



Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators

مرصد أبعاد للإنذار المبكر والمؤشرات الاستراتيجية

Bab al-Mandab Under Test

General Mobilization, Restoring the Initiative, and the Risk of
Multi-Front War

Analytical Report for Decision-Makers

September 2026

Issued by

About the Observatory

Abaad Studies and Research Center is developing the Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators as an analytical program that transforms daily monitoring of events, statements, reports and dispersed data into readable and assessable indicators. The Observatory focuses on political, economic and service-related, military and security, humanitarian and rights-based, and social indicators, helping decision-makers, researchers and relevant stakeholders understand ongoing transformations in Yemen and anticipate their possible trajectories.

The Observatory builds on Abaad's accumulated experience in following Yemeni affairs and on a monitoring and analysis service that operated for decision-makers in a limited form over previous years. It has since been developed into a more regular analytical product that combines human judgment with AI-assisted tools. Artificial intelligence is not used as a substitute for human assessment or editorial responsibility; it supports sorting materials, detecting patterns, classifying indicators and generating initial readings that are then reviewed, refined and interpreted by the analytical team.

Brief Methodology

The Observatory's methodology is based on daily monitoring and classification of material into five main tracks: political, economic and service-related, military and security, humanitarian and rights-based, and social/tribal. The material is then assessed through four levels: event intensity, direction of the indicator, level of impact, and early-warning significance.

This report does not treat news items as a chronological archive or as isolated incidents. It reads them as signals that may reveal rising risks, exploitable opportunities, or shifts in the balance of power, confidence and legitimacy. For this reason, the issues in this report

are arranged according to their strategic impact on the state, society and the political settlement track, rather than by date alone.



First: Executive Summary

The September 2026 monitoring shows that the Yemeni crisis moved into a more dangerous phase of military, sovereign and humanitarian escalation. Bab al-Mandab and the western coast became the center of gravity in the confrontation between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, while general mobilization shifted from political rhetoric into an official and popular track to support the frontlines and restore the initiative.

The main headline of September is that Yemen entered a phase of testing the recovery of the initiative. The Houthis made dangerous advances on the western coast and reached positions overlooking Bab al-Mandab and strategic islands. In response, the government, the Presidential Leadership Council and the armed forces raised readiness, declared general mobilization, expanded military operations, and moved diplomatically to build a firmer regional and international position. Parliament approved the declaration of general mobilization to confront Houthi escalation, protect citizens, defend the republican system and constitutional legitimacy, and safeguard state sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Politically, three simultaneous tracks emerged: national mobilization, regional and international support for the government, and warnings against turning Bab al-Mandab into an Iranian pressure card. President Rashad al-Alimi called on Yemenis to mobilize around the armed forces and security institutions and opened safe-return channels for those misled by the Houthis. Taiz, Aden, Marib and Hadramawt also moved politically and socially to support the armed forces.

Militarily, September witnessed a major expansion in government operations. The armed forces announced hundreds of daily operations across several fronts, including 756 precision operations over 72 hours in Kitaf, Al-Buqa, Alb, Al-Jawf, Marib, Al-Bayda, Lahj and Taiz, with claims that large numbers of Houthi fighters were neutralized. At the end of the month, the armed forces also announced 468 operations against the Houthis on multiple fronts, alongside heightened readiness and warnings for civilians to stay away from sites used by the group.

Maritime and strategically, Bab al-Mandab was the most serious early-warning file. The United Nations stressed the need to preserve Red Sea security and freedom of navigation in Bab al-Mandab after the Houthis took control of coastal cities and Yemeni islands overlooking the corridor following the withdrawal of government forces. The Yemeni government also warned Washington against relying on Houthi reassurance messages

regarding navigation, arguing that those messages are designed to buy time and consolidate the group's control over the strategic strait in service of the Iranian agenda.

Regionally, the circle of concern widened. The UN Security Council condemned Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and threats to navigation in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab, stressing the implementation of Resolution 2216. The G7 also called on Iran to stop arming the Houthis. The foreign ministers of the United States and Saudi Arabia discussed Yemen developments and the importance of protecting international navigation in Bab al-Mandab.

Humanitarianly, September was one of the heaviest months for civilians since the latest escalation began. Official reporting indicated that the number of people displaced by Houthi escalation exceeded 180,000. UNICEF reported that around 71,000 children had been displaced in recent weeks. The United Nations also warned that the number of internally displaced persons could exceed 230,000 if the conflict continues at the current pace.

In sum, September 2026 placed Yemen before a highly dangerous equation: a threatened Bab al-Mandab, rising general mobilization, intensified military operations, wide-scale displacement, and Iran-backed Houthi escalation linking the Yemeni front to Red Sea security, Saudi security and global trade. The next phase will depend on the state's ability to transform mobilization and deterrence into a coherent institutional plan that prevents the consolidation of a new Houthi military reality on the coast and islands.

Second: General Risk Indicator

Overall Risk Level: Red / Critical

The September risk indicator rises to a critical level due to the convergence of seven main factors.

First, the Houthis reached Bab al-Mandab, coastal areas and Yemeni islands. This is not a limited field advance; it is a strategic shift threatening international navigation and the security of Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the wider region.

Second, general mobilization moved into the political and social decision space. Parliament's approval of mobilization, along with movements in Taiz, Aden, Marib and Hadramawt and popular support convoys, shows that the state and society entered a broader phase of national mobilization.

Third, government military operations escalated. High operational numbers, airstrikes, the recapture of some positions, and advances in Al-Jawf, Taiz and Al-Bayda indicate a government attempt to restore the initiative after the shock of the coast.

Fourth, civil aviation and maritime navigation came under threat. The government warned the Security Council that Iranian-made weapons fired from Houthi-held areas in Al-Hodeidah toward international air routes threaten the safety of civil aviation in the southern Red Sea.

Fifth, the maritime and military file became increasingly internationalized. The United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the European Union, China, the G7 and the Security Council all appeared in successive positions and moves, confirming that the crisis is no longer purely local.

Sixth, displacement and humanitarian deterioration expanded. September's displacement figures, together with the World Health Organization's warning that Yemen's health system is nearing collapse, show that civilians are absorbing the heaviest blow of the escalation.

Seventh, forced recruitment and Houthi violations increased. These included child recruitment, abductions of people celebrating the 26 September Revolution, suppression of commemorations, home raids, house demolitions, and looting of medical, humanitarian and judicial facilities.

The danger in September does not lie in one battle. It lies in the possibility that the coastal war, the frontline war, the maritime war, the displacement crisis and the social mobilization war could converge at the same moment.

Third: Key Transformations in September

1. Sovereign and Strategic Transformation: Bab al-Mandab Becomes the Center of the Conflict

The most dangerous transformation in September was the shift of Bab al-Mandab from a maritime security file into a file of sovereignty and war. The issue is no longer only Houthi threats to navigation. It now concerns a new field reality on the coast and islands, and Houthi attempts to offer selective guarantees not to target certain ships while consolidating control over the corridor.

This is what prompted the Yemeni government to warn Washington against trusting Houthi messages on navigation, describing them as tactical de-escalation messages intended to buy time rather than guarantee freedom of navigation. Yemeni officials also

warned that any arrangements bypassing the Yemeni state would consolidate a new military reality and weaken sovereignty.

The strategic implication is that Bab al-Mandab has become a test for three actors: the Yemeni state and its ability to regain the coast and islands; Saudi Arabia and regional partners in protecting their security; and international powers in preventing the corridor from becoming a tool of blackmail in the hands of the Houthis and Iran.

2. Political Transformation: General Mobilization Redefines the Battle

September saw general mobilization move from media and political calls into a broader political decision. Parliament approved the declaration of mobilization, President al-Alimi called on Yemenis to rally around the armed forces and security institutions, and governorates such as Taiz, Aden, Marib and Hadramawt began organizing convoys, popular support and community initiatives for the frontlines.

This transformation redefines the battle from a confrontation between regular forces and the Houthis into a battle of state and society. The discourse of the 26 September Revolution therefore appeared strongly, not only as a national commemoration, but as a symbolic mobilization tool against the Houthi project.

Mobilization, however, also carries risks. If it is not managed within the framework of the state, law and institutions, it could turn into armed disorder or competition among multiple formations. The success of general mobilization therefore depends on the state's ability to regulate it, direct it and connect it to unified military command.

3. Military Transformation: From Defense to Restoring the Initiative

Military indicators show that government forces moved from defense and reaction to attempts to restore the initiative across several fronts. Operations were launched in Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda and Taiz; positions were reported recaptured in Hays and western Taiz; drones were downed; and Houthi positions, fortifications and vehicles were struck in Bab al-Mandab, Hajjah, Taiz and Al-Bayda.

Unprecedented density also appeared in daily operational figures. This reflects an attempt to apply continuous pressure on the Houthis and prevent them from turning coastal gains into a stable reality. Yet this escalation requires careful management. A high tempo of operations does not by itself produce a strategic shift unless it is linked to a clear plan to retake the coast, secure supply lines and prevent collapses.

The implication is that September was the month of restoring the military initiative, but it has not yet answered the question of whether tactical gains can be converted into durable strategic outcomes.

4. Internal Security Transformation: Cells, Smuggling and Penetration

Alongside the frontlines, the risk of cells and infiltration emerged in liberated governorates. The Interior Ministry announced the arrest of a Houthi-linked cell in Abyan, and later reported the detention of cells and individuals connected to the Houthis, along

with suspicious communications, meetings, smuggling attempts, intelligence gathering and recruitment efforts in liberated governorates.

Operations against ISIS in Hadramawt also appeared, along with drug-smuggling attempts through Al-Wadiah and ambushes targeting travelers in Shabwa and Hadramawt. This means Houthi escalation does not move only through the frontlines. It also moves through internal networks, smuggling and information cells.

The implication is that any plan to restore the initiative must include internal security, intelligence and border crossings, not the military front alone.

5. Economic Transformation: Levies, Fuel and Electricity Under Houthi Authority

Although economic indicators were fewer than political, military and humanitarian indicators, they were highly significant. Reports included complaints about Houthi checkpoints on truck routes in Ibb, contaminated fuel in Sanaa, higher electricity prices in Houthi-held areas after fuel-price hikes, a cement traders' strike against price increases, and the use of force against traders in Hays and Al-Khokha after they refused to pay levies.

These indicators mean that the Houthis are trying to turn new military control into a network of levies and financing, especially in recently captured coastal areas. Higher electricity and fuel prices in areas under their control after the seizure of Mokha and the coast also reflect an attempt to transfer the cost of war to the population.

The economic implication is that the battle for the coast is not only military. It is also a battle over transport routes, levies, fuel, electricity and markets.

6. Humanitarian and Rights Transformation: Displacement as September's Largest Warning

Displacement was the largest humanitarian indicator in September. The number of displaced people rose gradually from tens of thousands to more than 180,000, with UN warnings that the figure could exceed 230,000 if the conflict continues. Taiz became the leading destination for displaced people, hosting more than 81,000 of 145,000 displaced persons in eight governorates in one estimate.

The attacks also caused civilian casualties, including children, women and displaced persons. The United Nations reported 128 civilian deaths and injuries since the renewed escalation, while the World Health Organization said the number of people killed and injured by the fighting reached 2,883 over more than a month.

In the rights file, escalation coincided with broad repression of the 26 September Revolution anniversary in Houthi-held areas, including the abduction of celebrants, child recruitment, property looting, house demolitions, and raids on judicial and humanitarian facilities. This makes the rights file an essential part of early warning, not merely a documentation file.

Fourth: What September Indicators Mean for Decision-Makers



September's indicators mean that Yemen has entered a phase of war over decision and sovereignty. The question is no longer whether fighting will escalate, but how the confrontation will be managed: will general mobilization become a disciplined national plan, or a scattered emotional reaction? Will the state be able to regain Bab al-Mandab, the coast and the islands, or will a temporary field reality become permanent?

They also mean that Bab al-Mandab is no longer an internal Yemeni file. Any vacuum in this corridor will be filled by regional and international powers, and the Houthis may be treated as a de facto reality unless the Yemeni government presents a practical plan to restore control and secure navigation.

The indicators also show that military response alone is not enough. Displacement, health, education, services and the rule of law have all become arenas of the battle. Any actor that fails to protect displaced people and civilians, control internal security and manage public messaging will lose an important part of its legitimacy even if it achieves field progress.

Most importantly, September proved that the Houthis are using three levels of pressure: military pressure on the frontlines and coast; maritime pressure in Bab al-Mandab; and social/economic pressure through levies, recruitment and repression. The government response must therefore also be three-dimensional: military, maritime/sovereign, and humanitarian/institutional.

Fifth: Rising Risks

1. Consolidation of a New Houthi Reality in Bab al-Mandab

The greatest risk is that Houthi control over parts of the coast and islands becomes a long-term reality, especially if some international powers accept limited Houthi guarantees on navigation.

2. Expansion of the War Into a Wider Regional Confrontation

Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, intelligence and military support dynamics, and American, British, Turkish, Pakistani and Saudi moves all increase the likelihood of a broader confrontation.

3. Humanitarian Explosion Driven by Displacement

Displacement exceeding 180,000 people, with projections that it may surpass 230,000, warns of a shelter, food, health and education crisis, particularly in Taiz, Marib, Hadramawt, Abyan and Lahj.



4. Long Military Attrition

The intensity of operations may turn into a war of attrition if it is not linked to a clear plan to recover vital areas and secure supply lines.

5. Penetration of Liberated Governorates Through Cells

The arrest of Houthi-linked cells and signs of intelligence gathering, recruitment and smuggling show that the internal front remains vulnerable to penetration.

6. Child Recruitment and Forced Mobilization

Expanded recruitment of children, workers and students in Houthi-controlled areas could prolong the war and raise its social and psychological cost.

7. Collapse of Health Services

The World Health Organization's warning that the health system is nearing collapse makes any new escalation a multiplied risk for civilians and displaced communities.

Sixth: Available Opportunities

1. Turning General Mobilization Into an Organized National Framework

The government can turn mobilization from a popular reaction into a disciplined national plan covering official recruitment, logistical support, civilian protection and unified political messaging.

2. Building a Yemeni Plan to Recover Bab al-Mandab

International concern over Houthi control of the coast and islands gives the government an opportunity to present a clear plan to retake and secure the corridor in partnership with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti and major powers.

3. Leveraging Regional and International Support

Condemnations by the Security Council, the G7, the European Union, the United Kingdom and China, together with Saudi support, can be turned into practical capabilities for the Coast Guard, air defense, intelligence and border crossings.

4. Turning Displacement Into a Political Priority

Wide-scale displacement gives the government an opportunity to build an international humanitarian front linking humanitarian support to state recovery and the end of Houthi escalation.



5. Documenting Houthi Violations on the Coast and in Taiz

Forced displacement, shelling, looting of facilities, child recruitment, abductions of September celebrants, and the looting of judicial and humanitarian institutions should become an organized international rights file.

6. Strengthening State Legitimacy Through Civilian Protection

Instructions to protect civilians in Taiz, raise hospital readiness and organize shelter camps can strengthen public trust if implemented effectively.

Seventh: Possible Scenarios



Scenario One: Mutual Attrition Around the Coast and Bab al-Mandab

Probability: High Government forces continue operations, airstrikes and attempts to retake positions, while the Houthis attempt to stabilize their coastal gains without a quick resolution.

Scenario Two: A Government/Regional Operation to Recover the Coast

Probability: Medium Military, political and regional pressures may lead to a broader operation to recover Mokha, Bab al-Mandab and coastal areas, especially if threats to navigation and Saudi Arabia continue.

Scenario Three: Practical Internationalization of the Red Sea While the

Government Is Marginalized **Probability: Medium** International powers may move directly to protect navigation while dealing with the existing field reality if the Yemeni government does not present an executable plan.

Scenario Four: A Large Displacement Crisis That Exceeds Response

Capacity **Probability: High** If escalation continues, displacement may exceed 230,000 people, putting pressure on Taiz, Marib, Hadramawt, Abyan and Lahj and creating a prolonged humanitarian crisis.

Scenario Five: Rising Houthi Internal Repression **Probability: High** As

military pressure continues, the Houthis may resort to more forced recruitment, suppression of national celebrations, abductions of activists and resource looting.

Eighth: Recommendations for Decision-Makers

1. Turn General Mobilization Into an Institutional Plan

Mobilization should remain under the authority of the state and the armed forces, with clear records, disciplined training, official channels and safeguards against armed disorder.

2. Announce a National Plan to Recover Bab al-Mandab

The government should present a political, military and maritime plan to recover the coast and islands and secure navigation, while requesting specific support from partners.



3. Establish a Red Sea and Western Coast Operations Room

This room should include defense, interior, Coast Guard, intelligence, ports, foreign ministry, local authorities and regional partners.

4. Make Civilian and Displaced-Person Protection an Operational Priority

Safe corridors, organized camps, emergency response teams, evacuation mechanisms and protection plans for women, children and displaced persons should be established.

5. Strengthen Counter-Cell and Anti-Smuggling Measures

The arrest of cells in Abyan and other liberated governorates should become part of a wider national campaign against espionage, smuggling and Houthi recruitment.

6. Document Houthi Crimes on the Coast and in Taiz

Shelling, forced displacement, recruitment, looting of institutions and abductions of September celebrants should be documented and submitted to the United Nations and the Human Rights Council.

7. Link International Support to State-Capacity Building

Support should not stop at condemnation. Priority should go to the Coast Guard, air defense, drones, intelligence, relief and health.

8. Manage Public Messaging Clearly

The government should explain to citizens the objectives, limits, plan and results of mobilization so that rumors and Houthi propaganda do not become sources of confusion.

Ninth: Concluding Situation Assessment

The September 2026 monitoring indicates that Yemen has entered a highly sensitive phase of the war, defined by Bab al-Mandab, general mobilization and the effort to restore the initiative. The Houthis attempted to turn gains on the coast and islands into a strategic pressure card, while the government, armed forces and social actors began moving toward mobilization, deterrence and the recovery of positions.

The greatest danger is that the temporary military reality in Bab al-Mandab becomes permanent, or that international powers accept selective Houthi guarantees on

navigation while disregarding Yemeni state sovereignty. Wide-scale displacement, health-system deterioration, forced recruitment and rights repression also make the civilian cost of any new escalation extremely high.

Yet the opportunity also exists. Houthi escalation has created broader national alignment, returned the 26 September Revolution to the center of symbolic mobilization, and opened the door for greater regional and international support for the Yemeni government - provided that mobilization becomes a plan, international support becomes capabilities, and military operations become a clear strategy to recover the coast and sovereignty.

The bottom line for decision-makers is clear:

September 2026 confirms that Yemen's battle is no longer only a frontline battle. It is a battle over sovereignty, corridors, islands, displaced communities and national memory. Whoever succeeds in recovering Bab al-Mandab, organizing mobilization, protecting civilians and securing the internal front will hold the stronger position in the coming path of war and peace.

Data source: Yemen News Archive, 01/09/2026 - 30/09/2026, with analytical interpretation by Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators.