



Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators

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Sovereignty Under Test: The Iranian Air Bridge, Bab al- Mandab, and National Mobilization to Restore the State

Analytical report for decision-makers

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Program Overview

This report is issued under the **Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators**, as a monthly analytical reading of political, economic, service-related, military, security, humanitarian, rights-based and social/tribal indicators in Yemen. It does not aim to reproduce a chronological news archive. Rather, it seeks to transform daily monitoring into early-warning indicators that help decision-makers, researchers and relevant stakeholders assess risks, opportunities and possible scenarios.

Brief Methodology

The Observatory uses a multi-stage monitoring and analysis methodology. It begins by collecting news, official statements, reports and available field indicators, then classifies them into key tracks: political, economic and service-related, military and security, humanitarian and rights-based, and social/tribal. The material is then assessed across four levels: event intensity, indicator direction, level of impact and early-warning significance.

The Observatory uses artificial intelligence tools to assist in sorting materials, detecting patterns, classifying indicators and generating initial readings. Human review, editorial judgment and political and strategic analysis remain the basis for approving the final report.

First: Executive Summary

July 2026 showed that the Yemeni crisis has moved to a higher level of regional and sovereign confrontation. Houthi escalation was no longer limited to military pressure on the frontlines or intermittent threats to navigation. It became directly connected to an Iranian attempt to breach Yemeni sovereignty through the airspace, activate an air bridge to Sana'a, and intensify maritime pressure targeting Saudi Arabia and navigation in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab.

The main headline of July is that **Yemeni sovereignty has become the center of the conflict**. Events focused on preventing Iranian aircraft from landing in Sana'a, targeting

the runway of Sana'a airport to prevent an Iranian aircraft from landing, requiring all operators to obtain prior clearance before entering Yemeni airspace, and raising the file with the International Civil Aviation Organization. These developments showed the state's transition from political warning to the use of sovereign, military and diplomatic tools to prevent Yemeni airports from becoming an Iranian supply corridor for the Houthis.

Politically, the Presidential Leadership Council and the government appeared to adopt a firmer discourse built around three pillars: protecting sovereignty, raising readiness, and restoring the state. Calls for national alignment, support for the National Defense Council, review of the peace track, and the assertion that any settlement that does not end militia authority and restore state institutions will remain fragile and prone to renewed explosion all recurred throughout the month.

On the military and security track, indicators of open war increased. July witnessed broad readiness measures within the armed forces and security services, Houthi attacks on fronts in Hodeidah, Al-Dhalea, Marib, Al-Jawf and Taiz, interception of missiles and drones toward Saudi Arabia, attacks on ships and tankers in the Red Sea, and growing reports of Iranian experts and equipment arriving to strengthen Houthi capabilities. A notable development was the Ministry of Defense's display of models of the government air force drones "Aiban" and "Nuqm", indicating an attempt by the government to highlight a shift in its air capabilities.

Socially and tribally, the "Camps of Dignity" indicator in Al-Rayyan, eastern Al-Jawf, deepened. The monitoring noted the participation of 128 Yemeni tribes in the camps in defense of tribal customs and dignity, the downing of a Houthi drone over the camps, continued support from the Dhu Hussein tribes, and simultaneous clashes in Al-Yatamah between tribal fighters and Houthi forces. These indicators move the tribal file from symbolic solidarity to the potential for escalation and reveal Houthi concern that the tribe may become a resistant social front.

Economically, the file remained smaller in volume but highly significant. Oil export resumption returned as a sovereign and financial issue, especially after Hadramawt political and social components supported the resumption of exports while demanding the governorate's rights. The monitoring also highlighted the estimated six billion dollars in losses caused by Houthi attacks on oil facilities, Houthi levies, the flour price crisis, protests by Al-Jawf wheat farmers demanding payment of their dues, and demands to restart the Aden refinery and pay workers' entitlements.

Humanitarianly, July revealed multi-directional deterioration: mines, floods, displacement, disease, arbitrary detention, worsening press freedom, and obstruction of prisoner-

exchange efforts. The files of Mohammed Qahtan, abductees, activists, journalists, mine victims and food insecurity emerged as warning indicators no less serious than military indicators.

Second: General Risk Indicator

Overall risk level: Red / Very High

The risk indicator in July rises to an advanced red level because seven major factors converged.

First, Yemeni airspace turned into a direct sovereign confrontation arena between the government, Iran and the Houthis. The attempt to operate Iranian flights to Sana'a outside the authority of the government is no longer a civil-aviation procedural matter. It is an indicator of an effort to create a strategic supply corridor for the Houthis.

Second, the maritime threat escalated in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, with the Houthis announcing a ban on Saudi navigation, attacking ships and tankers, threatening cargo vessels moving to and from Saudi ports, and triggering wider Arab and international condemnation.

Third, Iranian support for the Houthis expanded from sea to air, as reflected in multiple reports and positions referring to experts, equipment, an air bridge, and attempts to enhance missile and drone capabilities.

Fourth, official, popular, tribal and military mobilization increased across liberated governorates, from Taiz to Hays, Al-Khawkhah, Hadramawt and Al-Jawf. This suggests that the “no war, no peace” phase has begun to lose its balance.

Fifth, internal security fragility continued in Aden, Hadramawt, Abyan, Lahj and Shabwa through internal clashes, attacks on Nation Shield Forces, tensions over security appointments, and continuing challenges in law enforcement and justice.

Sixth, the tribal indicator in Al-Jawf and Al-Rayyan deepened. The issue is no longer a limited tribal appeal; it now involves cross-tribal mobilization, the downing of a Houthi drone, and clashes in Al-Yatamah. This raises the likelihood that tribal discontent could become a real pressure front against the Houthis.

Seventh, humanitarian and rights-based deterioration continued, especially in the files of mines, displacement, disease, press freedom, abductions, deaths in detention and the stalled prisoner-exchange file.

The risk in July is the risk of **multiple confrontation fronts**: airspace, the Red Sea, land fronts, the tribal sphere, the economic street and the humanitarian file. This makes the crisis more likely to slide into broader escalation if a major incident occurs at sea, in the air, or on one of the sensitive frontlines.

Third: Key Transformations in July

1. Sovereignty Transformation: From Warning to Enforcing Airspace Rules

The most important transformation in July was the shift of the sovereignty file from political discourse to executive measures. The government treated Iranian flights to Sana'a as a direct violation of Yemeni sovereignty and Security Council resolutions, not as ordinary air traffic. Several measures stood out: the Presidential Leadership Council meeting, National Defense Council decisions, President Al-Alimi's warnings, the Civil Aviation Authority circular, the government's letter to ICAO, and the prevention of a new Iranian aircraft from reaching Sana'a.

The targeting of Sana'a airport's runway to prevent an Iranian aircraft from landing represented a turning point. It expressed a new equation: the state is prepared to use limited military tools to protect the airspace, even in areas it does not control on the ground. This reinforces the narrative that sovereignty is not limited to liberated geography; it includes airspace, ports, airports and maritime corridors.

The strategic implication is that the government has begun to build “sovereign rules of engagement” toward Iran and the Houthis. If these rules continue, they may become a deterrent. If they recede or are not supported by institutional and diplomatic capacity, they may turn into an open crisis over civil aviation and humanitarian access.

2. Regional and Maritime Transformation: Bab al-Mandab as an Extension of Hormuz

July returned the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab to the center of early warning. Houthi escalation was linked to threats against Saudi navigation, an attempt to impose a maritime

ban, attacks on ships and tankers, and warnings that the Houthis were preparing to replicate the Hormuz scenario in Bab al-Mandab.

The key point is that Bab al-Mandab is no longer read only as a Yemeni maritime passage. It has become part of Iran's confrontation equation with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Israel and global energy networks. Reports that Iran had asked the Houthis to close Bab al-Mandab if U.S. strikes targeted Iranian energy infrastructure mean that, in Iran's conception, the Houthis have become a maritime pressure tool parallel to Hormuz.

Saudi, Egyptian, British, Pakistani, UN and other international positions showed that Red Sea threats quickly move beyond Yemen into the realm of energy security and global trade. This gives the Yemeni government an opportunity to present itself as a key partner in protecting navigation, but it also carries the risk of marginalization if international powers monopolize the management of the file.

The implication is that Yemen faces a strategic question: will it be the sovereign owner and partner in protecting Bab al-Mandab, or will it become an arena managed by international arrangements because the state lacks capacity?

3. Military Transformation: Heightened Readiness and the Possibility of a Wider Battle

July witnessed a clear rise in military-readiness indicators. The Chief of Staff, the Supreme Security Committee, the Minister of Defense and commanders of military regions ordered maximum readiness. Statements about preparation for a decisive battle and the completion of liberation recurred. Popular and tribal armed rallies also appeared in Taiz, Hays, Al-Khawkhah, Al-Mawasit and other areas in support of the army.

Field activity spread across several fronts: Hodeidah, Hays, Al-Dhalea, Marib, Al-Jawf, Taiz and Al-Bayda. Saudi Arabia intercepted Houthi missiles and drones, ships were attacked in the Red Sea, and the coalition announced strikes against Houthi targets linked to threats against vessels.

The Ministry of Defense's display of the "Aiban" and "Nuqm" drones is both a political and a morale signal as much as it is a military one. Presenting government drone capabilities sends a message that the state is trying to enter a domain that the Houthis had dominated in propaganda and operations for years.

The implication is that July was a month of raising the military ceiling. It does not necessarily confirm that a comprehensive battle is imminent, but it shows that all parties are increasing readiness and building negotiating or deterrent positions through force.

4. Social and Tribal Transformation: The Camps of Dignity Become a Pressure Indicator Against the Houthis

The Al-Rayyan indicator developed notably in July. The monitoring cited Sheikh Hamad bin Fadgham's statement that 128 Yemeni tribes had participated in the "Camps of Dignity" in eastern Al-Jawf in defense of tribal customs and values, not for the benefit of any political party. Tribal fighters also downed a Houthi drone over the camps. The Dhu Hussein tribes prevented a Houthi event in Al-Yatamah and reaffirmed support for the camps, while clashes occurred between tribes and Houthi forces in Al-Yatamah.

This means the tribe has returned as a relatively independent political and social actor, not merely a bloc mobilized by the parties. The issue began with the concepts of protection and restoration of standing, but it developed into a mobilization under the banner of dignity and customs, then entered direct contact with Houthi security and military tools.

The most important implication is that the Houthis may face a new kind of challenge: a challenge to their social legitimacy. The group can manage frontlines, control institutions and use religious discourse, but it faces difficulty when tribal values such as protection and dignity turn into broad mobilization that cannot easily be dismissed as partisan or foreign-driven.

However, the indicator also carries major risks. If tribal mobilization is not managed wisely, it may turn into an unorganized confrontation, be drawn into side tribal conflicts, or be penetrated through mediation efforts designed to dismantle it. It should therefore be treated as an early social warning and an opportunity for pressure, not as an alternative to the state or the army.

5. Economic Transformation: Oil, Levies and State Financing

Although the economic file was smaller in volume, it reveals the core of the crisis: the state needs sovereign resources, while the Houthis and parallel formations use levies and resource control to sustain influence.

The most prominent economic indicator in July was the support of Hadramawt components for the resumption of crude-oil exports, coupled with demands to guarantee the governorate's entitlements. This position connects the state's need for resources with producing governorates' demand for fair distribution of revenues. The estimate that Houthi attacks on oil facilities cost Yemen around six billion dollars also shows the scale of the economic cost created by the disruption of exports.

In Houthi-controlled areas, the monitoring recorded levies on traders, increases in white flour prices, the crisis of unpaid dues owed to Al-Jawf wheat farmers, and the dismissal of government employees under the pretext of “surplus labor”. These indicators reveal that the group is facing a resource crisis and is trying to finance itself by increasing pressure on society.

The economic implication is that the struggle over resources will be part of the struggle to restore the state. There can be no serious discussion of salaries, services and recovery without resuming exports, controlling levies, protecting ports and unifying revenues.

6. Humanitarian and Rights Transformation: Mines, Detainees and Disease as Another Face of War

July showed that the humanitarian file is no longer only an outcome of war; it has become an arena of pressure in its own right. Mines continued to kill civilians, including a landmine explosion in Al-Zaydiyah that killed four members of one family, and mine explosions in Al-Bayda that killed and injured children. Project Masam also destroyed thousands of explosive remnants in Bab al-Mandab, Abyan and Hadramawt.

The file of abductees and forcibly disappeared persons remained highly visible. The prisoner-exchange agreement faltered. Demands to reveal the fate of Mohammed Qahtan continued. Rights organizations questioned the Houthi narrative about him. The cases of journalist Walid Ghalib, lawyer Abdulmajeed Sabra and other detainees remained active.

Serious health and environmental indicators also emerged: dengue fever, measles, cholera, diphtheria, cancer, floods, drowning incidents, road accidents and exposed water-pool hazards. The food-security crisis also reached a critical stage, according to FAO monitoring, especially in Houthi-controlled areas.

The humanitarian implication is that any new military or maritime escalation will strike a society already exhausted by disease, poverty, displacement, mines and collapsing services. Decisions about war, deterrence or escalation cannot therefore be separated from their direct humanitarian cost.

Fourth: What July's Indicators Mean for Decision-Makers

July's indicators mean that the Yemeni state has entered a new stage of the sovereignty test. It is no longer enough to manage the government from Aden. The state must protect airspace, ports, the sea, islands, frontlines and resources. The Houthi threat is no longer internal only; it is now directly linked to Iran and to the security of Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea and global energy.

The indicators also show that deterrence has become necessary, but deterrence requires careful management. Uncontrolled decisiveness could open a wider escalation, while hesitation may give the Houthis and Iran space to strengthen air and maritime supply routes. The government therefore needs an equation that combines military firmness, legal legitimacy, regional coordination and international cover.

The indicators also reveal that the tribe has returned to the center of the scene, whether in Al-Jawf, Ibb, Amran, Taiz, Hays or Al-Khawkhah. Any strategy for state restoration must therefore absorb the tribal dimension as a social lever, not as a local detail.

Economically, the indicators confirm that the state cannot fight a long sovereignty battle without resources. Oil and gas exports, revenue control, restarting the Aden refinery and supporting electricity are not merely service files; they are tools of political and military resilience.

The bottom line is that decision-makers face five simultaneous tests: **the test of air sovereignty, the test of maritime deterrence, the test of military readiness, the test of tribal mobilization, and the test of economic and humanitarian resilience.**

Fifth: Rising Risks

1. The Iranian Air Bridge Becoming a Permanent Supply Route

If Iran succeeds in operating repeated flights to Sana'a or Saada outside government authority, Yemeni airspace could become a rapid supply route for experts and equipment, compensating for restrictions on maritime smuggling routes.

2. A Wider Maritime Confrontation in Bab al-Mandab

Continued attacks on vessels and threats to ban Saudi navigation may push Saudi Arabia, the United States or the coalition toward broader responses, increasing the risk of the maritime battle being further internationalized.

3. Military Mobilization Turning into Comprehensive War Without Economic Readiness

Heightened readiness and popular and tribal mobilization may create pressure for a decisive battle. However, a comprehensive war without stable resources and services could impose high costs on the government and society.

4. Dismantling or Provoking the Camps of Dignity

Any Houthi attempt to penetrate, suppress or bypass the Al-Rayyan camps may turn tribal mobilization into a wider confrontation in Al-Jawf, especially if it intersects with Al-Yatamah clashes and the Dhu Hussein tribes.

5. The Dissolved STC Returning as a Tool of Disruption

The monitoring referred to attempts to push the dissolved Southern Transitional Council back to the forefront and to signal support for secession during Houthi escalation. This raises the risk of opening an internal disruption track at a sensitive moment of confrontation.

6. The Prisoner and Mohammed Qahtan File Stalling

The failure of the prisoner-exchange deal and continuing uncertainty about Mohammed Qahtan's fate may undermine humanitarian and political confidence and reinforce the belief that the Houthis use the file for bargaining rather than resolution.

7. Food and Health Deterioration Because of Regional Escalation

Disturbances in Hormuz and the Red Sea, funding shortages, higher food prices and disease outbreaks could push broader segments of Yemen's population toward hunger and illness.

Sixth: Available Opportunities

1. Building a National Consensus Around Sovereignty

The Iranian aircraft crisis created an opportunity to unify political discourse around the sovereignty of airspace and airports as a national issue rather than a partisan one.

2. Turning the Red Sea into a Yemeni-Regional Partnership File

The government can present a Yemeni vision for Bab al-Mandab security that brings together Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia and European partners, instead of leaving the file to international powers alone.

3. Leveraging Tribal Mobilization in Support of the State

The Al-Rayyan camps and armed rallies in Taiz, Hays, Al-Khawkhah, Al-Mawasit and Hadramawt reveal society's capacity to support the state if it finds disciplined messaging and trusted leadership.

4. Turning Oil Resumption into a National Recovery Project

Hadramawt components' support for resuming exports opens a window to connect resources with local justice, salaries, electricity and services, provided transparency and guarantees are in place.

5. Developing Government Military Capabilities

The display of the "Aiban" and "Nuqm" drones may mark the beginning of a national deterrence narrative, if it is linked to real development of air and intelligence capabilities.

6. Using the Detainees File as a Rights-Based and International Pressure Tool

The stalled Qahtan and prisoner files can become organized rights-based pressure on the Houthis if managed through documentation, international alliances and a unified humanitarian message.

Seventh: Possible Scenarios

Scenario One: Controlled Deterrence and Limited Escalation

Probability: Medium

The government and coalition continue preventing unauthorized Iranian flights, while responding in a limited way to maritime threats without moving into comprehensive war. Tension remains high but manageable.

Scenario Two: A Wider Maritime Confrontation

Probability: Medium to High

The Houthis carry out a significant attack on a vessel or facility linked to Saudi Arabia or international navigation, prompting the coalition, the United States or international actors to conduct broader strikes against Houthi coastal and missile capabilities.

Scenario Three: A Tribal/Internal Front Erupts in Al-Jawf

Probability: Medium

The Al-Rayyan camps and Al-Yatamah clashes expand and tribal participation increases. The Houthis respond through suppression or containment efforts, which may lead to limited or broad tribal escalation in Al-Jawf.

Scenario Four: Renewed Disruption in the South

Probability: Medium

Attempts to reactivate the dissolved STC or mobilize unlicensed protests in Hadramawt and Aden increase, disrupting state efforts at a moment of confrontation with the Houthis and Iran.

Scenario Five: Humanitarian and Economic Deterioration Alongside Escalation

Probability: High

Maritime and air escalation increases import costs and reduces funding, while disease, mines and floods expand humanitarian needs.

Eighth: Recommendations for Decision-Makers

1. Consolidate Air-Sovereignty Rules

Measures preventing unauthorized Iranian flights should become a declared institutional policy involving civil aviation, defense, foreign affairs and international law. Every violation should be documented and raised with ICAO and the UN Security Council.

2. Establish a National Operations Room for the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab

This room should bring together defense, interior, the Coast Guard, intelligence, ports, foreign affairs and coastal local authorities, and coordinate directly with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti and international partners.

3. Manage Military and Tribal Mobilization Within the State Framework

Mobilization must not become armed disorder. Tribal and popular rallies and the popular resistance should be tied to a clear national plan under the leadership of the state and the armed forces.

4. Treat the Al-Rayyan Camps as a Pressure Opportunity, Not a Front of Disorder

The government should communicate with tribal leaders, document Houthi violations, prevent infiltration of the mobilization, and present the issue as a file of dignity, rights and justice rather than an open tribal war.

5. Resume Oil and Gas Exports Within a Transparent Compact With Producing Governorates

Export resumption should be linked to guarantees for Hadramawt, Shabwa and Marib, with clear allocations for electricity, salaries and services.

6. Raise the Readiness of Cities, Not Only Frontlines

Internal security in Aden, Hadramawt, Abyan, Lahj and Shabwa should be part of the readiness plan, because any internal breach may weaken the state in its confrontation with the Houthis.

7. Turn the Qahtan and Prisoner File into a Continuous International Campaign

The file should not remain hostage to intermittent negotiation rounds. It should become a sustained rights-based and diplomatic campaign exposing Houthi manipulation and demanding an independent international investigation.

8. Build a Unified Media Message

Official and media discourse should connect sovereignty, the Red Sea, the tribe, the economy and humanitarian protection, and prevent the Houthis from marketing escalation as a defense of Yemenis.

9. Develop a Monthly Sovereignty Index

This index should measure airspace violations, maritime threats, port traffic, missile attacks, smuggling, international positions and the state's response capacity.

10. Protect the Humanitarian Track From Escalation

The continued work of organizations, protection of ports and imports, support for epidemic response and acceleration of demining should be guaranteed, because military deterrence will not succeed if the humanitarian environment collapses.

Ninth: Concluding Situation Assessment

July 2026 indicates that Yemen has entered the phase of a “comprehensive sovereignty test”. The state is no longer facing the Houthis only on the frontlines. It is facing an Iranian attempt to breach the airspace, a maritime threat to Bab al-Mandab, tribal mobilization in Al-Jawf, internal tensions in the south, and an extended economic and humanitarian crisis.

The greatest danger is that these tracks may coincide at one moment: an Iranian aircraft, a maritime attack, a tribal clash, tension in Aden or Hadramawt, and a humanitarian setback. At that point, the crisis could move from manageable escalation to multi-front confrontation.

Yet opportunity also exists. Iranian-Houthi escalation has created a state of national, Arab and international alignment around Yemeni sovereignty, returned the state file to the

center of discussion, and opened space to rebuild the government's role as a partner in Red Sea security, navigation protection and the restoration of national decision-making.

The bottom line for decision-makers:

July 2026 confirms that sovereignty is no longer an abstract constitutional concept. It is a daily test in the sky, at sea, on the frontline, in the tribal sphere and in the economy. Whoever succeeds in protecting sovereignty, managing mobilization and building resources can lead the path of statehood and peace. Whoever fails will find Yemen turning into an open arena for the conflicts of others.