



Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators

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May 2026

After Hadi: Aden's Statehood Test and the Opportunity for Confidence-Building

Monitoring and analysis of political, economic, social, military, security, rights and humanitarian indicators in Yemen

Strategic reading for decision-makers

Aden's security test, the detainee-exchange opportunity and strategic partnership



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Political

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Military/Security

20

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2

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Methodology and Analytical Approach

Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators adopts a multi-stage monitoring and analysis methodology designed to transform raw materials, news items, reports and dispersed data into indicators that can be understood, measured and assessed. The aim is to help decision-makers, researchers and relevant stakeholders read ongoing developments in Yemen and anticipate their possible trajectories.

The methodology begins with collecting monitored materials from media sources, official statements, local and international reports, organizational outputs and available field indicators. These materials are then classified into key tracks: political, economic, social, military, security, rights and humanitarian indicators.

After classification, the materials are analyzed across four main levels: event intensity, indicator direction, level of impact and early-warning significance. The Observatory does not treat news items as isolated incidents, but rather as signals that may reveal broader trends, rising risks or exploitable opportunities.

Abaad Observatory also uses artificial intelligence tools to support the processing of raw information, sorting of materials, detection of recurring patterns, classification of indicators and generation of initial readings. AI is not used as a substitute for human judgment or editorial responsibility; all outputs are subject to human review, consistency checks, editorial refinement and strategic interpretation before publication.

Fixed Editorial Note

This report is not intended to provide a monthly news archive or to simply restate all developments in chronological order. Rather, it seeks to produce an analytical reading directed at decision-makers. Accordingly, issues are arranged according to their level of impact and strategic significance, not merely according to the date on which they occurred.

Some events that may appear limited in media volume may receive greater analytical weight if they are connected to the future of the state, the monopoly of force, unified security command, the settlement track, or the rights and humanitarian situation.

Executive Summary

May 2026 shifted the center of gravity from monitoring the settlement track alone to a broader test of the state's ability to repair legitimacy, stabilize Aden and build confidence through the detainees' file. The Observatory monitored 87 items: 43 political, 22 military/security, 20 humanitarian and rights-related, and only 2 economic items. This distribution shows the dominance of the political file, a strong security presence, an important humanitarian file and an economic dimension that remains under-monitored.

The most visible political event was the death of former president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, which reopened the debate around a highly complex decade in Yemen's modern history and its implications for legitimacy, unity, political transition and the memory of the state. Yet May was not only a month of political symbolism; it also coincided with the Yemeni-Saudi relationship being framed as a broader strategic partnership, continued official discourse on state recovery, rejection of militarizing the Red Sea, and stronger Yemeni diplomatic presence in Washington, Cairo and the Horn of Africa.

Security-wise, Aden remained at the center of early warning. The assassination of Wesam Qaed, the earlier assassination of Abdulrahman Al-Shaer, and the interior minister's announcement of foiling a foreign-backed assassination plot all indicate that the battle to restore the state still passes through the gate of internal security. Assassinations are no longer only criminal acts; they are instruments for disrupting institutions and weakening public confidence in the state.

Humanitarian-wise, the agreement to exchange more than 1,700 detainees, and its connection to revealing the fate of politician Mohammed Qahtan, created an opportunity for confidence-building and a test of the parties' seriousness. Press freedom, temporary protection for Yemenis in the United States, migration and humanitarian work also remained indicators that the rights and humanitarian dimension is part of the legitimacy of any settlement.

Economically, the monitoring showed a clear quantitative weakness, but two important signals emerged: the need to resume oil and gas exports as a condition for recovery, and the danger of Houthi interference in banks and humanitarian organizations. This shows that the economy and humanitarian financing have become part of the struggle over control and legitimacy.

General Risk Indicator

Overall risk level in May: Red / High.

The indicator rises because four factors intersect. The first is the fragility of security in Aden, where assassinations indicate the ability of internal and external networks to target state institutions and the civil and humanitarian environment.

The second factor is the continuing battle over legitimacy and unity. Hadi's death and the anniversary of Yemeni unity brought back the question of the state and the national entity, while official and party statements continued to stress that restoring state institutions is the entry point for protecting unity and addressing the southern question.

The third factor is the confidence-building opportunity linked to the detainee-exchange deal. Despite its importance, linking implementation to revealing Mohammed Qahtan's fate shows that the file remains vulnerable to obstruction, and any failure would affect both the humanitarian and political tracks.

The fourth factor is weak economic monitoring despite the seriousness of the economic file. Resuming oil and gas exports, regulating the banking sector and preventing the Houthis from controlling the assets of humanitarian organizations are no less important than politics and security.

Key Transformations in May

First, a political transformation centered on reassessing legitimacy and national memory. The death of former president Hadi reopened debate over a complex transitional period, but it also brought back the concepts of the state, unity and federal Yemen. This coincided with Unity Day and presidential and party statements emphasizing that unity is protected not by slogans, but by restoring the state, ending the coup and limiting fragmentation projects.

Second, a diplomatic transformation toward consolidating partnerships. The Yemeni-Saudi partnership emerged as a broader framework for rebuilding institutions, recovery and stability. Egypt's position on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, the U.S. track through Ambassador Jamila Raja's credentials, and regional engagement through Djibouti and Somalia all indicate an attempt to reposition the Yemeni state externally as a partner, not merely a crisis file.

Third, a dangerous security transformation in Aden. The assassination of Wesam Qaed, investigations into Abdulrahman Al-Shaer's assassination, and the announcement of a foreign-backed assassination plot all confirm that Aden remains a test of the state's ability to protect institutions and public figures. Security is no longer a local file; it is a condition for the survival of government, humanitarian work and development.

Fourth, a military and maritime transformation connected to unified command and protection of routes. The files of military decision-making, readiness, handover procedures in the Fourth Military Region, the handover of Badr Camp, Yemeni-Djiboutian Coast Guard cooperation and the failed recovery of a hijacked fuel vessel all show that maritime and internal security require disciplined institutions and a clear chain of command.

Fifth, a humanitarian and rights transformation through the detainees' file. The agreement to release more than 1,700 detainees may be the largest confidence-building window in years, but in practice it depends on revealing Mohammed Qahtan's fate and implementing the deal without selectivity. Press freedom also remained a negative indicator after Yemen fell to 164th place in the 2026 World Press Freedom Index.

What May's Indicators Mean for Decision-Makers

May's indicators mean that the Yemeni state faces three simultaneous tests: the test of memory and legitimacy after Hadi's death, the test of internal security in Aden, and the test of confidence-building through the detainees' file.

They also mean that state recovery is no longer a general political slogan. It is a complex process that requires security control, unified military decision-making, protection of institutions, a tangible humanitarian track and wider regional and international partnerships that serve sovereignty rather than guardianship.

They further mean that Aden remains the main gauge of government performance. If assassinations and insecurity continue without transparent results and real accountability, any discourse on the return of the state will remain vulnerable to erosion.

The detainees' file, meanwhile, represents a rare political and humanitarian opportunity. Success would give the UN track and the government space to build confidence; failure would confirm that parties use the humanitarian file for maneuvering rather than for relieving suffering.

Rising Risks

First risk: continued assassinations in Aden and their transformation into a systematic tool for weakening the state, disrupting institutions and undermining local and international confidence.

Second risk: obstruction of the detainee-exchange deal because of disagreement over Mohammed Qahtan, lists or implementation mechanisms, wasting a significant humanitarian and political opportunity.

Third risk: keeping the economy outside sufficient monitoring and analysis despite the fact that resuming oil and gas exports and regulating the banking sector are conditions for recovery.

Fourth risk: militarizing or internationalizing the Red Sea through arrangements that do not give the Yemeni state an effective role, weakening sovereignty and increasing sensitivity to regional competition.

Fifth risk: using unity and the southern question as a new entry point for polarization instead of turning them into a national dialogue that addresses the southern issue under the umbrella of the state.

Available Opportunities

First opportunity: using Hadi's death and Unity Day as a moment for calm political review that reaffirms the federal state, national partnership and protection of unity through institutions rather than slogans.

Second opportunity: investing the Yemeni-Saudi partnership in building state capacity, improving services, supporting economic recovery and linking support to clear performance indicators.

Third opportunity: turning the Aden assassination file into a transparency and accountability test by announcing investigation results and legally pursuing cells, sponsors and perpetrators.

Fourth opportunity: using the detainee-exchange agreement as an entry point for confidence-building, provided it is implemented with clear guarantees, Mohammed Qahtan's fate is revealed and the track is expanded to include journalists and forcibly disappeared persons.

Fifth opportunity: building a practical maritime partnership with Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, making Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security part of Yemeni sovereignty rather than an alternative to it.

Possible Scenarios

Scenario One: Relative containment and limited confidence-building. Probability: Medium. The government succeeds in consolidating some security-investigation results and implementing part of the detainee-exchange deal, giving the political and humanitarian track a limited boost.

Scenario Two: Simultaneous security and humanitarian obstruction. Probability: Medium to High. The detainee-exchange deal stalls and assassination cases remain unresolved, weakening public confidence in both the government and the UN track.

Scenario Three: Diplomatic momentum without internal impact. Probability: Medium. External partnerships and international messages supporting the state and unity expand, but do not translate quickly into security, services and economic improvement.

Scenario Four: Silent economic deterioration. Probability: Medium. The absence of clear monthly economic indicators continues while salary, revenue and humanitarian-financing pressures accumulate, increasing the likelihood of social protest and public pressure.

Recommendations for Decision-Makers

1. Treat the Aden assassination file as a national-security priority, with published investigation results and non-selective pursuit of cells, sponsors and perpetrators.

2. Implement the detainee-exchange deal with clear guarantees, and treat the disclosure of Mohammed Qahtan's fate as an entry point for testing seriousness and building confidence.

3. Invest the Yemeni-Saudi partnership in a measurable government performance plan covering services, revenues, salaries, recovery and institution-building.

4. Develop a monthly economic indicator that monitors oil and gas, salaries, exchange rates, fuel, services and the impact of Houthi measures on banking and humanitarian work.

5. Build a national strategy for Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security, involving the government, Coast Guard, ports, intelligence and regional partners.

6. Turn Unity Day and Hadi's death into an opportunity to launch a national dialogue on the federal state, the southern question and the dangers of fragmentation and armed projects.

7. Protect press freedom and humanitarian work as indicators of state seriousness, not as rights files separate from politics and security.

8. Strengthen Yemeni diplomatic presence in Washington, Cairo and the Horn of Africa to serve sovereignty, maritime security and economic recovery priorities.

Concluding Situation Assessment

May 2026 combined political symbolism with practical tests. Hadi's death reopened the file of transitional memory and unity, but the real test of the state appeared in Aden, where assassinations reveal the ability of violent networks to target institutions and public figures.

At the same time, the detainee-exchange agreement opened a humanitarian and political window for confidence-building, but it will remain fragile unless it is connected to revealing Mohammed Qahtan's fate and implementing obligations clearly. The Saudi partnership and regional and international support offer an opportunity, but their value will be measured by whether they turn into tangible government performance.

The bottom line for decision-makers is clear: after Hadi is not merely a symbolic phase in Yemen's political memory. It is a test of the state's ability to protect unity, secure its temporary capital, build humanitarian confidence and translate external partnerships into institutions, services and tangible security.

Early-Warning and Strategic Impact Matrix

Issue	Risk level	Trend	Meaning	Suggested response
Hadi's death and legitimacy memory	Med-High	Rising	Reopens debate on the state, unity and transition	Turn the moment into calm national review
Aden assassinations	High	Rising	Direct test of state authority and internal security	Transparent investigations and accountability
Detainee deal and Qahtan	High	Rising	A confidence-building opportunity vulnerable to obstruction	Link implementation to guarantees and revealing Qahtan's fate
Yemeni-Saudi partnership	Med-High	Rising	Opportunity to support institutions and recovery	Link support to government performance indicators
Red Sea and Gulf of Aden security	High	Persistent	A sensitive sovereign and regional file	Build a Yemeni maritime strategy with partners
Weak economic monitoring	Medium	Persistent	Data gaps weaken crisis assessment	Create a monthly economic indicator
Press freedom and humanitarian work	High	Persistent	Indicator of state legitimacy and civic space	Protect journalists and humanitarian workers

The matrix shows that the highest-impact May issues revolve around three axes: Aden's security, the detainee-exchange opportunity, and state recovery through partnerships and institutions.