing significant environmental impact and endangering civilians (OCHA 20/07/2015).

## Access

**An escalation of fighting in Aden would result in immediate access constraints for the affected population as well as for humanitarian actors.** Critical infrastructure such as roads connecting Aden to other southern governorates and to the north of the country, Aden's port and airport would likely be affected by physical damage and administrative constraints imposed by the parties to the conflict. **Damage or closure of roads, the airport, and port would impact Yemenis across the country, not only those living in Aden.**

**The port of Aden, located in Ash Shaikh Outhman district,** is a critical entry point for humanitarian and commercial imports serving the south of the country. The port has capacity to import 100,000 metric tonnes (MT) of non-food items (over 50% of Yemen's total capacity), 80,000 MT of food (16% of Yemen's capacity), and 50,000 MT of fuel (25% of Yemen's capacity). Damage to, or closure of, the port would significantly disrupt imports and humanitarian cargo. **This would decrease access to food, fuel, and medicine for nine million people living in the south of the country (30% of Yemen's population).**

**Aden airport, located in Khur Maksar district,** is likely to be intermittently closed due to heavy fighting or insecurity, hampering people from leaving the country. This would impact people in need of urgent medical attention outside of the country, particularly as Aden airport is one of only two airports still able to operate international air services.

**As of 15 August, the airport is reportedly closed in expectation of large scale protests.** Even though the closure is not likely to be permanent, repeated closures can be expected to have a severe impact on humanitarian operations if the conflict continues.

**As of 15 August, all main roads in Aden governorate remain open** (ACAPS Arabic social media monitoring and discussions with operational partners). However, renewed fighting would likely cut road connections to Taizz, Lahj, and Al Dhale'e and to the north, including Sana'a governorate, restricting the transportation of goods (food, water, fuel) and humanitarian assistance and increasing prices.

## Vulnerabilities and vulnerable groups affected

**People from the north residing in Aden and surrounding districts in Lahj and Abyan** are at a high risk of targeted violent attacks from militants aligned with the STC due to alleged collusion with Houthi and Islahi forces. 2,400 people from Aden and Tur Al Bahah district in Lahj were forcibly deported between 2 to 4 August 2019.

More than 45,000 IDPs currently residing in Aden originate from northern governorates, mainly Al Hudaydah and Taizz, along with several thousand northerners working in the services and trade sectors. Since 2 August 2019, STC aligned forces have detained, harassed and executed males from the north at checkpoints, Aden's central markets and at work. Northerners have been subject to arrest, detention, physical assaults, verbal abuse, seizure of personal valuables, forced closure of businesses and deportation. Some northerners have fled to Taizz and other governorates in the north. Those that remained were too afraid to leave their homes to work or to access essential goods and services such as food, water, fuel, health services and aid. Humanitarian actors report that 'northerners', particularly IDPs, are experiencing psychological and mental trauma, due to the climate of fear and violence (IOM DTM 31/07/2019, ACAPS Arabic social media monitoring, ACAPS discussions with operational actors in Yemen).

Currently, the movement restrictions are mainly affecting men as they are at a higher risk of being forcibly deported or detained. As a result, there have been reports of women having to travel alone to access services which increases their risk of gender based violence on the road or at checkpoints. There have been reports of households being unable to access their cash distribution as the male head of household was unable to go to the cash points.

According to operational actors and human rights groups, deportations, torture and the detention of male 'northerners', and harassment and gender based violence against female northerners, is common. Males are most at risk of deportations, arrests, reprisal killing and detentions. IDPs, traders, service sector workers, and those who do not have ID documentation are particularly at risk. Women and girls from the north are at

increasing risk of abduction, trafficking, physical and sexual assault, and repression. Those who have recently become female headed households due to the deportation of male household members are particularly at risk. IDPs living in collective centres and settlements are additionally vulnerable to the impacts of prolonged conflict and a lack of access to basic services due to higher levels of food insecurity and pre-existing levels of poverty.

The risk of further violence against 'northerners' is high as the security situation remains extremely unstable and random incidences of deportations continue to occur, mainly around the various checkpoints in Aden. There is an additional risk that large scale deportations could be incited by mass gatherings of STC supporters such as the 'million man march' that occurred on the 15 August and attracted thousands of people in support of the southern resistance movement from more than 20 southern cities (The Associated Press 15/08/2019). If the situation in Aden continues to deteriorate over a prolonged period, it is likely that affected people from the north are going to run out of essential commodities such as food and water due to constraints on movement and lack of access to services.

**Muhamasheen, refugees and migrants** are at risk of escalating and targeted violence, access constraints and severe acute food insecurity due to pre existing levels of poverty, persistent caste based discrimination and social exclusion. These groups rely heavily on food distributions to survive because they have significantly less access to economic opportunities and services than the rest of the population. Any prolonged disruption in food aid is likely to result in a further deterioration of food security levels pushing pockets of the most vulnerable population into the IPC 5 (Catastrophe) and IPC 4 (Emergency). Negative coping mechanisms such as increased debt, eating less nutritious food, skipping meals, begging and force recruitment is expected to increase.

Muhamasheen largely reside in makeshift housing on the edges of urban centres in Aden, such as the slums of Dar Sad. They experience high rates of unemployment and lack access to basic services due to social marginalisation (MRG 11/2018). Migrants and refugees, mostly males from Ethiopia and Somalia, also experience extreme levels of social discrimination. From April to May 2019 authorities rounded up and arrested an estimated 5,000 refugees and migrants from across Aden, Abyan and Lahj and held them in two stadiums and a military camp which were overcrowded and lacked basic services (IOM 06/2019). Basateen, a suburban neighborhood in Dar Sad district, currently hosts around 50,000 refugees (UNHCR 9/08/2019).

**An estimated 6,000 IDPs are located in anticipated conflict hotspots**, putting them at high risk of casualties if fighting is to escalate (IOM 2/08/2019). 24,500 IDPs are currently residing in collective centres, spontaneous settlements and public buildings across Aden (IOM 2/08/2019). They rely on humanitarian assistance as one of their main sources of

livelihoods due to pre existing levels of poverty, lack of access to services and absence of livelihood generating activities. If conflict was to prevent aid delivery for a prolonged period of time, these IDPs would likely run out of food and water before other civilians in Aden. This puts them at risk of severely acute food security levels and a decline in their health and well being.

**Civilians that are in need of medical assistance** such as those that have been injured due to fighting, pregnant women, those with chronic illnesses that require regular treatment, and the elderly are particularly at risk . Urban fighting in August 2019 cut off many people's access to medical facilities. Others were too afraid to leave the house to access medical assistance. There have been reports that the delays in accessing medical services have already led to deaths of civilians from treatable illnesses.

**Civilians that have mobility difficulties** which prevent them from being able to evacuate quickly such as elderly, women in the last trimester of pregnancy, and people with chronic illness and people with particular disabilities that affect their movement ability, are at risk of being caught in the crossfire if fighting escalates suddenly. Civilians with mobility difficulties are also dependant on others to access services on their behalf which increases their overall vulnerability.

## Contextual information

Aden governorate, Yemen's southern port city, is one of the country's most densely populated governorates, with one million people living within 1,114 square kilometers, less than half a per cent of the size of Hadramaut governorate. The climate in Aden ranges between 22 degrees in January, to mid 30s in July.

Aden is highly urbanised, with services, trade and fishing the main economic major sectors. **Aden is home to one of only two airports** that is still allowed to operate in Yemen (Seyun is the other). It also houses major ports and oil storage facilities that serve neighbouring governorates in the south.

Aden was under British occupation from 1874 to 1967. British colonial authorities developed financial relationships and treaties with numerous tribes across southern Yemen. Some commentators have linked this with challenges establishing central government control across the south.

Aden was under socialist governance from 1967 to 1990. The business sector in south Yemen is less developed than the north. Much of the Qat and fresh produce trade is managed by northern Yemenis. Although southern and northerners have close ties through marriage, family and trade, southern separatists have at times stoked anti-northern sentiment, resulting in violence. The collapse of the Soviet Union hastened the

unification of Yemen in 1990, sparking a four-year, war which is a still a source of animosity for many southerners (Al Jazeera 12/08/2019).

**Aden has witnessed several rounds of conflict.** The 1986 south-south coup sparked by ideological and tribal tensions between members within the

Yemeni Socialist Party, left between 4,000 to 10,000 people dead and saw the tribes of Yafa'a (Lahj) and Al Dhale'e battle against Abyanis (New York Times 9/02/1986, Carnegie Endowment Papers 03/2010, Halliday 1990). Mistrust still lingers between people of Al Dhale'e and Lahj tribal origin, and those from Abyan.

In 2015 there were three months of fierce urban battles between southern and Houthi forces which caused wide scale destruction.

Calls to reestablish an independent south Yemen gained new momentum with the launch of the Hirak movement in 2007, which led to the founding of the Southern Transitional Council in May 2017, led by former Governor of Aden, Aidarus Al Zubaydi. In 2018 there was a three day urban battle between STC and Hadi forces before the Saudis and UAE stepped in to restore order (Middle East Research and Information Project 26/04/2018).

## Aggravating factors

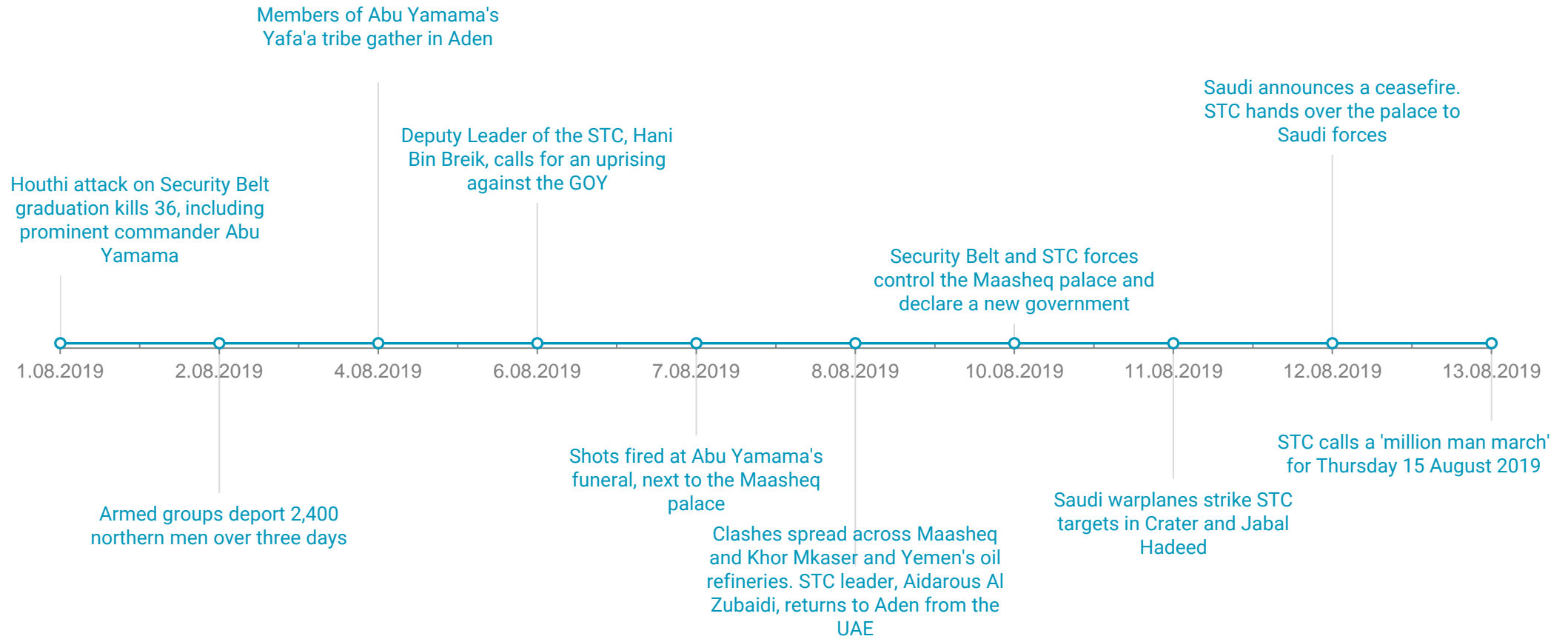
**UAE partial withdrawal:** In early 2019, the UAE signaled its intention to withdraw from Yemen and began to hand over security to local forces in some areas (The Washington Institute 02/07/2019). A strong Saudi and UAE intervention was crucial in halting previous rounds of south-south fighting, including fighting between the STC and Hadi forces in Aden in January 2018. Given the recent UAE drawdown and its strong relationship with STC leaders (the President of the STC Al Zubaidi has a UAE passport), it is unclear how far the UAE will be willing to go to exert pressure on the STC in support of a negotiated settlement. Saudi Arabia has been a more staunch supporter of Hadi. It is unclear whether the Saudis will insist on the full restoration of the internationally recognised government, or take a more flexible approach in negotiations. Behind the scenes political calculations by Saudi Arabia and the UAE will play a key role in determining the success of peace talks.

**Potential for conflict to spread to other governorates:** If negotiations fail and prolonged urban fighting resumes in Aden, it is highly likely the conflict will spread to other governorates, such as Lahj, Al Dhale'e, Abyan and Al Hadramawt as each side seeks to impose its control on the south. Sporadic clashes have occurred between Hadi and STC aligned forces in the previous 12 months and could escalate quickly as part of a broader conflict. If the conflict spreads beyond Aden, the humanitarian impact would exceed what is estimated in this report.

**Potential for the Houthis to take advantage of the current crisis in the south to make territorial gains.** This would result in a large escalation of the conflict. Small scale clashes have continued along the conflict front lines between Houthi and southern forces, but these have mostly been in line with trends over the previous six months. The Houthis are likely to seek a negotiated settlement with the STC, who have limited interest in the Houthi's core areas of strategic interest in the north.

Al Qaeda or ISIS may also try to take advantage of south-south fighting to retake territory. However, both groups have seen their capacity heavily degraded over previous years and it is unlikely they would be able to establish lasting territorial control.

## Timeline: Escalation of conflict in Aden










# YEMEN: Ceasefire collapse - anticipated impact in Aden

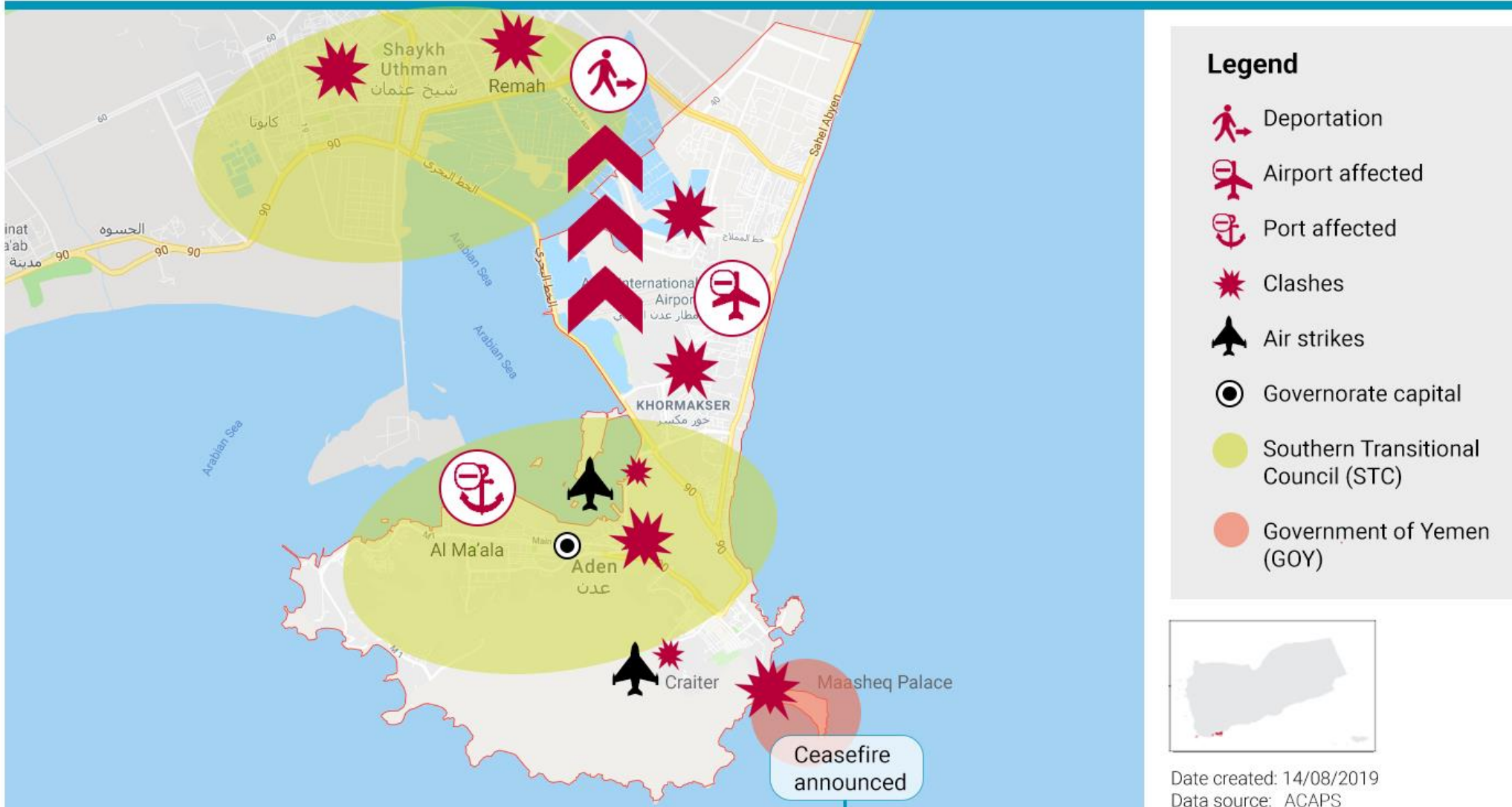


**Legend**

-  Deportation
-  Airport affected
-  Port affected
-  Conflict
-  Retaliatory killings and looting
-  Governorate capital



# YEMEN: Conflict developments in Aden - August 2019



Date created: 14/08/2019  
Data source: ACAPS