



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 3 June 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In its resolution [2534 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested me to present a review of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) at least one month before the expiration of its mandate, on 15 July 2021. The Mission, established pursuant to paragraph 1 of resolution [2452 \(2019\)](#), supports 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).

Since my last review, submitted on 15 June 2020 ([S/2020/524](#)), and following the suspension by the Government of Yemen of its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee in April 2020, UNMHA has undertaken sustained engagement at all levels towards the resumption of joint mechanisms established in furtherance of the Agreement. The Mission has further continued its efforts to support the parties in their implementation of the ceasefire. This notwithstanding, the Mission's efforts have been stymied by limitations on its freedom of movement, coupled with the ongoing suspension of the Government's participation in the Coordination Committee and related joint modalities and continued fighting along the front lines in Hudaydah Governorate. After a period of reduction with regard to the Mission's footprint beginning in April 2020 as a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) prevention measure, UNMHA has worked since September 2020 to re-establish its operational capability in a highly challenging environment, so as to advance effective mandate implementation, while remaining in strict alignment with COVID-19 protocols. UNMHA has continued to engage stakeholders and partners to leverage maximum influence and ensure a unified understanding and approach in supporting the parties in their implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement.

Despite the significant challenges faced over the reporting period, the Hudaydah Agreement and the related ceasefire have continued to be characterized by: (a) an overall and firm reduction of violence across the governorate despite the continuation of fighting; (b) the safety and partial functioning of the Red Sea ports, enabling the receiving and offloading of vessels; and (c) conditions conducive to continued growth of economic activity within the city of Hudaydah and increased humanitarian access to areas of need. While challenges persist with regard to efforts to resume the Redeployment Coordination Committee framework, the Agreement and a United Nations presence in Hudaydah remain cornerstones of the broader peace process and are essential to ensuring the continued safety of the Red Sea ports and enhanced stability within Hudaydah Governorate.



## **Military and political developments**

During the reporting period, the situation on the ground has continued to evolve, affected by complex shifts and dynamics at the local, national, regional and international levels. Overall, while ceasefire violations and spikes in hostilities have persisted across six major hotspots identified within the Hudaydah Governorate, there has been a continued reduction in reported violence across the board, especially in the city of Hudaydah. Significantly, there have been no major territorial shifts between the parties, and the front lines have continued to remain largely static, except for in the Hays and Durayhimi districts, where, in early October 2020, significant hostilities occurred, leading to a break in the siege of Durayhimi city and some shift in the front line in that area. That escalation represented an increase in the level of violence across the governorate that had not been seen since the Stockholm Agreement came into force, revealing the potential fragility of the ceasefire. Across the governorate, air and drone strike activity heightened at the start of October 2020, from the end of November to the end of December 2020 and, most recently, in March and April 2021. That activity has been focused largely in the Salif and Bajil districts to the north of the city of Hudaydah, in Durayhimi city during the October 2020 escalation and in the Tuhayta' district in the south.

Within the city of Hudaydah itself, since the outset of 2021, the eastern front-line area, which serves as an economic hub and access point to the rest of northern Yemen, has witnessed most ceasefire violations in the city. That has coincided with efforts by the Houthi movement (who also call themselves Ansar Allah) to militarize the Hudaydah airport located in the south-eastern part of the city. The focus of hostilities in the governorate has otherwise been centred primarily in the southern districts that have been impacted by political and military shifts in the coastal districts of neighbouring Ta'izz Governorate. The Hays district, the communications hub of the south, has been an epicentre of military activity over contested infrastructure and strategic intersections. The Tuhayta' district has also been an enduring military focus, as a result of efforts by the Houthi movement to interdict Government of Yemen supply lines running from Mukha' in the south, along the coast to the city of Hudaydah in the north.

Ceasefire violations have continued to have a significant impact on the local population. A pattern of violations directly affecting residential areas has become especially pronounced since the beginning of 2021.

During the reporting period, fighting has led to an estimated 104 civilian casualties and 33 deaths, including 9 women and 7 children. Of those, 29 casualties, including 13 deaths, have been attributed to 27 incidents related to landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, located primarily on the fringes of the city of Hudaydah and in the southern districts of Durayhimi, Tuhayta' and Hays. During the same period, the Mission has publicly condemned that loss of life, consistently and regularly, through its significantly strengthened strategic communications capabilities and platforms. The Mission has further stressed the responsibilities of the parties with respect to their obligations to adhere to international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians.

Ongoing fighting in areas beyond the Mission area, including Ma'rib, has led to an overall relative de-escalation in the Hudaydah Governorate. However, should broader military dynamics shift and attention return to the western coast, it would likely have significant implications, especially in the absence of a national ceasefire. A resurgence in fighting in and around Hudaydah would seriously jeopardize the fragile ceasefire on the western front and, in turn, threaten the vital port access for commercial and humanitarian goods. These conditions underscore the significant need for a return to fully functional joint mechanisms to prevent or reduce the potential of future escalation on the western coast. The Mission continues to closely coordinate with the

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen with regard to the national situation and efforts to secure a broader ceasefire and political settlement.

The situation on the western coast has also been affected by shifts in the political landscape, in particular during the first half of 2021. In March 2021, Tareq Saleh, leader of the National Resistance Forces/Guards of the Republic, formed a political bureau on the western coast and increased his engagement with a range of international diplomatic representatives. Those efforts have potential implications for the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance on the west coast and have given rise to tensions within the various components of the joint forces of the Government of Yemen, which have resulted in clashes between forces aligned with Saleh and those of the Tihamah Resistance, each of which are participants in the Redeployment Coordination Committee.

### **Redeployment Coordination Committee and its joint mechanisms**

To secure a sustained resumption of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the most significant implementation and coordination mechanism of the Hudaydah Agreement, the Mission has focused on: (a) bringing the parties back to dialogue through a proposed joint face-to-face meeting as the most immediate objective; and (b) addressing issues raised by the Government of Yemen with respect to Agreement implementation, including to ensure that the Mission has the ability to equally access the territory of both sides in Hudaydah.

In September 2020, following an easing of COVID-19 protocols on Mission activities, UNMHA returned to patrol and liaison activities, undertaking a series of bilateral face-to-face meetings with the parties and conducting visits to the front lines in southern Hudaydah. Those efforts were aimed at building support for the reactivation of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and its joint mechanisms and at advancing mediation efforts to de-escalate tensions, such as those that occurred in early October 2020 in the Durayhimi and Hays districts.

In coordination with both parties, the Mission also compiled an inquiry report on the death of a Government of Yemen liaison officer as a result of the shooting incident that occurred on 11 March 2020 at a front-line observation post of the city of Hudaydah. The incident precipitated the suspension of participation by the Government of Yemen in the Redeployment Coordination Committee and its joint mechanisms. The resulting inquiry report included recommendations for both sides to improve and strengthen the operations of the joint mechanisms, so as to reduce risks to personnel involved and avoid a reoccurrence of such an incident in the future.

At the outset of 2021, recognizing the continued challenges to resuming the Redeployment Coordination Committee, the Mission, in cooperation with the Office of the Special Envoy and United Nations Headquarters, developed a political engagement strategy in support of that aim. The strategy is focused on a range of key objectives and required engagement at all levels to build confidence between the parties and garner support for the resumption of the joint mechanisms. On the basis of that strategy, and following sustained shuttling between the parties and engagement with regional and international interlocutors, UNMHA was able to significantly narrow the gap between the parties and reach agreement that a joint meeting was of the essence in order to move forward and address concerns.

In February 2021, the Government of Yemen indicated its willingness to attend a joint meeting, provided that issues previously raised were addressed, with the primary concern being the relocation of UNMHA headquarters to a location equally accessible to the territory of both sides. Subsequently, Houthi representatives also undertook to attend such a meeting. Further bilateral discussions led to agreement on a proposed location and date for the meeting; however, at the last moment, after

logistical preparations were made in April 2021, both parties expressed their unwillingness to proceed. Several reasons were put forward for the decision by each party, including uncertainty on outcomes within the broader political process, leading to the adoption of a “wait-and-see” position.

Following the deferral of the joint meeting, UNMHA resumed its bilateral shuttling between the parties. This action advanced discussion on the proposed new location of the Mission’s footprint, with a proposal for a headquarters at the Hudaydah airport, on the basis of initial concepts shared with the parties on 17 October 2020. The aim of the proposal is to achieve the following objectives: (a) the ability for UNMHA to equally access and provide support to both parties; (b) the ability of both parties to gain access to UNMHA headquarters, including in support of the future re-activation of the joint operations centre and other ceasefire enhancement and de-escalation mechanisms; (c) the opening of access across the front lines for humanitarian actors to facilitate the delivery of aid; and (d) the ability of UNMHA monitoring and patrols in the territory controlled by both parties to strengthen ceasefire implementation, confidence and stability on the ground.

### **Monitoring of the ceasefire**

The Mission has continued to monitor the ceasefire throughout the reporting period. This has, however, been subject to considerable obstacles, stemming largely from the suspension of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and de-escalation mechanisms (see above) and the resulting receipt of daily on-the-ground reports from Houthi counterparts only. To build a balanced monitoring picture, the Mission has focused on a careful assessment of information from the widest possible range of other available sources, including third-party providers and other partners and stakeholders on the ground.

On 30 September 2020, after the lifting of COVID-19-related restrictions that had led to a pause of six and a half months, UNMHA resumed its patrols to the ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra’s Isa. The Mission’s ability to monitor and patrol has, however, been subject to significant limitations owing to restrictions on its freedom of movement put in place by the Houthi de facto authorities. Such restrictions have stopped the Mission from undertaking city patrols (since November 2019) and from accessing hotspots and locations that have been subject to significant ceasefire incidents. The Mission has engaged with the parties and conducted advocacy activities at all levels, including through diplomatic channels, to advance its freedom of movement, which is critical to effective on-the-ground monitoring and support for ceasefire implementation. After extensive engagement, the Mission was able to undertake visits on two separate occasions, following significant incidents in Houthi-controlled territory in March 2021. UNMHA continues to make every effort to engage both sides, in order to enable access to locations as incidents occur, in addition to conducting regular visits to governorate hotspots.

### **Redeployment of forces**

The sustained functioning of the Redeployment Coordination Committee and its de-escalation modalities are key requirements for achieving the redeployment of forces as envisaged within the Hudaydah Agreement. While the Mission continued to push for agreement on a revised concept of operations to govern the technical phases of redeployment at the start of the reporting period, engagement with the parties since September 2020 has been primarily focused on securing the resumption of the joint mechanisms. Ultimately, the joint mechanisms will play a critical role in any implementation and oversight of the redeployment of forces, in accordance with the Agreement.

## **Coordination with stakeholders of the Stockholm Agreement**

The absence of a fully functional Redeployment Coordination Committee has frustrated the Mission's ability of to support humanitarian efforts in Hudaydah. Notwithstanding those challenges, UNMHA has continued to advocate, through its engagement with the parties, in favour of humanitarian passage to areas of need, in full coordination with the United Nations country team. In coordination with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNMHA has also contributed to the advancement of advocacy in favour of the provision of international support to the Yemeni Coast Guard, through the strengthening of technical skills and access to enhanced equipment and infrastructure.

The Mission has also continued to engage with United Nations partners on the viability of rehabilitating and improving port assets and infrastructure in Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa. In coordination with those partners and other humanitarian actors, the Mission has also advocated with Houthi counterparts in favour of the provision of access to existing water pipelines, so as to enable repairs to damaged pipelines and enhanced water distribution across the governorate.

Cooperation with and support for the activities of the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre has remained an important element of UNMHA efforts to address issues relating to explosive remnants of war, in close coordination with UNDP. Through UNMHA patrols to the Red Sea ports, the Mission has been able to verify the status of known minefields and areas of unexploded ordnance that continue to pose a threat to the safety of port personnel and operations. Through engagement with Houthi representatives on the Redeployment Coordination Committee and with the Mine Action Centre, UNMHA has continued to advocate effective maintenance of the marking of hazardous areas and to ensure the provision of support and access to the Mine Action Centre to aid their removal. UNMHA has also worked with UNDP to advocate access for the Mine Action Centre to mine action equipment, owing to the current embargo on provision of such items in Houthi-controlled areas. Advancing mine action initiatives, especially within residential locations, has become a matter of urgency, considering the high number of civilian deaths due to landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war across Hudaydah.

## **Operations during the pandemic**

Since September 2020, following a period of complete lockdown and a significant drawdown of UNMHA staff as a preventive measure to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission has worked to incrementally increase its operational posture and capabilities in line with United Nations country team and World Health Organization protocols and guidelines. Increased restrictions on movement and on the ability to engage local stakeholders given the surge in COVID-19 cases in Yemen since March 2021 have continued to affect the Mission's operations. Despite those limitations, UNMHA has successfully implemented a series of mitigating measures that have allowed for overall business continuity. The Mission continues to liaise with the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office on the roll-out of vaccination options for UNMHA personnel to aid in the gradual further easing of COVID-19 risk mitigation measures and ensure the safety of its staff.

## **Observations**

More than two years since the signing of the Hudaydah Agreement, it remains a cornerstone for broader peace efforts in Yemen. Although setbacks have occurred in the past year, the Agreement has continued to remain critical to maintaining stability in the city of Hudaydah and to ensuring the sustained protection and operation of its ports and the reduction of violence across the governorate.

Despite persistent challenges in advancing the resumption of the Redeployment Coordination Committee mechanism and its supporting structures, the presence of the Mission and its ongoing efforts to sustain and expand engagement with the parties and support Agreement implementation have had a tangible moderating impact on the ground, in particular within the city of Hudaydah and the three ports, thus preserving a major import lifeline into Yemen. With that in mind, the presence of the Mission remains critical to preserving hard-won gains and maintaining relative stability around what is a key strategic area for both economic and humanitarian purposes, thereby significantly reducing the risk of the destabilization of Hudaydah and the Red Sea ports.

When the Hudaydah Agreement was reached in December 2018, it was envisaged as a stepping stone towards efforts to resume the political process in Yemen. Its fate cannot be divorced from broader political and military dynamics, and its success, including the ultimate objective of redeployment, hinges on the political will of the parties. The heightened international focus on, and renewed sense of diplomatic momentum towards, achieving a political settlement to the conflict in Yemen has generated both opportunities and pressure points for the parties in Hudaydah. This has created an atmosphere conducive to encouraging the parties to re-engage under the auspices of the Redeployment Coordination Committee. It is critical, however, that uncertainty about peace prospects on the national level do not stand in the way of the commitment of the parties to re-engage with the Committee and to advance the implementation of the Agreement, which remains central to the cessation of hostilities in Hudaydah.

While vested with essentially military oversight functions, the ability of UNMHA to deliver on its mandate rests on the political will and commitment of the parties and the Mission's engagement at the political level. High-level engagement with the political leadership on both sides, along with regional and international stakeholders, with the support of and in coordination with the Office of the Special Envoy, is critical to achieving that objective, as demonstrated by the efforts undertaken to defuse the major escalation of hostilities in the governorate in October 2020. Sustained engagement on the political and regional levels, along with continued efforts to reactivate the joint mechanisms have been and will continue to be key to preventing escalation along the western coast.

Adjusting the footprint of UNMHA to enable access to the Mission for both parties across front lines is also vital to its ability to effectively cover its area of operations and provide impartial support to both sides, including through on-the-ground liaison, monitoring and patrols. This is paramount to any sustained solution and/or effort to effectively advance implementation of the Hudaydah Agreement. While the proposal of a headquarters at the airport – or indeed elsewhere – is not without obstacles, a joint meeting and ongoing dialogue aimed at reaching agreement on the Mission's ability to access and establish the site and addressing issues on demilitarization and demining, will be critical.

Lastly, the Mission's ability to carry out mandated tasks and to provide support for effective ceasefire implementation hinges on the freedom of movement afforded to it by both parties. While UNMHA resumed weekly patrols to the ports of Hudaydah, Ra's Isa and Salif in September 2020, there is an urgent need to enable the Mission to carry out its city patrols and to conduct frequent and unimpeded visits to hotspot locations and areas following significant incidents on the ground. This is critical to allowing the Mission to verify and assess the impact of incidents for the purpose of ensuring oversight on ceasefire implementation and veracity in reporting and as a measure to build confidence among the local population. An unequivocal commitment from both parties to the freedom of movement of UNMHA is vital to its

ability to effectively carry out its core mandated tasks. UNMHA will continue to advocate improved access, through bilateral and collective engagement with the parties and regional stakeholders, and counts on the support of the Security Council in its efforts to achieve that aim.

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

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**

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