



Security Council

Distr.: General
15 June 2020
English
Original: French

Letter dated 15 June 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In its resolution [2505 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested me to present a further review of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) at least one month before its mandate is due to expire on 15 July 2020. The Mission, established pursuant to paragraph 1 of resolution [2452 \(2019\)](#), is designed to support the implementation of the Agreement on the City of Hudaydah and the Ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ra's Isa, as set out in the Stockholm Agreement ([S/2018/1134](#), annex).

Eighteen months after the signing of the Agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Houthi movement (which is also known as Ansar Allah) in Sweden and the subsequent establishment of UNMHA, the situation in Hudaydah continues to be important in efforts to address the conflict in Yemen, notwithstanding the changing dynamics of the conflict at the national level. Following initial progress in enhancing the ceasefire in Hudaydah governorate and progress on the demilitarization of the city, implementation of the Agreement has been severely hampered over the past four months by political and military events elsewhere in Yemen, a crisis of confidence within the Redeployment Coordination Committee and operational constraints imposed by coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Redeployment Coordination Committee

Since my previous review of UNMHA dated 14 October 2019 ([S/2019/823](#)), the relative stabilization of the military situation in Hudaydah governorate has enabled the Redeployment Coordination Committee to reopen the dialogue on the redeployment of forces. On the basis of the outcomes of its seventh meeting, held in December 2019, the Committee focused on ways to consolidate the ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanism, including through the deployment of United Nations monitors along the front lines. The two parties agreed to adopt interim measures, including the development of a road map on the opening of humanitarian access routes in the governorate, and discussed options for the disengagement of forces, although execution of the redeployment of forces remains at a stalemate over the issue of local security forces.

In response to the shooting incident of 11 March 2020,¹ the Government of Yemen withdrew its liaison officers from the ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanism and suspended its participation in the Committee.² UNMHA proposed a

¹ A liaison officer of the Government of Yemen was injured as a result and died on 17 April 2020.

² See [S/2020/207](#).



tripartite investigation of the shooting, but the Houthi movement rejected this proposal owing to operational concerns. The joint work of the Committee and its accompanying mechanisms has since been disrupted. UNMHA, however, has maintained direct channels of communication with the heads of delegations to the Committee, and continues to discuss ongoing issues with them bilaterally, including on ways to adjust the Committee's working modalities. In a note verbale dated 19 April 2020, the Government of Yemen set the following conditions for resuming its participation in the Committee: (a) deployment of United Nations monitors at the observation posts; (b) opening of secured humanitarian access routes; (c) relocation of UNMHA headquarters to a neutral location (i.e. not situated within territory under the exclusive control of one party); and (d) conduct of an investigation into the shooting incident of 11 March. The concerns raised by the Government of Yemen in the document are not new and have been discussed on several occasions within the Committee, where the issues of the deployment of United Nations monitors and the opening of humanitarian access routes were previously addressed collectively.

The temporary locating of UNMHA headquarters on the United Nations-flagged vessel in the port of Hudaydah also presented inherent challenges for both parties. The vessel was also used as a venue for Committee meetings (held in international waters off the coast of Yemen) and housed the joint operations centre where representatives from both parties lived and worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Its position in the port required the Houthi movement to open its front-line positions to allow representatives of the Government of Yemen through to meet with UNMHA, and the Government of Yemen indicated that continuing that practice presented protocol and partiality issues. Despite assurances from the Head of Mission and Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee regarding the impartiality of UNMHA, and repeated efforts to reach out to the Government of Yemen to address these concerns, the Government was dissatisfied with the refusal of the Houthi movement to open its front lines to allow its delegation to travel by road to participate in the Committee's meetings. Although the recent transfer of UNMHA headquarters to new premises in the city of Hudaydah in May 2020 has removed some of the logistical hurdles encountered during the time at the port, the issue of front-line crossing will continue to depend on the goodwill of the parties until demilitarization of the city allows the Committee to meet in a neutral location.

Ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanism

The ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanism (the joint operations centre, which is operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the five observation posts in the city of Hudaydah) has had a positive impact on stability in Hudaydah. The mechanism supported security cooperation and coordination between the parties to strengthen their compliance with the ceasefire as stipulated in the Agreement, as well as to monitor and de-escalate incidents. UNMHA made two visits to the Khamiri observation post, on 14 January and 18 February 2020. The acceptance by both commanders to meet on the front line confirmed the progress made in building confidence, setting up adequate security cooperation mechanisms and opening a dialogue on demilitarization. Daily interaction at the observation posts and in the joint operations centre aboard the United Nations-flagged vessel facilitated communication and furthered confidence-building at the operational level. After a few months of steady improvements, these efforts were, however, challenged by the fighting elsewhere in Yemen. As the governorate witnessed a sporadic escalation in hostilities, the Mission focused its efforts on diffusing tensions between the parties and supporting the mechanism to systematically de-escalate incidents.

The shooting of a liaison officer of the Government of Yemen on 11 March 2020 constituted a setback to the hard-earned progress of the previous months. The resulting temporary suspension by the Government of Yemen of its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee and in the ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanism de facto halted the security cooperation mechanisms put in place to maintain the ceasefire, undermined confidence-building measures for the disengagement of forces, and interrupted the dialogue on demilitarization – all of which carries the risk of an escalation of violence in the governorate.

At this critical juncture, the response of UNMHA to the situation has been hampered by the impact of COVID-19.

Redeployment of forces

While the concept of operations for the redeployment of forces from the city of Hudaydah and the three ports has been developed and is ready for discussion and approval by the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the issue of the local security forces, as provided for in the Agreement, remains one of the major impediments to its execution. The Committee has agreed on most of the modalities for executing the redeployment, but the parties have repeatedly expressed opposing views on the local security forces issue, failing to reach agreement on the definition of the term “in accordance with Yemeni law”, the composition of the local security forces and the chain of command. Given the nature of the discussions pertaining to these forces, the Committee agreed to refer the issues to the political level for a decision.

Coordination with stakeholders of the Stockholm Agreement

Notwithstanding the recent impediments to the implementation of the Agreement, the presence of UNMHA in Hudaydah continues to have positive effects on the situation in the governorate. In accordance with its mandate, the Mission has continued working in coordination with the United Nations country team to support humanitarian activities in Hudaydah, as appropriate. In addition to its advocacy with the parties on humanitarian principles and the opening of sustainable routes for humanitarian access, UNMHA has supported agreements on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to a number of the governorate’s volatile areas. In February, the Mission facilitated cooperation with both parties to enable a non-governmental organization to access remote villages in the vicinity of Durayhimi. In March 2020, UNMHA also enabled an exchange of bodies on the front line. The Mission continues to assist the World Food Programme, in coordination with the Government of Yemen, on the resumption of its wheat milling and transportation operations at the Red Sea Mills. The relatively stable environment also continued to facilitate port activity in Hudaydah, allowing for necessary items, including food and fuel supplies, to reach the city, governorate and inland.

United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement: operations and restrictions

To ensure the safety of the Yemeni population and United Nations personnel in light of COVID-19, in consultation with my Special Envoy for Yemen and United Nations Headquarters, it was decided on 15 April 2020 to temporarily reduce the presence of the Mission in Hudaydah.

Accordingly, non-essential civilian staff and some monitors have been temporarily relocated outside Yemen until the COVID-19 crisis subsides. A twelve-member team, including the Head of Mission and Chair of the Redeployment

Coordination Committee, remains in Hudaydah, together with national staff, to continue the work on the ground.

In Hudaydah, on 7 May 2020, UNMHA moved its headquarters into a land-based compound, resulting in the release of the United Nations-flagged vessel that had served as temporary work and living quarters.

Throughout the reporting period, the de facto authorities continued to impose restrictions on the activities, movements and presence of UNMHA. Despite official correspondence and engagement by the Mission leadership with the de facto authorities in Sana'a and the local authorities in Hudaydah to address operational constraints and restrictions, the freedom of movement of UNMHA continues to be impeded. The suspension of city patrols by the local authorities since October 2019 is of particular concern because it has a direct impact on the implementation of activities mandated by the Security Council.

Observations

While the country continues to grapple with the ongoing conflict and the impact of COVID-19, it remains imperative to bring the Government of Yemen back to the Redeployment Coordination Committee, to avoid derailing implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement. A protracted disruption in communication between the parties risks further shrinking the space for dialogue and cooperation that is critical for maintaining the ceasefire. Therefore, a key priority for UNMHA is to work with the Government of Yemen to address its concerns, re-establish confidence in the coordination and de-escalation mechanisms and facilitate its rapid return to the Committee.

The Mission will focus on rebuilding confidence with and between the parties in order to move towards the progressive disengagement of forces in the city and foster consensus between the Government of Yemen and the Houthi movement concerning the redeployment modalities. In this regard, there is an urgent need for the parties to agree on the concept of operations relating to the redeployment of forces, and for United Nations monitors to be deployed to the observation posts, together with liaison officers from both parties.

Despite the sustained efforts of UNMHA to start a dialogue within the Committee to address the problems regarding local security forces, the parties have not taken responsibility for this issue. My Special Envoy will continue to seek clarification on this issue from the political leaders of both parties, but there is a need to empower the Committee to engage in meaningful dialogue on the technical aspects of the local security forces. I therefore urge both parties to enable and enter into such a dialogue in order to resolve this issue as a matter of urgency.

In the present context, the temporarily reduced but responsive format of the UNMHA presence in Hudaydah is considered appropriate for the existing and expected operational requirements in the immediate future, taking into account the evolving health, safety and security environment.

The Mission, however, does see the need for the immediate return of appropriate numbers of military, police and mine action components and civilian staff when conditions are conducive to a resumption of operations, including the deployment of United Nations monitors to the observation posts. In this regard, a sequenced and proportionate re-establishment of the presence of the Mission will be required once the situation on the ground changes with respect to COVID-19 and there is agreement, in principle, between the two parties concerning the revised concept of operations for joint activities on the ground.

Despite the current challenges, throughout the coming period, the United Nations will continue its work, through UNMHA and my Special Envoy, to find a political solution to the conflict in Yemen.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
