

# Conflict sensitivity of aid in southern Yemen

## The south and Aden Governorate

January 2020



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## Acronyms

AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
CBY	Central Bank of Yemen
DFA	De Facto Authority
DIFAC	District Food Assistance Committee
EHOc	Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Committee
ERC	Emirati Red Crescent
HEF	Hadrami Elite Forces
HRC	High Relief Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IRG	Internationally Recognised Government
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
KS Relief	King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSCR	National Security Command and Control Room
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSESGY	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
PFF	Presidential Protection Forces
RA	Riyadh Agreement
SBF	Security Belt Forces
SDRPY	Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen
SEF	Shabwa Elite Forces
SFD	Saudi Fund for Development
SLC	Saudi-Led Coalition
STC	Southern Transitional Council
SUFAC	Sub-District Food Assistance Committee
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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# Executive Summary

## The IRG-STC conflict and aid delivery

- 1) The August 2019 violence was the latest manifestation of a longer-term conflict, with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) looking to reduce both the role of the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) and the influence of Islah inside the IRG. The political conflict has not been resolved, and in fact is likely to intensify, as STC and IRG figures vie for influence in the unity government. Political conflict will destabilise aid agencies' relationships with ministries, and the parties to the conflict will likely seek to use aid agencies as leverage for their political legitimacy and aid to reinforce their public support.
- 2) Delays in implementation of the Riyadh Agreement (RA) is increasing conflict tensions on the ground, with a further round of armed clashes likely in 2020. Key issues are the proximity of IRG and STC-aligned groups, and non-payment of STC salaries. Aid delivery agencies should prepare for armed clashes, by: (1) identifying alternative delivery paths; (2) enhancing their crisis management capacity; and (3) planning for increased humanitarian need.
- 3) Approval of aid projects has become more difficult since August 2019. This is manifest in additional requirements on aid delivery agencies (e.g., budgetary allocation), threats of non-renewal, and interference in procurement. There is a concern that the IRG's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) is replicating approaches to aid management adopted in Sana'a. This move is not yet due to IRG-STC competition over aid approval, with the STC taking a 'hands-off' approach to aid approval. However, this 'hands-off' approach by the STC is unlikely to continue into 2020, and aid agencies should be prepared for greater STC interference in aid delivery.
- 4) Application of the formal approval process for project approval depends on: (1) the relative strength of the MoPIC Sub-Office (in the governorate); (2) the level of militarisation and presence of STC; (3) district council strength and presence; and (4) the existence of prior grievances towards aid agencies. Aid agencies should assess these four issues on a governorate and district level when planning aid.
- 5) Travel approval is more difficult to negotiate than project approval, with aid agencies needing to get a minimum of approval from the IRG and in some cases a secondary approval from STC-aligned armed groups. The number of approvals varies by governorate and can be burdensome if multiple security groups are competing for control. Aid agencies engage with STC-aligned groups on an informal basis through personal connections. Aid agencies should adopt a common approach for managing STC travel approvals.
- 6) At present there are no standard processes for coordination of assistance in the IRG-controlled areas between traditional aid delivery agencies and those of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This can lead to duplication of activities and can also be conflict insensitive if traditional and UAE/KSA agencies operate in competing ways in the same areas.

## Conflict dynamics in Aden

- 7) Al Mansoura, al Mualla, al Sheikh Othman, Kraiter, and Dar Saad are the least stable districts in Aden, followed by Khormaksar and al Bureiqqa. These areas see regular raids against suspected Islah groups by the Security Belt forces (SBF), and attacks on SBF forces, purportedly by IRG and Islah-aligned groups. Importantly, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has shifted the focus of its attacks from IRG forces to the SBF. There is no indication that these raids/attacks will reduce. This is leading to high tensions between the SBF and community groups (for example in Dar Saad). Learning from other contexts demonstrate that community groups will develop more aggressive responses to the SBF and vice versa. This will increase instability and impact on aid delivery.
- 8) Community support has mostly shifted to the STC following the August 2019 violence, although support can change rapidly depending on service delivery and the payment of public salaries. Aid agencies should use two measures to monitor public support for the IRG and STC: (1) who is winning the 'blame game' between the IRG and STC on poor public services; and (2) who is the target of public protests. These measures are important for aid delivery agencies, as aid can be considered a service, and hence aid delivery can reinforce or refute negative narratives being developed by the IRG or STC towards each other.
- 9) There are five inter-group conflict dynamics that aid agencies need to be aware of and plan for: (1) between STC and Islah supporters; (2) between 'northerners'<sup>1</sup> and Adenis;<sup>2</sup> (3) between Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Adenis; (4) between Muhamasheen and non-Muhamasheen Adenis; and (5) between poorer and more affluent communities. Aid should be delivered in a manner that helps bridge these divides. For example, development aid for local businesses could look to reinforce networks of northern and Adeni businesspersons so they are more mutually supportive.
- 10) The IRG is still well represented among national government agencies. However, their Aden sub-offices are more likely to be staffed with STC-supporters. This can deepen existing tensions between government agencies and sub-offices for influence in Aden. Political allegiance at the district and sub-district levels are fluid. Deputy Ministers play an important and potential ameliorating role, as they are mostly from Aden and have good connections to districts and sub-districts. Aid agencies should look to work with Deputy Ministers as a way of strengthening relationships between line ministries, sub-offices and district administrations.
- 11) The SBF has solidified territorial control and authority during the fighting, and now control all checkpoints into Aden governorate, as well as those in most of the districts. This control has in some ways assisted aid delivery and enhanced stability. However, it is also at the expense of ease of movement with some groups feeling targeted and fearful of crossing checkpoints (e.g., 'northerners' and Islah supporters). It is essential for the wider aid community to think through how aid could help ameliorate movement issues inside Aden.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Northerners' in this report is used to refer to Yemenis that live and work in Aden, but are from one of the northern governorates (most usually from Taiz, Ibb, and Hodeida).

<sup>2</sup> 'Adenis' in this report is used to refer to Yemenis that were born and / or raised in Aden, rather than those Aden residents that have come from other governorates.

- 12) Competition over economic resources has continued to grow since August 2019. The Aden-specific focus of competition is: (1) control of public buildings and land; (2) control of the port and import/export activities; (3) control of checkpoints; (4) protection rackets targeting northern businesses; and (5) the oil industry. Aid agencies should ensure that their delivery does not influence, and fuel this competition. As such, it is recommended that agencies working in Aden develop a simple question checklist for ensuring aid practices do not feed into economic competition.

### **Aid practice in Aden**

- 13) Aden's MoPIC Sub-Office has lost influence over sub-agreement approval since the IRG's MoPIC Head Office moved from Sana'a to Aden. At times, the Head Office bypasses the Sub-Office's approval stage, fuelling competition between the two offices. In part because of this tension, aid agencies encounter delays and challenges completing sub-agreement approvals. This issue is likely to deepen as the Head Office appears aligned with the IRG, while the Sub-Office appears aligned with the STC.
- 14) Aid delivery agencies avoid going through ministries as governmental bodies in Aden are seen as corrupt or ineffective. Furthermore, there is no sitting Governor. As a result, aid agencies' most important relationships are with district and sub-district authorities, as well as local influential individuals (e.g., the Aqel al Haras). These relationships should be maintained and strengthened, but through collective engagement. They should also be balanced by collective measures to strengthen the involvement of central authorities.
- 15) The procedure for negotiating travel is different for movement between Aden and other governorates and inside Aden. Movements between Aden and other governorates with a strong STC presence, such as Lahj or al Dhale'e, require only an SBF approval. Movement to IRG-dominated governorates, such as Marib, Jawf, Shabwa, and al Bayda, require both IRG and SBF approval. Inside Aden, only SBF travel approvals are required for movement within and between districts. Indeed, travel within Aden is simpler than in other governorates, given SBF's dominance at checkpoints. Aid agencies mostly liaise with the SBF on a personal and informal level. While there are concerns about formal engagement with the SBF, aid agencies should agree a collective and consistent approach that both: (1) safeguards aid agencies against possible future access restrictions; and (2) reduces the likelihood of legitimising non-state armed group actors.
- 16) Aid delivery, especially the delivery of food and cash, has caused tensions between: (1) the public and aid agencies; (2) local leaders and the main distribution mechanism, the District Food Assistance Committee (DIFAC); (3) individuals; and (4) with the local police. The crisis management capacity in Aden on these issues is relatively well developed but could be learned from and further strengthened.
- 17) Aid agencies are exposed to the closure of roads and deteriorations in the local security environment. As a result, as in other parts of the country, there is a greater reliance on downstream partners. While this confers greater autonomy over assistance delivery to local actors, it can also heighten security concerns for local staff, raise issues about duty of care for partners, and potentially increase risks of fraud and diversion. These issues deserve further examination.

## Introduction

In August 2019, simmering tensions between the IRG and STC escalated into a violent conflict over the control of political institutions, sources of economic income, and movement. The STC was mostly successful in this confrontation, taking control of Aden and by extension much of the south, and relegating the IRG to the periphery of political control. In November 2019, KSA brokered a power-sharing deal between the STC and IRG (the Riyadh Agreement, RA), allocating political roles between the two parties, and creating channels of communication to avoid further military escalation. The development of the IRG-STC conflict, and its amelioration through the RA has changed the realities for aid delivery in the south. Aid delivery agencies have to navigate new political systems and conflict dynamics, in terms of approval, access, and delivery. There is also the potential for aid delivery to assist moves away from violence, or to further entrench divisions and increase the potential for a new round of fighting.

### Using the report

The purpose of this report is to assist aid agencies as they plan their work in Aden. It is part of a series of papers exploring aid and conflict dynamics in southern governorates,<sup>3</sup> and will be followed by reports on Abyan, Hadramawt, Lahj, and Shabwa. These reports should:

- Ensure aid delivery agencies have up-to-date information about conflict dynamics in southern Yemen and are aware of how local conflict dynamics could further develop.
- Enable agencies to plan for how to adapt their operations to be more conflict sensitive, by enhancing understanding of the two-way interaction between aid and conflict dynamics.

The report is based on a desk review of media sources and available analysis, as well as 42 interviews with aid delivery agencies. The research is qualitative and designed to capture the experiences and perspectives of aid agency staff. The report has the following sections:

1. **Conflict and aid in southern Yemen.** This section provides a background to the recent IRG-STC conflict and is the basis for the governorate-specific analyses of Aden, Abyan, Hadramawt, Lahj, and Shabwa. It describes the parties to the conflict, and the process of conflict development and amelioration. It also describes the impact of the conflict on approval of aid projects, access, and delivery in the south generally.
2. **Experience of conflict in Aden.** The second section describes how the IRG-STC conflict manifested in Aden in terms of its impact on communities and community affiliation, local political decision-making, security and movement, and the local economy.
3. **Aid practice.** The third section examines the experience of aid agencies in delivering assistance in Aden and the impact of conflict dynamics on their work. It does this by examining how aid is approved and authorised, how access is negotiated, and present delivery modalities.

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<sup>3</sup> 'South' and 'southern' in this report are used to refer to the former governorates encompassed by the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, not to IRG-controlled areas.

# 1. Conflict and Aid in Southern Yemen

This section provides a history of the southern independence movement and its development since 2015. It describes the 2019 crisis and the RA, and assesses the present state of delivery of the Agreement. It also describes the processes for project and travel approval in IRG areas, and how they have been affected by the conflict and its aftermath. This background provides the foundation for the Aden-specific analysis that follows, as well as for the analyses of aid and conflict dynamics in Abyan, Hadramawt, Lahj, and Shabwa captured in separate reports.

## 1.1 Background to the IRG-STC conflict

In parallel to the national political conflicts between the De Facto Authorities (DFA) and IRG, there is a second ongoing conflict over the level of independence that should be afforded to the south from the national government. Conflict over self-governance in the south spilled over into open conflict between IRG and STC-aligned forces in August 2019.

### 1.1.1 History of the southern independence movement

The southern independence movement predates the present crisis and can be traced back to the formation of al-Hirak (i.e., al-Hirak al Janubiyy) in 2007. At the present time, the main voice of the southern movement is the STC, although the STC is not universally viewed as legitimate amongst those pushing for independence. The desire for southern independence is fuelled by:

- The history of a separate self-governing southern Yemeni state – the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen – prior to unification with northern Yemen in 1990.
- The perception of economic marginalisation and isolation from political decision-making by Sana’a-based elites after unification with northern Yemen.
- Negative stereotypes of northern Yemenis as less developed and having aggressive attitudes towards the south; a stereotype that was strengthened by the actions of northern DFA-aligned fighters in the south in 2015.

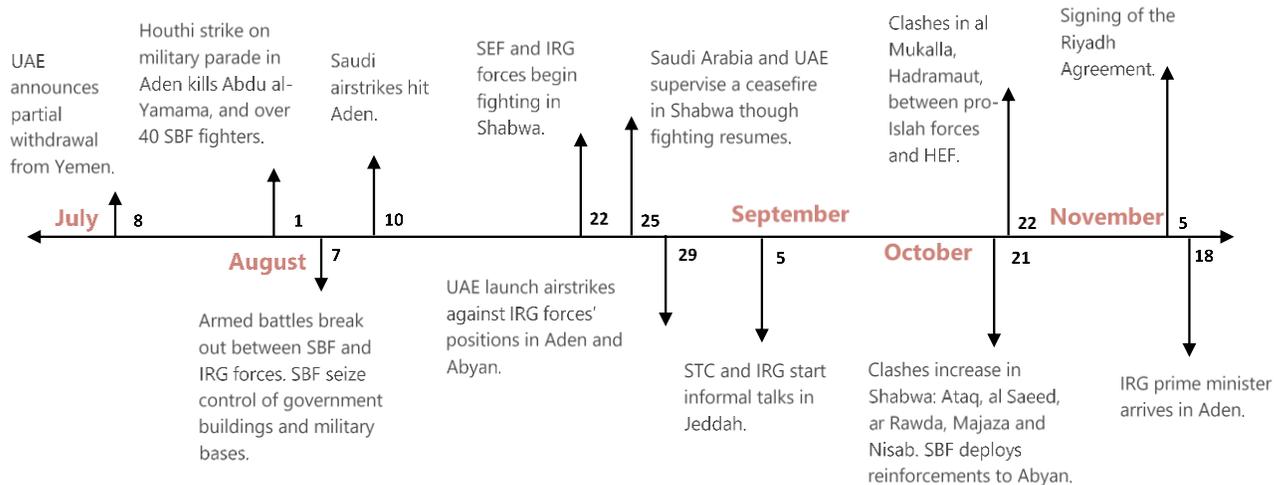
Mediation of the ‘southern question’ is not included in the mandate of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), which focuses on resolution of the DFA-IRG conflict in accordance with outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). As there has been no dialogue process focused on the southern question, it has been likely that it would escalate into the use of violence.

The 2015 crisis marked a turning point in the form and capacity of the southern movement. Prior to 2015, the southern movement was mostly a political grouping that had little ability to influence governance or decision-making. However, the virtual breakdown in the IRG’s capacity to govern outside of Aden allowed for the STC to gain influence in local government in much of the south, at both the governorate and district levels. In addition, the mobilisation of southern Yemenis in the armed groups that helped push DFA forces out of the south resulted in a new set of military actors sympathetic to the idea of southern independence, with access to financing (primarily from UAE) and with a significant presence in Aden, Lahj, and al Dhale’e. Finally, due to the STC’s greater

visibility as a political and security actor, it was increasingly seen by many parts of the public as more legitimate than the IRG. The alliance between this newly strengthened southern movement and the IRG has been fragile since its inception. Indeed, a precursor to the present round of clashes occurred in January 2018.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1.2 Confrontation in August 2019

Graph 1: Timeline of the IRG-STC conflict since August 2019<sup>5</sup>



The August 2019 confrontation between the IRG and the STC was precipitated by the UAE's announcement of a partial withdrawal from Yemen.<sup>6</sup> The UAE maintained a close relationship with the STC and, according to some analysts, had checked STC's ambitions for independence.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, KSA had forged strong links with the IRG, acting as its main political and financial backer.<sup>8</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2019, the DFA launched a missile attack on a military parade in Aden, killing a top STC commander, Abu al-Yamama.<sup>9</sup> The killing triggered the SBF and other STC-aligned groups to take over key military camps and governmental buildings in Aden, including the presidential palace, and the *de facto* evacuation of IRG officials from Aden. The STC claimed that it maintained support for the IRG, and that its purpose was to reduce Islah's influence within the IRG.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Noah Browning & Sami Aboudi, "Ten dead as rival Yemenis battle for control of Aden", *Reuters*, 28 January 2019. Last accessed 15 December 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-clashes/ten-dead-as-rival-yemenis-battle-for-control-of-aden-idUSKBN1FH06M>.

<sup>5</sup> Graph based on authors' analysis of media reporting as well as interviews with aid agency staff.

<sup>6</sup> "UAE announces partial troop withdrawal from Yemen", *Ansamed*, 8 July 2019. Last Accessed, February 2, 2020. [http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/yemen/2019/07/08/uae-announces-partial-troop-withdrawal-from-yemen\\_4aac47cc-b001-4725-89b3-ba602b5e97f3.html](http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/yemen/2019/07/08/uae-announces-partial-troop-withdrawal-from-yemen_4aac47cc-b001-4725-89b3-ba602b5e97f3.html).

<sup>7</sup> No Author, "Mohammad Bin Salman's Coalition in Yemen is collapsing that means trouble for UAE", *Foreign Policy*, 23 August 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/23/mohammed-bin-salmans-coalition-in-yemen-is-collapsing-that-means-trouble-for-trump-uae-saudi-arabia-aden/>.

<sup>8</sup> No Author, *Yemen: Key Players and Prospects for Peace*. London: Chatham House, 2015. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/events/2015-11-07-yemen-key-players-prospects-peace-meeting-summary\\_4.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/events/2015-11-07-yemen-key-players-prospects-peace-meeting-summary_4.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> No Author "Dozens killed in Houthi attack on Aden military parade", *Al Jazeera*, 1 August 2019. Last Accessed 15 January 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/yemen-houthi-rebels-target-military-parade-aden-190801065146809.html>.

<sup>10</sup> War's Elusive End- The Yemen Annual Review: Anti-Houthi Coalition, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 2020. Last Accessed 1 February 2020. <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8923>.

As fighting continued in Aden Governorate, STC-aligned groups also extended their control over parts of Shabwa and Abyan. The conflict further escalated as the UAE and KSA launched airstrikes against IRG and STC forces respectively, potentially weakening relationships between two key partners in the Saudi-Led Coalition (SLC). In response to STC success, the IRG called on the UN Security Council to intervene.<sup>11</sup> While the UN did not intervene directly, KSA started informal talks in Jeddah in September 2019.<sup>12</sup> These informal talks resulted in the RA, which aimed to defuse tensions in the south by absorbing the STC into the Yemeni government.

### 1.1.3 The Riyadh Agreement and its implementation

The RA can be loosely divided into political, military, and security provisions:<sup>13</sup>

- **Political provisions.** The RA stipulates: (1) formation of a new government comprised of 24 ministers with an equal number of ministries allocated to STC and IRG supporters; (2) reestablishment of the IRG in Aden; (3) the immediate resumption of work by government institutions; and (4) the appointment of governors for Aden, Abyan, and al Dhale'e.
- **Military provisions.** The RA requires: (1) the redeployment of all forces from the areas they moved into in Aden, Shabwa, and Abyan back to pre-August positions; and (2) the disarmament of military forces in Aden. Both redeployment and disarmament are envisaged as taking place under the auspices of a KSA-led committee.
- **Security provisions.** The RA includes the reorganisation of all military and security forces across southern Yemen under the IRG Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (Mol) in a process facilitated by KSA. In addition, the RA also foresees appointment of a Director of Security in Aden. As such, the security arrangements provide an important opportunity to initiate limited security sector reform in the south.

The Agreement also provides for the creation of two main KSA-led committees (one in Riyadh and one in Aden) to ensure its implementation. The Aden Committee is tasked with overseeing the military and security arrangements.<sup>14</sup> The Riyadh Committee is tasked with monitoring violations of the Agreement. Implementation of the RA has proved challenging due to its ambitious timeline and a disagreement on sequencing. The Agreement included the following milestones, all of which were missed:<sup>15</sup>

- Storage of the conflict parties' heavy weapons in bases under KSA control within 15 days of the Agreement coming into force.
- Relocation of forces to pre-August positions, appointment of governors for Aden, Abyan, and al Dhale'e, and formation of a new cabinet within 30 days.

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<sup>11</sup> The Southern Implosion- The Yemen Review August 2019: Related International Developments-Yemen Seeks UN Security Council Intervention in the South, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 2019. Last Accessed 13 January 2020. <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8016>.

<sup>12</sup> Mu Xuequan, "Delegation of Yemeni southern forces arrives in Jeddah for talks". *Xinhua*, 4 September 2019. Last Accessed 30 December 2019. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/04/c\\_138362594.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-09/04/c_138362594.htm).

<sup>13</sup> No Author, "Riyadh Agreement: Full text of the Yemeni government, STC agreement", *Al Masdar Online*, 6 November 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/58>.

<sup>14</sup> A number of subcommittees have been formed on individual issues such as redeployment.

<sup>15</sup> Maged al-Madhaji, "The Riyadh Agreement: Saudi Arabia Takes the Helm in Southern Yemen", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 5 November 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2019. <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/8324>.

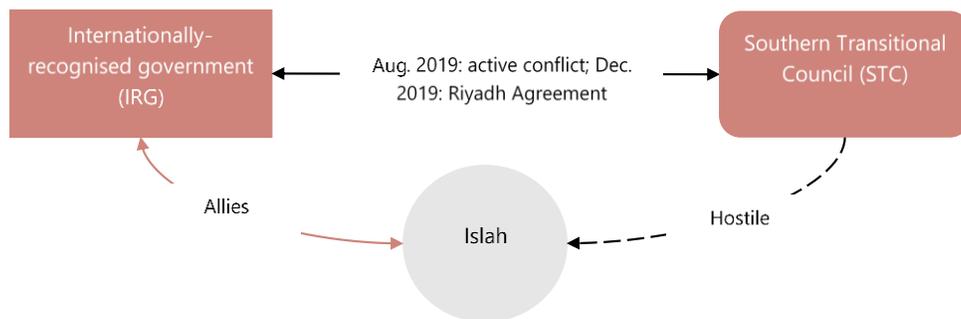
- Merger of security and military forces under the MoD and Mol within 90 days.

Delays in implementation have fuelled tensions between the IRG and STC, as is evidenced by the assassinations of SBF officers and clashes between IRG- and STC-aligned groups. For example, in December 2019, gunmen killed SBF official Mohammed Saleh al-Radfani in Aden<sup>16</sup> and IRG forces advanced into the Ahwar District of Abyan, sparking clashes with STC-aligned armed groups and resulting in two deaths.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of sequencing, STC insists that the IRG pay the salaries of military forces in Aden, appoint a new Security Director and Governor of Aden, and pull out of Shabwa and Abyan before IRG-aligned forces return to Aden.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the IRG believes that the STC should first disarm.<sup>19</sup>

#### 1.1.4 New roles and relationships: Islah, AQAP and regional actors

Graph 2: The parties to the IRG-STC conflict



The 2015 violence reshaped the conflict over southern independence by raising the role and importance of Islah within it, with the STC making a concerted effort to reduce Islah’s influence in the IRG and in southern society more broadly. This is because Islah is a significant competitor in the national government, in local government, in business and in the community. For example, Islah was perceived to be one of the main winners of the NDC, some of the most successful Yemeni Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the south are aligned with Islah, and Islah controlled significant business interests in Aden following the 2015 conflict. Further, the prominent role that Islah played in reversing DFA control of southern governorates challenges the narrative that the STC ‘liberated the south’, and hence the STC’s legitimacy as the south’s security provider. STC animosity towards Islah is reinforced by both Islah’s unionist politics, which are squarely opposed to independence for the south, and the UAE’s rejection of Islah.

The STC has taken a range of measures to undermine Islah. In 2017, STC armed groups took control of several important Islah businesses,<sup>20</sup> and it appears the squeeze on Islah business interests has continued after the 2019 crisis. There are also accusations that the STC has used its political

<sup>16</sup> No author, “Assassinations rock Aden following Yemen government’s return”, *Middle East Eye*, 12 December 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/assassinations-rock-aden-following-yemeni-2020>.

<sup>17</sup> No Author, “Roundup: Saudi-brokered deal on Yemen at risk of Collapse”, *Xinhuanet*, 6 December 2019. Last accessed 2 February 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/06/c\\_138608791.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/06/c_138608791.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Female, Embassy Adviser, 8 November 2019.

<sup>19</sup> INGO Analysis, 30 January 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Male, NGO, Senior Management, 6 February 2020.

influence to prevent approval for activities of NGOs believed to be affiliated with Islah. In the security field, since August 2019, STC-aligned armed groups have raided alleged Islah groups. Finally, Islah is portrayed by the STC as a 'northern movement' that colludes with the DFA. For example, the death of Abu al-Yamama sparked allegations of Islah-DFA collusion from STC Vice President Hani Bin Breik.<sup>21</sup>

The IRG-STC conflict further created opportunity for AQAP to increase its influence in the south. Since the start of the 2015 crisis, AQAP has benefited from the failure of the IRG to deliver basic services, perceived high levels of corruption in state structures, and heightened insecurity. In response, AQAP has won support from some Yemeni constituencies who see AQAP as more credible on these issues than either the IRG or the STC. As a result, AQAP gained physical control of parts of Abyan, al Bayda, Shabwa, and Hadramawt, and most visibly the port city of Mukalla. For example, with the funds acquired from extorting and taxing goods coming into the port in 2015, AQAP provided residents with drinking water, electricity, healthcare, and other basic services.<sup>22</sup> While the 2017-2018 anti-AQAP Operation Decisive Sword restored IRG-STC control over these areas, AQAP retains limited capacity in Abyan, Hadramawt, and Shabwa.<sup>23</sup> This continued capacity has been used during the IRG-STC conflict to regain some areas (e.g., temporary control over a district of Abyan in September 2019)<sup>24</sup> and to launch attacks on armed groups aligned with the STC. For example, AQAP is accused of conducting an attack on the SBF in Mudia district (Abyan) on 19 November 2019,<sup>25</sup> of an attack in the Al-Mihwari area of the Al-Wade'a district on 26 January 2020, and of ambushing an SBF vehicle in Mudiydah (Abyan) on 27 January 2020.<sup>26</sup> It is unclear whether these attacks were the work of AQAP or were conducted by other anti-STC groups, using AQAP as a cover. Nevertheless, it is predicted that these attacks will continue and increase if there is delay in implementation of the RA.<sup>27</sup> Abyan is most vulnerable to such attacks, due to its volatile security and the prior history of AQAP control in the Governorate; in addition to the September 2019 action, the group also occupied Zinjibar and Ja'ar in 2011.<sup>28</sup>

Since the 2015 conflict, KSA and UAE have played important political and military roles in the south, and ultimately in the development of the IRG-STC conflict. KSA supports the IRG politically, and the Yemeni National Army and the Presidential Protection Forces (PFF) financially, although it has also financed STC-aligned groups such as the Hadrami Elite Forces (HEF). The UAE has similarly provided political support to STC, and financial support to the armed groups aligned with it, mostly during the anti-AQAP operations in 2017-2018. Most importantly, KSA and UAE have different perspectives on Islah. UAE's leadership views Islah as a threat because of its links to the Muslim Brotherhood, a

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<sup>21</sup> No Author, "UAE-backed southern separatists leader urges overthrow of Yemen's Saudi Backed government", *The New Arab*, 7 August 2019. Last Accessed 17 February 2020. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/8/7/uae-backed-southern-separatist-leader-urges-overthrow-of-yemens-government>.

<sup>22</sup> Faisal Edroos & Saleh Al Batati, "After al-Qaeda: No signs of recovery in Yemen's Mukalla", *Al Jazeera*, 11 January 2019. Last Accessed 15 February 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/al-qaeda-signs-recovery-yemen-mukalla-180111135554851.html>.

<sup>23</sup> No Author, "Yemen File: November 20, 2019", *Critical Threats*, 20 November 2019. Last Accessed 1 December 2019. <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-file>.

<sup>24</sup> No author, "Al-Qaeda seizes control of southern Yemen district", *Middle East Monitor*, 9 September 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190909-al-qaeda-seizes-control-of-southern-yemen-district/>.

<sup>25</sup> No Author, "Yemen File: November 20, 2019", *Critical Threats*, 20 November 2019. Last Accessed 1 December 2019. <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/yemen-file/yemen-file-november-20-2019>.

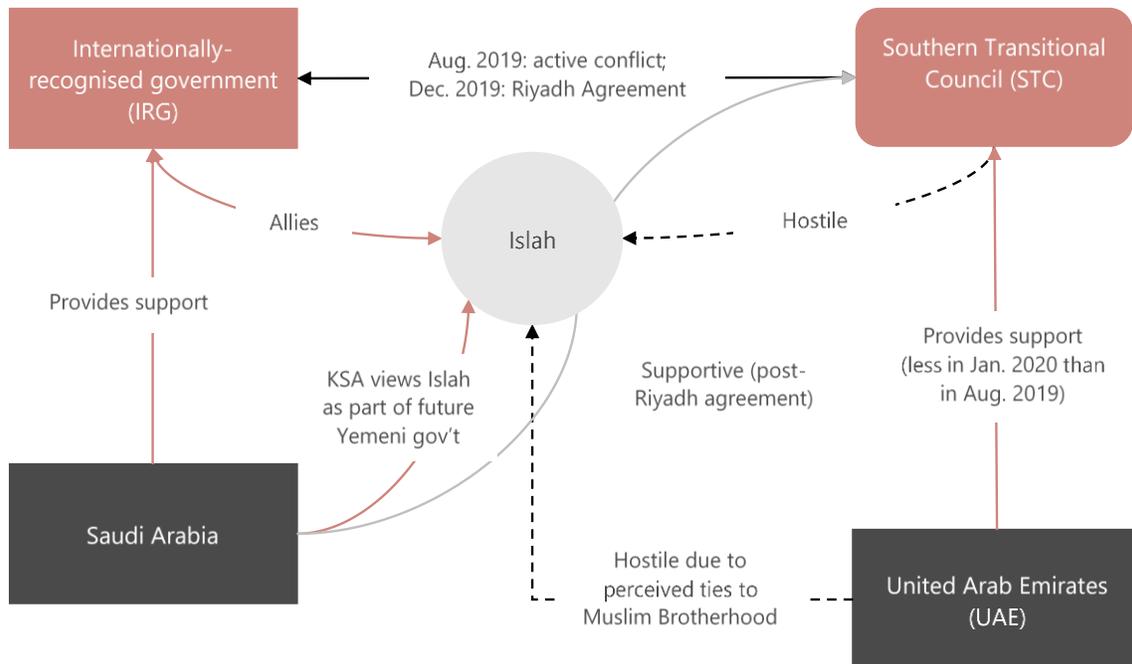
<sup>26</sup> INGO Analysis, 30 January 2020.

<sup>27</sup> INGO Analysis, 30 January 2020.

<sup>28</sup> No Author, "Al-Qaeda seizes control of southern Yemen district", *Middle East Monitor*, 9 September 2019. Last Accessed 2 February 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190909-al-qaeda-seizes-control-of-southern-yemen-district/>.

regional Islamist movement that the Emiratis see as radicals.<sup>29</sup> KSA, however, views Islah as playing an essential role in Yemen's future politics. The August 2019 crisis was precipitated with the UAE's announcement of its withdrawal from the Yemen conflict. This withdrawal has enhanced the presence and influence of KSA, and also led to KSA building stronger relationships with the STC. This can be seen in part by Riyadh's role in negotiating the peace agreement between the IRG and STC.

Graph 3: Relationships help by KSA and UAE



Prior to August 2019, both KSA and UAE maintained military bases in the governorates included in this set of studies. KSA had military bases in Aden (in Kraiter) and Hadramawt Governorate (Sayoun). The UAE maintained two military bases in Aden (Khormaksar and al Bureiqa), two in Hadramawt Governorate (by Mukalla seaport) and one in Abyan (by As Said oil and gas fields).<sup>30</sup> While KSA has maintained its military bases, UAE bases have either closed or reduced their operational capacity.<sup>31</sup>

### 1.1.5 Non-traditional aid agencies and donors

KSA and UAE are also influential through their humanitarian and development funding. This funding is divided between the UN system, international aid delivery agencies, and national partners. KSA delivers aid through the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KS Relief), and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen

<sup>29</sup> Salisbury, Peter. Yemen's Southern Powder Keg. London: Chatham House, 2019. Accessed 1 December 2019. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2018-03-27-yemen-southern-powder-keg-salisbury-final.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 15 December 2019.

<sup>31</sup> There is contradictory information on the status at reporting of UAE bases.

(SDRPY). All three organisations maintain local offices and capacities in Yemen, enabling KSA to consolidate its links to Yemeni society, and expand its influence among government actors and other decision-makers.<sup>32</sup> SDRPY efforts focus on areas under the control of the IRG, particularly in Aden and Mahra,<sup>33</sup> while KS Relief and SFD works on a more national scale. The Emirati Red Crescent (ERC) is the primary partner of the UAE, directing aid to areas where their affiliated forces have influence, such as Lahj, Taiz, Shabwa, Hadramawt, Abyan, Socotra, and al Mahra.<sup>34</sup> Prior to August 2019, ERC offices were located near to SLC Operations Rooms in Aden, al Khawkhah, Hadramawt and Socotra. There is uncertainty whether these offices are still operational since the signing of the RA and the subsequent reduction of UAE presence in southern Yemen.

Traditional aid delivery agencies express concern that they do not have mechanisms to properly coordinate their assistance with the UAE and KSA's national partners. This is considered to pose the dual risk of duplication and inefficiency, and potentially conflict insensitivity, if UAE and KSA programs and those of traditional aid agencies are not aligned.

## 1.2 Delivering aid in southern Yemen

This section describes the processes for approval of projects and travel, as established by the IRG since 2015, as well as their application post-August 2019. The application of processes for project/travel approval in Aden is covered in Section 3. The application of processes for project/travel approval in the other four governorates included in this research (Abyan, Hadramawt, Lahj and Shabwa) is unpacked in separate area-specific reports.

### 1.2.1 Project approval

The formal process for approval of a sub-agreement has five steps:

- Initial project approval is provided by the IRG's MoPIC<sup>35</sup> Head Office, located in Aden.
- The Head Office then forwards the project document and its approval to the MoPIC Sub-Office at the governorate level.
- The agreement is reviewed and, if no alterations are made, it is forwarded to the ministry that is associated to the project. For example, the sub-office will liaise with the Ministry of Health (MoH), if the project is health related.
- Afterwards, the Ministry sends the agreement back to the MoPIC Sub-Office, which then coordinates with the respective governor's office.
- Lastly, if the respective governor approves the project, the sub-agreement is sent to district authorities, which then play a critical role in coordinating implementation.<sup>36</sup> While formal approval is not required at the district level, the ability of an aid agency to deliver its project is usually highly dependent on working relationships with local officials, including formal

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<sup>32</sup>No Author, "SDRPY Launches Saudi-Yemen Workshop: Effort Paves Way for more Development and Reconstruction in Yemen Following Riyadh Agreement", *Relief Web*, 10 November 2019. Last Accessed 2 December 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/sdrpy-launches-saudi-yemeni-workshop-effort-paves-way-more-development-and>

<sup>33</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 3 November 2019.

<sup>34</sup> INGO Analysis, No date

<sup>35</sup> Henceforth in this report 'MoPIC' will refer to the IRG body based in Aden.

<sup>36</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 7 November 2019.

leaders such as district directors, deputy district directors and mayors, and informal leaders, such as the Aqel al Haras.

Graph 4: Project approval steps



The approval process for projects was relatively rapid and mostly procedural up to early 2019 (certainly compared to gaining approval in Sana'a). While these processes are faster than those in Sana'a, approval processes have still been delayed by poor capacity in MoPIC. During the period of fighting in 2019, gaining approval became more difficult due to the departure of senior government officials from Aden. Throughout 2019, approval has become more difficult as MoPIC has increased requirements on aid delivery agencies. There is a concern that MoPIC may be adopting DFA-style restrictions on aid agencies that will make the approval process more difficult:

- MoPIC sent a letter to aid delivery agencies threatening not to renew agreements beyond December, if agencies do not increase their 'standards of work'. However, these standards were not established.
- It is now common for sub-agreements to be sent back to the applicant agency for 'budget revision' purposes, when previously agencies used the same budget lines and faced no requests for alterations.<sup>37</sup>
- MoPIC requests that projects maintain a 30-70 percent budget balance, with operational costs not exceeding 30 percent. The same 30-70 percent budget balance already existed in DFA-controlled areas, demonstrating a tendency for the IRG to copy DFA practice. However, the interpretation of the split is different between the IRG and DFA. For the DFA, the 30 percent relates to operational costs in country, while for the IRG it relates to any cost out of country.
- MoPIC sent a letter to aid delivery agencies asking them to purchase rather than rent vehicles, with the apparent motive being that Principle Agreements stipulate that any assets acquired must be transferred back to the Government upon project completion.<sup>38</sup> This requirement also exists in DFA areas, further demonstrating the tendency of the IRG to copy DFA practice towards aid approval.

While demands have increased since August 2019, they are more related to greater capacity in MoPIC, the intent to more closely regulate aid delivery agencies, or corruption rather than being due to the IRG-STC conflict. To date, the STC has avoided directly preventing or intervening in aid project approval by the IRG. It is speculated that this is due to a desire to be seen to be a cooperative aid partner, internationally and locally.<sup>39</sup> Four factors dictate implementation of the formal process: (1) the relative strength of the MoPIC sub-office; (2) the level of militarisation and the presence of

<sup>37</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 5 February 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 6 February 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 16 October 2019

STC-aligned armed groups; (3) dynamics in district-level authorities; and (4) existence of grievances against aid delivery agencies.

- **MoPIC Sub-Office strength.** In areas where the MoPIC Sub-Office has lost influence, local authorities tend to prioritise approval from the governor over approval from the Sub-Office and, at times, want a personal written letter from the governor for proof of the approval. For example, in the governorate of Shabwa, the Governor is highly respected and the MoPIC Sub-Office is small and inefficient. In Shabwa's Ain District, local authorities did not allow an agency to operate unless presented with a written letter from the Governor himself, even though the Governor's Office and MoPIC had already coordinated with district officials.<sup>40</sup>
- **High militarisation and STC presence.** During ongoing fighting or in highly militarised areas, which are generally districts where STC-affiliated forces have a strong presence, such forces want to be kept informed of aid programming as they perceive it as a measure of respect for their *de facto* authority. For example, an aid delivery agency operating in Haban District in Shabwa in March 2019, when Shabwa Elite Forces (SEF) were in control of the district, had to coordinate with an influential SEF member before implementing the project to ensure that SEF did not perceive the aid delivery agency to be disregarding its authority.<sup>41</sup>
- **District authority dynamics.** The willingness and ability of district authorities to work with aid agencies depends on several factors. High turnover within local administration means that aid agencies are required to coordinate with different representatives, slowing down the speed of delivery. District authorities are usually strong in rural areas, due to greater tribal influence, meaning that coordination of delivery is easier. In urban areas, lower levels of social cohesion, and greater likelihood of politicisation of the district council, make it more difficult to coordinate delivery.<sup>42</sup>
- **Grievances.** It is possible for an agreement to be accepted by MoPIC but declined at the ministerial level due to local, STC, and/or government authority grievances with the project or implementing agency.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to approval through Yemeni governance mechanisms, the High Relief Committee (HRC) enables aid coordination between the IRG and Gulf states on their aid programmes.

### *Aid agency visas*

For UN staff, visas are coordinated directly with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). Visas for aid delivery agency staff are organised via MoPIC who coordinates with National Security and then the Immigration Office in Aden. Afterwards, the Immigration Office distributes the visa to MoPIC who is responsible for fording it to the relevant staff member. During the August 2019 fighting, this process was interrupted as the Ministry of Interior temporarily closed the Immigration Office in protest at the STC takeover of governance institutions in Aden. As a result, visas were sent to embassies outside of Yemen instead of to the Aden Immigration Office; most commonly to those

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<sup>40</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 6 February 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 3 February 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Male, INGO, Senior Management, 20 November 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Male, INGO, Senior Management, 20 November 2019.

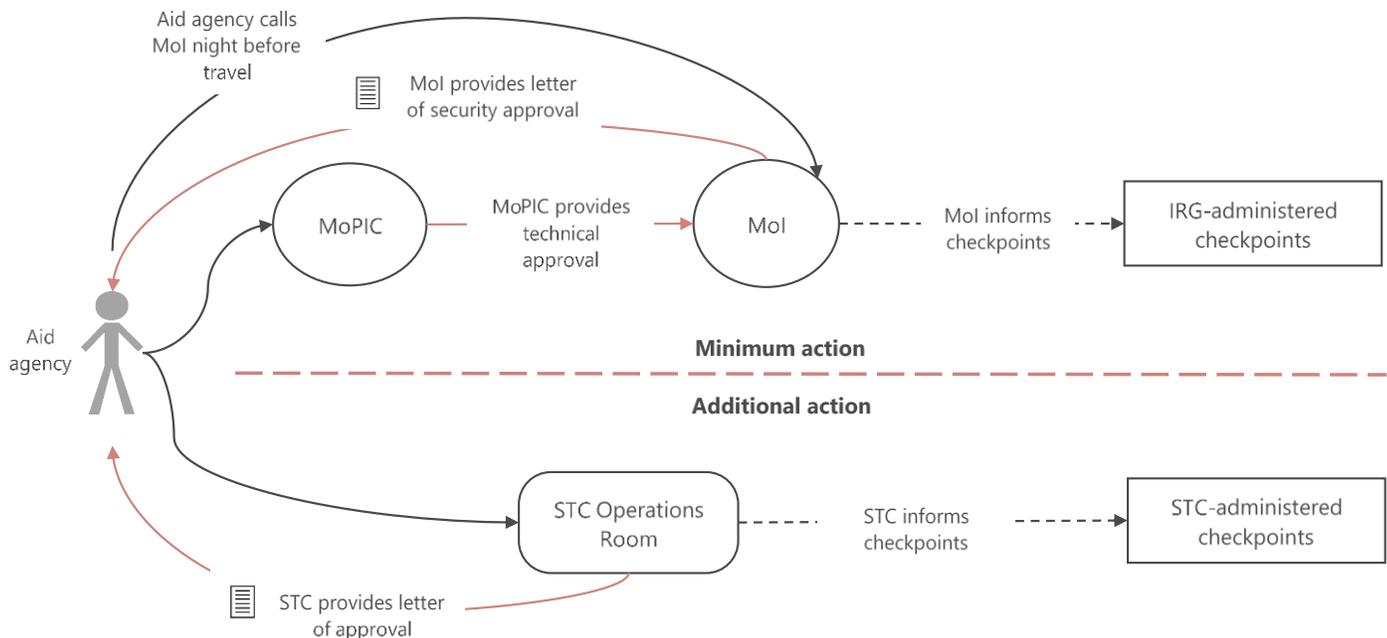
in Amman and Cairo.<sup>44</sup> The Immigration Office is currently fully functioning with the process taking approximately a month, though delays are common.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.2.2 Travel approval

Separate from project approvals, aid delivery agencies are required to either inform MoPIC of their travel patterns or obtain approval for travel from both MoPIC and the MoI. Individual Yemeni staff of aid delivery agencies, not transporting aid goods, are only required to inform MoPIC of their travel plans, although on occasions Yemeni staff may not do so in order to maintain a low profile. Travel approvals are required for international staff that intend to travel outside Aden or for the transport of aid goods. In addition, aid delivery agencies might also liaise with the SLC on their routes and travel plans in order to ensure 'deconfliction', although this is more prevalent for movement in northern areas of the country.

Travel requests are submitted to MoPIC for technical approval against the agency's purpose as set out in its Principal Agreement, and project sub-agreement. If MoPIC provides technical approval, it then requests security clearance from the MoI. Alternatively, approval can be gained from the National Security Command and Control Room (NSCR). If the MoI/NSCR provides security clearance, it then informs relevant checkpoints and provides an approval letter to MoPIC, which then forwards it to the relevant agency. The relevant agency is required to call the MoI before departure to ensure its approval is still valid.

Graph 5: Travel approval – minimum and additional actions



<sup>44</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 13 November 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Male, INGO, Senior Management, 10 February 2020.

MoPIC/Mol approval is the minimum requirement for movement. In areas dominated by STC-aligned armed groups, or contested between STC and IRG, aid delivery agencies are also required to coordinate with relevant STC Operations Rooms. STC Operations Rooms also inform the checkpoints they manage and provide a travel approval to the relevant agency. In Aden, Lahj, and Southern Hadramawt, informal travel approvals granted by STC Operations Rooms are more important than MoPIC/Mol approvals, as STC-affiliated forces currently control the majority of the checkpoints in these governorates.<sup>46</sup> By contracts, in parts of Abyan, northern Hadramawt, and Shabwa, only access permits distributed by IRG are required at checkpoints.<sup>47</sup> While STC Operations Room approvals are essential, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) advises aid agencies not to organise formal meetings with the STC as it would negatively impact relations with IRG, who would perceive formal interactions as side-lining their authority.<sup>48</sup>

Delays at checkpoints are generally context-specific and unsystematic. For example, the SBF has denied travel if the destination is considered a high security zone, to media missions, and when an aid delivery agency is believed to be Islah-affiliated or 'northern'.<sup>49</sup> Such problems are allegedly easily negotiable through bribes or by contacting influential tribal members, governors, or respected military and political figures in the STC in that particular governorate.<sup>50</sup> STC-aligned groups have previously detained vehicles if: (1) their Operations Room was not notified about the movement in advance; and (2) no initial formal permission has been provided by the Mol. Checkpoints and restrictions on movement have had a substantial impact on timely aid delivery. This is especially the case in Aden, which has seen an increase in SBF checkpoints. HEF is generally felt to play a more facilitatory role for the movement of aid agency staff and goods.

### *Operations Rooms and Evacuation and Humanitarian Operations Room (EHOC)*

Three types of Operations Rooms (Amiliyat al Markeziah) exist in southern Yemen – SLC, STC-affiliated and IRG. Each Operations Room is tasked with coordinating military movements of forces under their control. The SLC Operations Room, headquartered in al Bureiq District in Aden, is linked to the headquarters in Riyadh. The SLC maintains at least one Operations Room in each of the five governorates covered by this analysis (Abyan, Aden, Hadramawt, Lahj, and Shabwa). Prior to August 2019, UAE representatives dominated some of the Operations Rooms, for example, in Aden, Lahj, Shabwa, and southern Hadramawt. Due to the security provisions in the RA, Operations Rooms are currently mostly staffed by KSA officials. At the time of writing, UAE commanders are allegedly only present in the Operations Rooms in Belhaf Station in Shabwa and Mukalla, southern Hadramawt.<sup>51</sup>

STC-affiliated and IRG Operations Rooms are present in each of the five governorates covered by this analysis. As well as coordinating military movements, these Operations Rooms also distribute access permits. As noted above, access permits distributed by these Operations Rooms vary in

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<sup>46</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 3 November 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 3 November 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Male, UN, Program Staff, 7 December 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 8 December 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 20 October 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 5 February 2020.

legitimacy depending on whether checkpoints in the governorate are mostly controlled by STC-affiliated forces or IRG.

In those cases when aid delivery agencies believe it is important to 'deconflict' their travel, they will inform the EHOc based in Riyadh. EHOc acts as a deconfliction mechanism to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian buildings, personnel, equipment, and activities in areas where the SLC has military operations. Aid delivery agencies are required to send a detailed route of their movement with attached pictures of their vehicles to OCHA. OCHA coordinates with EHOc for movement approval. Coordination with STC Operations Rooms is not necessary for deconfliction.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Male, UN, Senior Management, 18 November 2019.

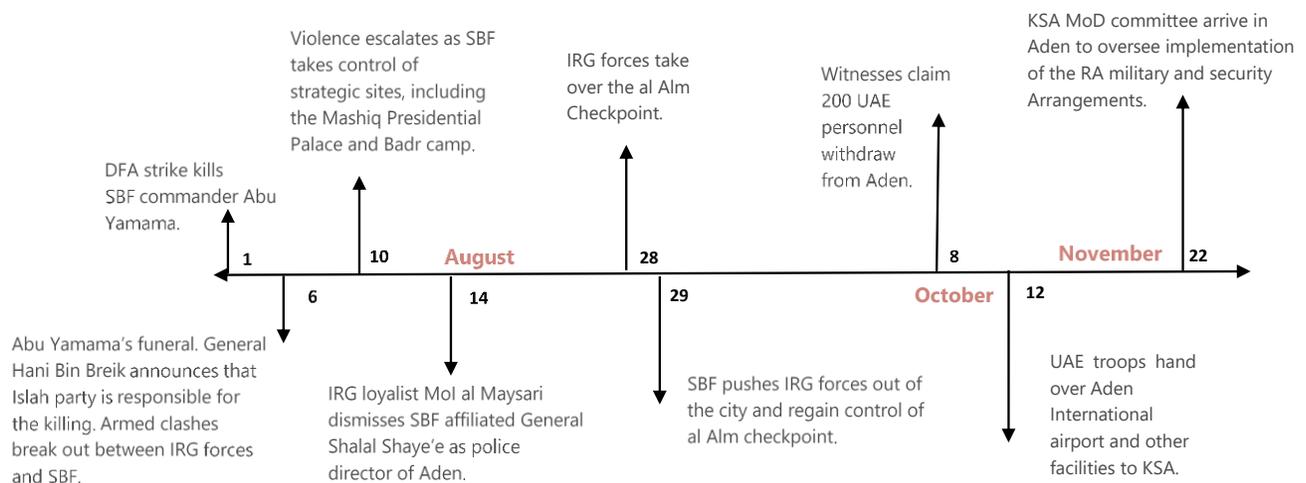
## 2. Conflict Dynamics in Aden

This section provides an analysis of local conflict dynamics in Aden Governorate. It explores how the IRG-STC conflict has manifested in Aden in terms of social dynamics (what community tensions does it tap into and how are communities affiliated?), political dynamics (how do local decision-makers relate to the political parties in the IRG-STC conflict?), security dynamics (who manages security and what restrictions are placed on movement?) and economic dynamics (what local resources are being competed over by IRG and STC-aligned individuals and groups?).

Aden Governorate is placed strategically on the Red Sea, hosting one of Yemen’s main ports, an international airport, and the major oil refinery. Aden was named the de-facto capital of Yemen by the IRG in 2015. Since then, Aden has been the seat of the Yemeni Government, hosting the presidential palace, ministerial buildings, and the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY). As the DFA-IRG war has progressed, Aden has become essential for the transport of commercial goods and humanitarian assistance into the country.<sup>53</sup>

As host to IRG institutions, Aden was at the epicentre of the 2019 conflict as IRG and STC-aligned groups clashed to control government buildings. The most significant events in Aden during the conflict are captured below in Graph 6.

Graph 6: Timeline of Conflict Events in Aden



### 2.1 Social dynamics

#### 2.1.1 Community stability and public support

Table 1 below provides an analysis of each district in Aden in terms of the impact of the 2019 conflict and present levels of stability.

<sup>53</sup> Abdel Kareem Al-Arhabi, Aden: Commercial Capital of Yemen. *World Bank*, No Date. Last Accessed 13 February 2020. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLED/Resources/AdenCDS100108.pdf>.

Table 1: Breakdown of the Conflict's Impact by District

The table uses a simple three step grading to judge the impact of the 2019 conflict on each area and the level of stability at the time of analysis:

- Green: Low impact or high stability.
- Amber: Medium impact or medium stability.
- Red: High impact or low stability.



Area/Rating	Description	Community composition and affiliation	Conflict history and impact
al Bureiqa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commercial area.</li> <li>▪ Port area for oil refinery.</li> <li>▪ Aden Oil refinery.</li> <li>▪ Al Jala and Raas Abbas military camps.</li> <li>▪ SLC and SBF Operations Rooms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ STC enjoy the most support.</li> <li>▪ Aden Refinery staff mostly supportive of Islah/IRG.</li> <li>▪ Hosts Abyan IDPs who are mostly supportive of Islah/IRG.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Location of DFA assassination of senior SBF commander, Abu al Yamama, which triggered the August conflict.</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure damage in 2019.</li> <li>▪ Some competition over oil industry. SBF has allegedly taken control of some oil processing tanks inside the refinery.</li> <li>▪ Attacks on SBF personnel.</li> <li>▪ SBF raid alleged Islah groups.</li> <li>▪ Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
Impact rating: Medium			
Stability rating: Medium			
Dar Saad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Residential area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High population of IDPs, Muhamasheen (Basateen), and 'northerners.'</li> <li>▪ Previous stronghold for IRG/Ali Mohsen supporters.</li> <li>▪ Present community affiliation is mixed, though mostly supportive the STC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Security is deteriorating with little attention from local police. Petty crime remains high.</li> <li>▪ Attacks on SBF personnel.</li> <li>▪ SBF raid alleged Islah groups.</li> <li>▪ Susceptible to AQAP attacks.</li> <li>▪ Service provision worsened since August 2019. Sewage leaks on public roads.</li> </ul>
Impact rating: Medium			
Stability rating: Low			

Khormaksar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aden international airport.</li> <li>Khormaksar power plant.</li> <li>Jabal Hadeed and Badr military camps.</li> <li>Special Security Forces, split between IRG and STC sections.</li> <li>Majority of aid delivery agencies operating in southern Yemen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community support varies, though generally higher levels of support for IRG.</li> <li>Support for Islah is primarily among IDPs who moved to area from other parts of Aden after August 2019.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frontline in August 2019.</li> <li>Infrastructure damage in 2019.</li> <li>SBF raid alleged Islah groups.</li> <li>Attacks on SBF, often targeting Badr military camp. Potential for SBF to respond with force.</li> <li>Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
<i>Impact rating:</i> High			
<i>Stability rating:</i> Medium			
Kraiter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercial area.</li> <li>Seat of the Yemeni government in Aden.</li> <li>Mashiq Presidential Palace</li> <li>IRG offices (at stadium).</li> <li>CBY.</li> <li>Al Sahreej water tank.</li> <li>Waterfront recreational area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse population with a poorer demographic.</li> <li>Muhamasheen live on the outskirts of the district.</li> <li>Large IDP concentration.</li> <li>High level of STC support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frontline in August 2019, with street fighting and shelling around Aden's main institutions and governmental buildings.</li> <li>During the conflict, UAE and KSA both conducted airstrikes targeting the IRG- and STC-aligned groups (respectively).</li> <li>High levels of damage which caused significant displacement.</li> <li>Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
<i>Impact rating:</i> High			
<i>Stability rating:</i> Medium			
al Mansoura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercial area.</li> <li>Transport/road route to the north.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed community with high presence of northern businessmen, primarily from Taiz, Ibb, and Hodeida. 'Northerners' population was greater before 2015.</li> <li>Prior to 2015, support varied between Hadi, Hiraki/STC, and Islah.</li> <li>High level of Islah support after 2015.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>STC takeover began prior to 2019, as influential Islah individuals and groups pushed out.</li> <li>Security situation has deteriorated since August 2019 with frequent confrontations between STC and Islah.</li> <li>High levels of crime.</li> <li>Susceptible to AQAP attacks.</li> <li>Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
<i>Impact rating:</i> Medium			
<i>Stability rating:</i> Low			

al Mualla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A mix of urban, coastal, and mountainous areas.</li> <li>▪ Port area for humanitarian and commercial goods.</li> <li>▪ Transport/road route to the north.</li> <li>▪ July 20 and 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade army camps.</li> <li>▪ Allegedly high levels of illegal property ownership among Islah supporters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Substantial IDP community, mostly comprised of fighters from Abyan, Taiz, Hodeida, and Ibb. Relocation to area encouraged by Vice President Mohsen.</li> <li>▪ During the August 2019 conflict, many Islah supporters fled the district. Islah supporters who remain mainly reside in the surrounding mountains.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2019 clashes occurred mostly in neighbourhoods populated by Islah.</li> <li>▪ In 2019, STC took control of the port and checkpoints on the main road.</li> <li>▪ Port presently under SLC Operations Room control.</li> <li>▪ Remains a high-risk area due to perceived presence of Islah supporters.</li> </ul>
Impact rating: Low			
Stability rating: Low			
al Sheikh Othman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mainly residential area populated by poorer families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Home to rural migrants from Abyan, Lahj, and Taiz.</li> <li>▪ High population of ‘northerners.’</li> <li>▪ High levels of integrated Muhamasheen (Basateen).</li> <li>▪ IDPs from coastal areas of Aden (including Kraiter), displaced during August 2019 conflict.</li> <li>▪ Mixed support for IRG, STC, and Islah; although higher levels of support for IRG than other districts due to the presence of the al Mudhar brigade.</li> <li>▪ Some Muhamasheen paid by SBF to fight against IRG in August 2019.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Frontline in August 2019.</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure damage in 2019.</li> <li>▪ Different from other districts due to presence of al-Mudhar Brigade, which takes a balanced position between IRG and STC.</li> <li>▪ High levels of crime.</li> <li>▪ Attacks on SBF personnel.</li> <li>▪ SBF raid alleged Islah groups.</li> <li>▪ Susceptible to AQAP attacks.</li> <li>▪ Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
Impact rating: High			
Stability rating: Low			
al Tuwahi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commercial area.</li> <li>▪ Port and naval base.</li> <li>▪ 4<sup>th</sup> Military Zone command.</li> <li>▪ Hosts senior STC officials such as Aiderous Zubaidi and Hani bin Breik.</li> <li>▪ Allegations of STC illegal takeover of property.</li> <li>▪ CBY reserves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High IDP population from al Dhale’e.</li> <li>▪ Support for the STC is localised due to the high population of IDPs from al Dhale’e.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure damage from 2015.</li> <li>▪ Fighting was limited in 2019 due to strong SBF presence.</li> <li>▪ Hosts the most difficult checkpoints in Aden.</li> <li>▪ Increased SBF checkpoints/military personnel restricts movement.</li> </ul>
Impact rating: Low			
Stability rating: High			

Table 1 provides an indication of the level of support experienced by the STC and IRG, as well as by Islah, across Aden's districts. While STC support is most widespread, the IRG still maintains significant levels of public support in Khormaksar and al Sheikh Othman. Islah support is most pronounced in al Mansoura and al Mualla, and among IDPs in Khormaksar and al Dhale'e. From August 2019, some Islah supporters have been internally displaced in Aden, most significantly from al Mualla to Khormaksar. The districts most likely to support AQAP are Mansoura, al Sheikh Othman, and Dar Saad because of a lack of security, and geographic proximity to Zinjibar in Abyan (a former AQAP stronghold).<sup>54</sup>

Aden residents' support is informed by: (1) recent experiences of violence (e.g., STC violence against presumed Islah supporters); (2) individual, communal, or tribal relations (e.g., support from the IDP community in al Mualla for Vice President Mohsen); (3) who is in power and the need to survive (e.g., shifting support from some community groups from IRG to STC due to their control on the ground); and (4) the quality of services and regularity of public sector payments. The last point is proving to be most important for public support. While the delivery of services has improved since August 2019, recurring problems such as electricity cut-offs, water shortages, and sewage leaks fuel anger towards the IRG and increase STC support.<sup>55</sup> On this issue it is important to track the 'blame game' on service delivery and the target of public protests:

- **Blame game.** Both the STC and IRG use public statements and the media to blame each other for poor service delivery. IRG authorities accuse the STC of refusing to fulfil local governance duties despite having *de facto* control over Aden, while STC authorities say that these problems were present even before the conflict and therefore prove the IRG's inability to govern effectively.<sup>56</sup> The fact that the RA does not specify which authority should take responsibility over service provision feeds the 'blame game'.
- **Public Protests.** Public protests at poor services and non-payment public salaries are common in Aden. For example, residents that are not overt STC supporters frequently gather in al Mualla in front of the al Ma'shiq palace and CBY demanding the payment of salaries and benefits, which reportedly have not been paid for the past four months. In December, military medics demonstrated over their unpaid salaries which they have not received for 10 months.<sup>57</sup> STC will likely garner further support in Aden as a result of IRG inability to pay salaries, even though they lack the capacity to pay public wages themselves.

### 2.1.2 Inter-group conflict dynamics

Generally, aid delivery agencies should be aware of the following intergroup conflict dynamics when planning their aid.

- **SBF vs. Islah-supporting constituencies.** Areas which are perceived to host significant Islah-supporting constituencies have been targeted by SBF anti-Islah operations. Such raids are particularly evident in al Bureiqa, al Mansoura, Khormaksar, al Sheikh Othman, and Dar Saad. There is a risk of increased action if attacks on SBF continue or intensify, especially in

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<sup>54</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 18 November 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 18 November 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 18 November 2019.

<sup>57</sup> INGO Analysis Report, December 2019.

Khormaksar, with the potential to create further community animosity towards the SBF. There are also risks of community action against the SBF, as in Dar Saad, where youth groups have clashed with the SBF during attempts to arrest residents. Experience from other contexts demonstrates that such actions between armed groups and community groups are likely to spiral into increasing use of violence.

- **'Northerners' vs. Adenis.** Aden is a relatively diverse city, home to families from across Yemen, including 'northerners'. During the August 2019 fighting, 'northerners' faced some harassment and physical assault, forced closure of businesses or prohibitive informal taxation, arrest, displacement out of Aden, and restrictions on travel by the SBF. Their situation has subsequently improved. For example, at the time of writing, 'northerners' are more able to travel freely in and out of Aden.<sup>58</sup> Many 'northerners' are still hesitant to travel to parts of Aden with high SBF presence (e.g., al Tuwahi) and some northern families have relocated from al Mansoura to al Mualla or Khormaksar, as such districts are close to the airport and roads leaving Aden.<sup>59</sup> The loosening of restrictions on Yemenis from northern governorates seems due in part to public pressure following increased market prices.
- **IDPs vs. Adenis.** Most of Aden's IDPs reside in Dar Saad, al Tuwahi, al Sheikh Othman, and Kraiter. There are no official camps in Aden so IDPs tend to live in public or private housing, or on donated private lands. Such areas usually receive weaker public services than other parts of the Governorate. The August 2019 conflict did not affect IDPs' situation substantially, but rather compounded existing vulnerabilities.<sup>60</sup> IDPs-Adenis relationships can be tense due to Adenis' frustrations at the perceived greater ability of IDPs to access assistance. For example, distribution of cash assistance and food baskets to IDPs in Dar Saad has led to a negative response from Adenis, who believe they do not have access to similar assistance despite living in near identical conditions.<sup>61</sup>
- **Muhamasheen vs. Adenis.** Even though discrimination against Muhamasheen is less intense in Aden than in other parts of Yemen, it is still prevalent.<sup>62</sup> There is some evidence of manipulation of Muhamasheen-Adenis tensions by the IRG and STC. Before August 2019, IRG appointed Muhamasheen to positions in local civilian and security authorities (e.g., the Transportation Brigade Presidential Guard in Dar Saad). In August 2019, the SBF allegedly Muhamasheen to fight against IRG-aligned armed groups. Muhamasheens' decision-making on who to support may be based on a calculation on who is best able to provide them with greater security and livelihoods.<sup>63</sup>
- **Poorer vs. more affluent residents.** There is a significant discrepancy in levels of income and access to services across Aden's districts. Those areas which have lower income are also most likely to be anti-STC, to experience anti-Islah raids and be the focus of attempted assassinations of SBF personnel (e.g., Dar Saad, al Bureiqa, and al Sheikh Othman). More affluent areas are more likely to host strong support for the STC and have experienced

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<sup>58</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 4 September 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 17 January 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Sana'a Center: A Gendered Crisis: Understanding the Experiences of Yemen's War report, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Male, UN, Program Staff, 14 December 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Aisha Al-Warraq, "The Historic and Systematic Marginalisation of the Muhamasheen Community", *Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, 4 June 2019. Last Accessed 17 February, 2020: <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/7490>.

<sup>63</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 27 October 2019.

additional security measures (e.g., al Tuwahi) that make some community groups apprehensive of living or travelling there (e.g., 'northerners').

## 2.2 Political dynamics

It is more difficult to distinguish between local decision-makers and the conflict parties in Aden than for other governorates covered in this set of analyses. This is because Aden is host to the IRG, and political leaders tend to also play a governing role for Aden. The tension between national- and governorate-level authorities is evident in the competition between national and local branches of the same ministries. For example, there are tensions between the MoPIC Head Office and Aden MoPIC Sub-Office over who has the leading authority on approval of sub-agreements.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, the STC's political influence in Aden has increased since August 2019, while that of the IRG has waned. There has also been an ongoing and successful STC campaign against Islah's political influence in the governorate since at least 2017. AQAP has less of a presence in Aden compared to other southern Yemeni governorates, as the group mainly thrives in rural areas. The influence of the conflict parties at the different levels of local decision-making in Aden is outlined in Table 2:

Table 2: Conflict Parties' Influence

National IRG agencies	Senior government officials tend to be IRG loyalists (e.g. senior officials in MoPIC are allegedly key IRG loyalist). <sup>65</sup> However, most of these officials left Aden during the fighting (e.g., the Minister of Interior relocated to KSA and then Shabwa), or refused to work in protest at STC actions. As such, STC mechanisms stepped in to take on IRG functions. <sup>66</sup>
Aden branches offices of IRG agencies	Political affiliation among staff in Aden branches of IRG agencies is split between the IRG and STC, although support for STC may be more prevalent. Indeed, competition between the IRG and STC is playing out in rivalries between IRG agencies and their Aden branch offices. For example, senior officials in the Aden MoPIC Sub-Office claim to be supportive of the STC, in contrast to the perceived allegiance of senior MoPIC HQ officials to the IRG. <sup>67</sup>
Governorate	The present governor is a Hadi appointee. However, there is no functioning governorate administration in Aden, with the last governor staying in the city no longer than a couple of months. <sup>68</sup> Appointment of a new governor is an important part of the RA.
District and sub-district authorities	District and sub-district level public officials have demonstrated a great deal of fluidity in their political allegiance. Local authorities previously affiliated to IRG switched loyalties to the STC after August 2019. Sub-district officials are less explicit about their political affiliations than district officials, and many alleged IRG-affiliated sub-district officials stayed in their posts after August. <sup>69</sup>
Civil society	Civil society in Aden has been dominated by CSOs that are accused of being affiliated to Islah. This led to an STC crackdown on presumed Islah-affiliated CSOs after August 2019 (although such actions had started prior to the conflict), with actions to prevent such CSOs from entering Aden and a media statement that Islah-affiliated CSOs are no longer permitted to

<sup>64</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 6 December 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 14 December 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 30 November 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Male, UN, Program Staff, 3 November 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 28 October 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 12 November 2019.

	operate in Aden. <sup>70</sup> As a consequence, presumed Islah-affiliated CSOs started to downplay and even deny affiliations. <sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Islah is still thought to be influential among CSOs.
<b>Informal individual leaders</b>	There is no discernable picture of allegiance among informal individual leaders. However, such leaders are themselves generally influential locally, and are widely trusted following the relative collapse of formal governance in Aden after 2015. For example, it is widely thought that Aqel al Haras are presently the most effective local government figures. <sup>72</sup>

## 2.3 Security dynamics

### 2.3.1 Security presence

The local security representatives of the conflict parties are outlined in Table 3.

*Table 3: Conflict parties' local security representatives*

<b>IRG</b>	<p><b>Presidential Protection Forces (PPF)</b> Falling under the MoD, PPF protects IRG strongholds in Aden, Shabwa, and Abyan. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> brigades are stationed in Aden. The PPF includes both formal military personnel and tribal fighters (mainly from Abyan). These forces, in cooperation with Hadi loyalist tribal members, were integral in the fight against STC-affiliated forces in August.<sup>73</sup></p> <p><b>National Yemeni Army</b> The Yemeni Army is mainly deployed in northern governorates to fight DFA-aligned groups, but has recently become involved in fighting STC-affiliated forces in Aden.</p>
<b>STC</b>	<p><b>Security Belt Forces (SBF)</b> The SBF is the main armed group aligned with the STC in Aden. The SBF is mostly comprised of fighters from the Yafei Tribal Confederation. The UAE previously provided extensive support to train and develop the forces, including the payment of SBF salaries. Following the RA, the SBF was formally absorbed under the MoD with SBF salary payments becoming the responsibility of the IRG. The SBF accuses the IRG of renegeing on this commitment.<sup>74</sup></p>
<b>Islah</b>	<p>Islah does not maintain a separate armed group in Aden. However, the SBF accused the National Yemeni Army of being dominated by Islah Fighters.<sup>75</sup> Senior figures in the MoD and National Yemeni Army are thought to be influential in Islah</p>
<b>AQAP</b>	<p>Before August, AQAP concentrated their attacks in Aden on the Hadi government and local security personnel. Since August 2019, AQAP has started to target SBF personnel as a means of challenging their control in the Governorate.<sup>76</sup> The most likely targets for AQAP are al Mansoura, al Sheikh Othman, and Dar Saad, due to the potentially higher levels of public support in these areas (see above).</p>

Up until the signing of the RA in November, the most visible and influential armed group in Aden was the SBF.<sup>77</sup> Following the RA, there has been some return of IRG-aligned groups to the Governorate. This has created a more tense security situation as both forces are now in proximity

<sup>70</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 28 November 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Male, UN, Senior Management, 18 November 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Female, Program Staff, 12 November 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 5 February 2020.

<sup>74</sup> INGO Analysis, 12 December 2019.

<sup>75</sup> After Aden: Navigating Yemen's New Political Landscape. Aden/New York/Brussels: Crisis Group, 2019. Last Accessed 12 February 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/071-after-aden-navigating-yemens-new-political-landscape>.

<sup>76</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 10 November 2019.

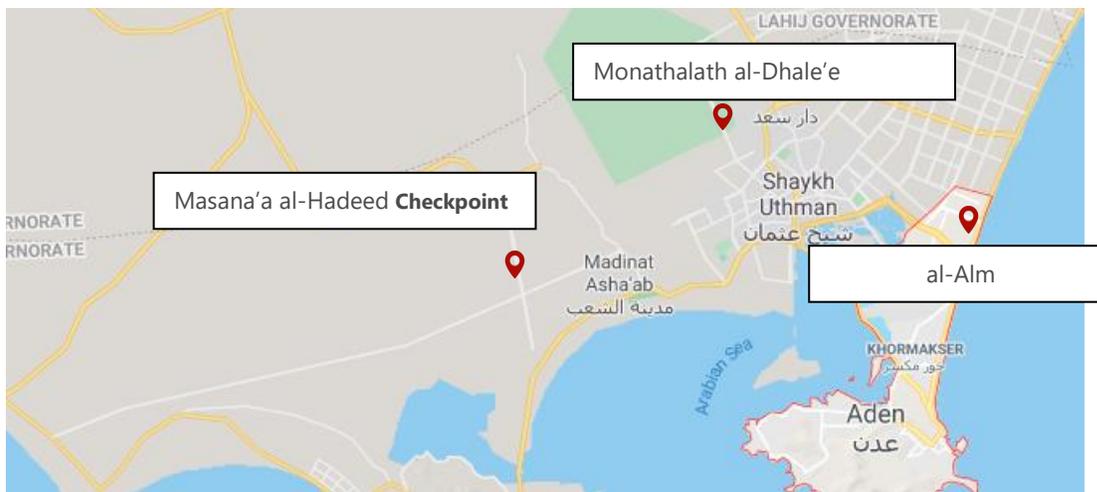
<sup>77</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 28 November 2019.

with each other, making the possibility of a direct military confrontation more likely.<sup>78</sup> Some analysts believe that the IRG will use the RA as an opportunity to reduce the SBF's influence in Aden, by incrementally increasing the IRG's military presence and through attempts to take over checkpoints.

### 2.3.2 Control of movement

There is a mixed picture regarding movement into and inside Aden. There has been a notable improvement of access to the Governorate since the period of fighting, when only the Motalath al Dhale'e checkpoint was open. This is demonstrated by the fact that 'northerners' have been able to move to and from the city relatively unimpeded. Easing of restrictions into Aden may be partly because of the takeover by the SBF of the three main checkpoints for accessing the Governorate: (1) Masna'a al-Hadeed (into Lahj); (2) Motalath al Dhale'e (into Lahj); and (3) al-Alm (into Abyan).

Map 2: Main checkpoints to access Aden Governorate<sup>79</sup>



Al-Alm and Masna'a al-Hadeed are the most strategically important checkpoints. Al-Alm allows for access to Abyan, Shabwa, and the southeastern governorates. Control of al-Alm means control of military movement into these contested areas. In addition, there are indications of the SBF restricting movement across al-Alm for aid delivery agencies or political representatives. Masana'a al-Hadeed checkpoint leads on to the main road to Taiz and Sana'a, and the SBF is concerned with the potential for opposition groups to use it to cross over into the governorate. As a result, this checkpoint is the most difficult to cross for ordinary Yemenis.

By contrast, movement between districts in the Governorate has become more difficult. SBF have reportedly heightened security measures in the city in the wake of attacks on its personnel, by installing new checkpoints in al Bureiqa, Khormaksar, Kraitir, al Sheikh Othman, and al Tuwahi.<sup>80</sup> In addition to these checkpoints, SBF staff have enforced new restrictions on, and approval measures for, goods moving inside the governorate. These restrictions can impact equally on aid agencies and national Yemeni businesses. For example, on 23 December 2019, SBF reportedly prevented

<sup>78</sup> INGO Analysis, January 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Copyright: Google Maps.

<sup>80</sup> INGO Analysis, November 2019.

vehicles carrying construction materials from accessing the centre of al Bureiqa without having first acquired building permits.<sup>81</sup> The result is that aid agencies have experienced an increase in vehicle detainment in the months preceding the release of this report.<sup>82</sup>

While the new checkpoints may have increased security in the Governorate, this has been at the expense of its residents' ease of movement. This has led to some groups not crossing district boundaries, or even restricting their movement inside their district. The groups most affected by restrictions on movement are 'northerners', alleged Islah-supporting constituencies, and some IDP groups. Checkpoints in al Tuwahi are considered the most difficult to cross by residents and aid agency workers.

## 2.4 Economic dynamics

Contest over economic resources has accelerated since August 2019. At the point of writing, control of economic resources by the conflict parties was mostly for personal income, rather than for garnering public support. This is demonstrated by STC moves to enhance security for the main commercial areas or key infrastructure (e.g., the Aden refinery). The main economic resources under competition are: (1) public buildings and land; (2) the port and import/export of goods; (3) checkpoints and movement of goods; (4) protection rackets and northern businesses; and (5) the oil industry.

- **Public buildings and land.** Land and property disputes are common across Yemen due to pressure on housing, the rent that can be earned from property ownership, and because property is viewed as good investment (given the lack of trust in the banking sector to protect savings). This is especially the case in Aden, given the relatively high population density and large IDP population compared to other southern governorates. SBF and other STC aligned groups are accused of taking over a range of public and private buildings for rent, especially in the commercial and port areas of al Tuwahi. Some of these buildings were previously under Islah control. Illegal property ownership among Islah supporters is presently understood to be restricted to al Mualla.
- **The port and import/export.** Aden has become the principal point for import of goods into Yemen, given the challenges with Hodeida in the north. As such, there is a good deal of opportunity to earn income or rent on port or import/export activities. For example, the Union of Heavy Transport Haulers runs a virtual monopoly over the movement of goods in the port, pushing up prices for importers.
- **Checkpoints and movement of goods.** STC, through the SBF, has taken control over the three checkpoints controlling access to Aden as well as most internal checkpoints inside the Governorate, with the exception of al Sheikh Othman where the al-Mudhar Brigade is present. In addition, as noted in the previous section, checkpoints have been strengthened around the main commercial or government areas. These checkpoints may have helped enhance stability, but they also provide a source of income for the SBF and STC. Rent collection at SBF checkpoints has increased due to the non-payment of salaries by IRG

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<sup>81</sup> INGO Analysis, January 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 12 December 2019.

- authorities, as stipulated by the RA (i.e., salaries were previously paid by UAE).<sup>83</sup> As a result, SBF has started imposing taxes and fees on commercial trucks moving in and out of Aden. Each truck reportedly has to pay YER 15,000 for entering and YER 30,000 for leaving. In the coming period, there is a risk that SBF will continue to seek alternative revenue sources, such as through additional customs fees or charging for services like security provision.<sup>84</sup> This is also likely to affect aid workers transporting assistance materials between districts who will likely face additional charges at checkpoints.
- **Protection rackets and northern businesses.** Aden is home to a range of small market traders, especially from northern governorates such as Taiz. These traders are responsible for the transport of fruit and vegetables from the north. These northern traders have been targeted by the SBF, both as a source of income through protection payments and through attempts to restrict their business. During the violent conflict, SBF barred 'northerners' from travelling into Aden, leading to a drop in the supply of fruit and vegetables and an increase in price. This led to public protests and pressure on the SBF to allow 'northerners' to travel and transport goods to Aden, resulting in a reversal of the SBF policy.<sup>85</sup>
  - **Oil industry.** STC and IRG forces clashed over control of Aden's main oil refinery, located in al Bureiqa, during the conflict period. While the oil refinery is currently non-operational, it is used as a storage facility and its control provides a means of exerting influence over fuel distribution in Aden. The oil industry in Aden is a microcosm of the wider conflict. Management of the facility is under the IRG. One business group closely aligned to the IRG maintains a monopoly over import of fuel into Aden and rents a large proportion of the refinery. This monopoly allows for manipulation of fuel prices above the market rate and significant profit.<sup>86</sup> The STC, through the SBF, provide security around the facility and are currently attempting to take over storage tankers.<sup>87</sup> It should be noted that a portion of tankers at the refinery are rented by WFP for distribution to aid agencies. During the fighting in August 2019, aid agencies were unable to access fuel commercially, so WFP took over distribution of fuel to aid agencies registered with OCHA.

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<sup>83</sup> INGO Analysis, January 2020.

<sup>84</sup> INGO Analysis, January 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 12 January 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, Negotiation and De-escalation- The Yemen review, November 2019: The Minefield of Combating Corruption in Yemen. 2019. Last Accessed 17 February 2020. <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/the-yemen-review/8519>.

<sup>87</sup> Male, UN, Senior Management, 2 November 2019.

### 3. Aid Practice in Aden

This section examines the aid environment in Aden Governorate, and the relationship between conflict dynamics and aid practice. It does this by exploring three questions: How is aid approved and authorised? How is access negotiated and ensured? How do aid agencies identify and deliver to those in need?

#### 3.1 Project approval

The table below compares the implementation of approval in Aden against the five approval steps explained in Section 1:

Step 1: MoPIC Head Office	Competition with MoPIC Sub-Office (see below).
Step 2: MoPIC Sub- Office	Aden Sub-Office has lost influence over sub-agreement approval, since the Head Office moved from Sana'a to Aden. At times, the Head Office bypasses the Sub-Office's approval stage, fuelling competition between the two offices. In part because of this tension, aid agencies encounter delays completing sub-agreement approvals. For example, the Sub-Office reportedly delays signature of sub-agreements approved by the Head Office in protest at the Sub-Office's loss of influence. Though all research participants report that the Sub-Office eventually does sign agreements, the delay extends the project approval process through extensive negotiations. <sup>88</sup>
Step 3: Ministries	<p>Aid delivery agencies avoid going through ministries as governmental bodies in Aden are seen as corrupt or ineffective.<sup>89</sup> For example, during the approval of a project to distribute personal hygiene kits to schools in Aden, the Minister of Education (MoE) required the aid delivery agency to pay for local security, despite it being deemed unnecessary by the agency in question.<sup>90</sup> The MoH is felt to be particularly ineffective. For example, aid delivery agencies experience considerable delays in receiving permission from the MoH to retrieve medical supplies from the port. While the process should take two to three days, it often takes several months.<sup>91</sup></p> <p>Aid agencies have found it is more effective to coordinate with deputy ministers, who have remained in their roles and have a good understanding of Aden, rather than ministers, who take a more political role and mostly left Aden during the fighting. The departure of ministers from Aden for extended stretches has meant that deputies have direct experience of governing Aden and have developed wider networks from being in constant communication with local authorities.<sup>92</sup> Such figures are less vocal about their political affiliations so they can operate more freely on the ground without fear of attack.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, deputy ministers seem to have higher levels of trust from Adeni residents as they live in, and are mostly from, Aden.</p>
Step 4: Governor	Governor not present or functioning.

<sup>88</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 7 November 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 19 November 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 27 October 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 30 October 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 3 November 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Male, UN, Senior Management, 15 October 2019.

<p>Step 5: Local district authorities</p>	<p>District and sub-district representatives have mostly stayed the same following August 2019, meaning there is continuity of working relationships for aid agencies. However, aid delivery agencies experience significant pressure from local authorities to 'do more' or 'provide benefit.' For example: (1) sub-district representatives vandalised the warehouse of an aid delivery agency for 'slow delivery' in al Tuwahi; (2) aid agencies in Dar Saad report being continuously overcharged by local authorities for security; and (3) the district director of al Sheikh Othman has reportedly deliberately delayed signing sub-agreements so that aid agencies pay to speed up the process.</p>
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### 3.2 Travel approval

There are different requirements for approval to travel between Aden and other governorates, compared to travel just within Aden. If moving between Aden and other governorates with a strong presence of STC-aligned armed groups, such as Lahj or al Dhale'e, SBF checkpoints will not ask for IRG-issued permits, only requiring those issued by the SBF Operations Room. By contrast, SBF checkpoints will ask for an IRG approval letter for travel to governorates with a high presence of IRG-aligned groups, such as Marib, Jawf, Shabwa, and al Bayda. In such cases, the SBF is more inclined to accept permits issued by the MoI than the NSCR. Inside Aden, only SBF travel approvals are required for movement within and between districts (potentially except for al Sheikh Othman, given the presence of the Mudhar Brigade) and aid delivery agencies report that it is unnecessary to coordinate with IRG agencies.<sup>94</sup> Aid delivery agencies report that travel within Aden is simpler than in other governorates, given the fact that SBF controls nearly all checkpoints, therefore necessitating engagement with only one actor most of the time.

Aid delivery agencies report occasional problems at SBF checkpoints, most of which are context-specific and dependent on the individual involved. Problems mostly arise when aid agencies fail to properly inform the SBF Operations Room about the type of assistance they are delivering. For example, an aid delivery agency vehicle was detained by the SBF in Khormaksar for four days until the agency communicated with the SBF Operations Room's senior official.

Coordination with the SBF Operations Rooms is relatively informal. If the aid agency has good working relations with officials in the STC, aid workers can inform the SBF directly by sending a text message or going in person to the SBF Operations Room.<sup>95</sup> The SBF Operations Room's senior official is widely known and well-connected to local officials in Aden, and aid agencies regularly coordinate with him, instead of the MoPIC Sub-Office or Governorate, to be put in touch with district directors.

### 3.3 Aid delivery

#### 3.3.1 Beneficiary selection and conflict management

Most aid agencies operating in Aden utilise a common system to select and finalise lists of beneficiaries. For example, DIFAC, made up of district directors and MoPIC representatives and trained in beneficiary criteria by WFP, plays a leading role in identifying food aid beneficiaries. This Committee reviews the initial beneficiary list developed by a Sub-District Food Assistance

<sup>94</sup> Male, UN, Program Staff, 16 November 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 13 November 2019.

Committee (SUFAC) made up of community leaders, Aqel al Haras, religious leaders, and youth and women representatives. Following the initial list creation by SUFAC, the beneficiary list then passes to DIFAC for review, beyond which point sub-district leaders cannot access the list. Receipt of assistance is in part managed by a biometric system. This system was developed by several aid agencies in coordination with Aden district directors in order to ensure comprehensive input from authorities and minimise the risk of names being added to the lists without proper assessment. According to most research participants, the method is generally successful for beneficiary registration and in minimising conflict.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, beneficiary lists are still a significant source of conflict inside Aden, with cash and food programmes most likely to increase tensions. The following types of conflict were described as most prevalent.

- **Public-aid agencies.** Perceptions of unfair aid distribution have created public distrust of aid agencies. Residents excluded from beneficiary lists have staged attacks on International Non-Governmental Organisations' (INGO) offices in Khormaksar and Kraiter.
- **DIFAC-SUFAC tensions.** Tensions between DIFAC and SUFAC manifest in two ways. Firstly, there is dispute over who is included in lists. Local leaders in SUFACs often accuse DIFACs of removing names that they have inserted. In contrast DIFACs accuse local leaders in SUFACs of manipulating lists in order to increase assistance to their area. For example, several research participants reported that Aqel al Haras in Khormaksar falsely label residents as IDPs to increase the quantity of aid coming into their neighbourhoods.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, SUFAC and DIFAC often disagree on the criteria established by the DIFAC, such as the percentage of displaced people in their district and determination of 'displacement' itself. These tensions are in part because SUFAC representatives believe they should have greater authority on beneficiary selection, given their proximity and relationships with communities and their needs.<sup>98</sup>
- **Tensions between individuals.** There are complaints over multiple registrations of individuals on beneficiary lists. Whether or not it is done intentionally, adding of names to these lists often occurs at the SUFAC-level, where SUFAC representatives may add family members or friends. Research participants say that, at times, individuals accidentally register themselves in different districts or sub-districts, or an individual submits a family member under a different last name, causing SUFAC to register the individuals separately.<sup>99</sup>
- **Tensions with the police.** The biometric system is perceived negatively by local police, who have complained that the system interferes with the sovereignty of residents. Research participants suggest that this opposition is because the mechanism reduces opportunities for corruption and gives too much authority to aid agencies instead of to local officials.<sup>100</sup>

If such conflicts emerge: (1) SUFAC members are empowered to resolve disputes between aid agencies and community members not included on beneficiary lists;<sup>101</sup> and (2) SUFAC

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<sup>96</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff 7 November 2019; Male, INGO, Program Staff, 30 October 2019; Male INGO, Program Staff, 3 November 2019; Female, INGO, Program Staff, 27 October 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 13 January 2020.

<sup>98</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 7 November 2019; Male, INGO, Program Staff, 28 October 2019; Female, INGO, Program Staff, 27 October 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 27 December 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Female, INGO, Program Staff, 28 October 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 15 December 2019.

representatives or the MoPIC Aden Sub-Office provide security. An additional layer of conflict management is being experimented with using a voucher system delivered through local businessmen. These businessmen provide aid only to individuals holding vouchers provided by aid agencies. Working with these businessmen is believed to reduce the risk of aid agencies being targeted by residents excluded from the list, as the selected business leaders are thought to be highly respected and influential locally.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.3.2 Delivery mechanisms

During the August 2019 conflict, humanitarian operations halted for a week, as most agencies evacuated or limited the presence of their staff in Aden. During the conflict period, most aid agencies were unable to deliver humanitarian assistance to Kraiter, al Mualla, Khormaksar, and al Mansoura due to road closures. Since the fighting also paused international aid worker entry into Aden, agencies significantly increased their reliance on downstream partners and local organisations.<sup>103</sup> While this confers greater autonomy over assistance delivery to local actors, it can also heighten security concerns for local staff, raise issues about duty of care for partners, and potentially increase risks of fraud and diversion. As the movement of international aid staff is still somewhat restricted, reliance on local partners is likely to continue.

If fighting erupts again, it is likely that restrictions on access to markets and services, and disruptions at the airport and port would significantly impact imports of humanitarian goods and travel for both humanitarian staff and Yemeni citizens seeking medical attention outside Aden. Most aid agencies are based in Khormaksar, as the district is close to the airport and a port, providing easy access to UN flights and boats to Djibouti, if evacuation becomes necessary. Research participants report that some agencies have relocated to al Mansoura due to Khormaksar's potential to be the focus of violence if conflict resumes, and because of the lower rents and greater space available in al Mansoura.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Male, UN, Program Staff, 9 November 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 15 November 2019.

<sup>104</sup> Male, INGO, Program Staff, 7 November 2019.



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**Front Cover Picture: Aden, February 2018.**