FACTSHEET
ON THE HOUTHIS DEVASTATING USE OF LAND MINES IN YEMEN
May 2019
The Iran-backed Houthis terrorize Yemenis with land mines

Houthi Use of Land Mines

For the past several years, the Iran-backed Houthi militias have contaminated Yemen with more than a million land mines and improvised explosive devices. These weapons of terror threaten the lives of all Yemeni men, women and children, and have already caused nearly one thousand civilian deaths. The Houthis have planted these mines in residential areas, around schools and hospitals, and in the pathway of key humanitarian corridors. These mines will pose a threat to Yemenis for decades to come.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy found the Houthis use landmines at an “astonishingly high rate.” According to Conflict Armament Research, the scale of land mine contamination in Yemen is extraordinary, with mines “Mass-produced by Houthi forces on a scale only previously achieved by Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria.”

Congress must publicly denounce the Houthis for violating international human rights law and perpetrating acts of terrorism against the people of Yemen. Now is the time for Congress to speak up, and to condemn the Iran-backed Houthi militias for their continued use of illegal war tactics and deliberate prolongation of the conflict.

- Houthi land mines have caused more than 9,000 casualties, according to mine removal experts and monitors in Yemen.

- The Houthis have been reconfiguring anti-tank mines that previously needed over 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of pressure to detonate so that they require less than 10 kilograms (22 pounds) — meaning a child could trigger the explosive.

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4 https://www.apnews.com/bce0a80324d040f09843ceb3e4e45c1e
• According to the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, a humanitarian data source, land mines in farmlands, villages, wells and roads have killed at least 140 civilians, including 19 children, in the Hodeidah and Taiz governorates since 2018.

• Land mines and IEDs also have blocked humanitarian organizations from populations in need, left farms and wells inaccessible and injured civilians trying to return home.

• Human Rights Watch found that “Houthi forces bear primary responsibility for civilian casualties and foreseeable civilian harm from land mines.”

• Yemen’s National Centre for Removal of Land mines has removed over 300,000 land mines planted by Iran-backed Houthi militias. It estimates that the Houthis have planted more than 1,000,000 mines in Yemeni territory.

• The United Nations and several independent groups established that components for Houthi mines originate in Iran. This illegal transfer of arms by Iran to the Houthi extremists violates multiple UN Security Council Resolutions.

• With assistance from Iran, the Houthis established a land mine production facility in Saada, producing around 20 tons of mines per day to distribution hubs in Sana’a, Hodeidah, and Dhamar.

• The US Department of Defense found that Iranian landmines and IEDs have caused the death of more than 600 US soldiers in the Iraq War. Iranian material will threaten U.S. and international personnel for decades to come in Yemen.

Land Mines Affect Yemeni Civilians

Land mines, unlike other weapons in this conflict, are increasingly found in civilian areas. Land mines have been found in schools, homes, roads, hospitals, farmlands, and wells. These have left several areas

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Map of Landmine Contamination Areas in Taiz Governorate

The majority of casualties have occurred in Taiz governorate. A media source quoted Basam Al Ariqi from the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center (YEMAC) reporting that in Taiz province alone, landmines had killed 268 and injured 214 between April 2015 and March 2017. These landmines afflict Yemeni civilians more than any other group. Both the Human Rights Watch and DWB interviewed victims who had been affected personally, or knew someone that had been affected by landmines.

- “Mansour,” a farm worker in al-Qataba, in Khawkha district, Hodeida governorate, suffered serious injuries and burns when his plow struck a mine on a vegetable farm in early 2019.

- “Hassan,” a shepherd in al-Omari village near Mokha, said that his 15-year-old son suffered burns and serious injuries in a landmine explosion in December 2018 while the two of them were tending their livestock. “I heard the explosion and I ran to [my son]. All of us were scared, but I saw him lying there and I took off my head scarf and started wrapping it around his body and his wounds.”

- In December 2018, “Nasser” was tending his sheep with his uncle and cousin when he walked on a land mine. Nasser and his uncle were injured in the blast. Nasser needed a right foot amputation and using crutches has been difficult.

uninhabitable and have restricted access to food and water for thousands of Yemeni civilians. Claire Ha-Duong, the head of the Doctors Without Borders Mission in Yemen stated, “People who live here are punished – not once, but twice. The mines not only blow up their children but also prevent them from cultivating their fields. They lose their source of income as well as food for their families…”

Taiz, one of the areas with the greatest population density in Yemen, holds a significant number of known land mines. The map indicates areas where known landmines have been planted, but cannot fully display the level of contamination that has not yet been discovered. Nowhere in Taiz can be considered free from explosive remnants of war.

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9 https://www.msf.org/trapped-mines-yemen
12 Ibid
A Yemeni child requires crutches after a landmine severely injured his legs

- In December 2018, “Sultan”, who lives in Waze’yah in Ta’iz Governorate, went to Mocha city markets to buy food. “Someone walked on an explosive device, maybe a land mine, in the market, I heard a strong blast.” Sultan was injured by shrapnel in his right foot and his abdomen.14

- “Fatima,” a 12-year-old girl, was riding a donkey to collect water. Her grandmother said that as she returned home with her water cans, the donkey stepped on a mine. The resulting blast caused Fatima to lose her foot.15

- Ali, a teenager from a small village near Mawza, was wounded in November 2018 when he stepped on a land mine in a field near his house. His right leg was amputated under his knee.

Doctors Without Borders set up a hospital in the city of Mocha, in the Taiz Governorate, in August of 2018. From then to December 2018, the organization has treated more than 150 people wounded by mines, among other explosive devices – of which one-third of the affected were children, who were merely playing in nearby fields.16

Much of the rural population in southwest Yemen, where most of the land mines are located, do not have the money for treatment in Aden, the closest specialist hospital, or even the money to travel to the city. The area between Aden and Hodeidah, a six to eight hour drive, is now considered a “medical wasteland”. “The coastal region between Hodeidah and Aden is rural and extremely poor. People have no access to medical treatment and our hospital is the only place they can go when they need surgery,” says Husni Abdallah, a nurse in the DWB operating theater. “Mines cause particularly severe injuries, so we see complex fractures that are difficult to operate on. Patients often have to have amputations and then require months and months of rehabilitation.” 17

Some Yemeni civilians have taken it upon themselves to remove the immense amount of landmines, specifically within their communities. These amateur civilian deminers lack the necessary demining protection or equipment, and use haphazard methods to attempt demining.18

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17 https://www.msf.org/trapped-mines-yemen
Yemeni civilians attempt to remove a mine from their village as others look on.
Everyone lacks protective equipment. (Human Rights Watch)

**Saudi Efforts to Remove Land Mines**

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) currently backs the MASAM project, which has had an active presence in the country since June 2018. Since the start of the project, KSrelief staff have removed over 63,000 mines. Many of these mines had been placed in civilian properties, such as schools, homes, farmlands, wells, and roads.

“Mines today exist in every single area of Yemen,” Ousama al-Gosaibi, the program manager for the MASAM Project, told The Associated Press during a trip to the southern city of Aden organized by the Saudi military. “It’s not being used as a defensive (or) offensive mechanism. It’s being used to terrorize the local population across Yemen.”

KSrelief is backed by international partners, such as Dynasafe Area Clearance Group, a UK company. It also employs international staff, including experts around the world, who put their lives on the line in order to help the Yemeni people. This includes the five foreign demining experts who died in accidental explosions on the job in January 2019.

**International Efforts to Remove Land Mines & Mine Risk Education**

Claire Ha-Duong, the DWB head of Mission stated, “Specialist mine clearance organizations and the authorities must step up their efforts to demine the region in order to reduce the number of victims…” In response, other organizations have put forward efforts to not only demine Yemen, but also to raise awareness with the local populations on identifying land mines and how to avoid them.

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19 http://www.projectmasam.com/eng/masam
20 https://www.apnews.com/bce0a80324d040f09843ceeb3e4e45c1e
21 https://twitter.com/KSRelief_EN/status/1122463181417459718
22 https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/asia-foreign-mines-yemen-1.815805
23 https://www.msf.org/trapped-mines-yemen
• The Yemen Executive Mine Action Center (YEMAC) has been active since the beginning of the conflict in 2012. Between 2016 and 2018, YEMAC cleared 300,000 mines from civilian areas. Over 10 million Yemenis have benefitted from YEMAC activities. It has worked in partnership with Save the Children on Mine Risk Education (MRE) in order to reduce the psychological impact on affected children who have lost limbs due to mines. More than 360,000 have participated in mine-risk education activities.

• YEMAC expanded capacity and the scope of operations in 2017. YEMAC field staff operated in 55 districts of 14 governorates in 2017. This compares favorably with the previous year when it worked in 47 districts across nine governorates.

• The UN’s Development Program (UNDP) has worked in the country since 2015 on an emergency basis. Over the past four years, land survey and clearance operations have been conducted in 16 governorates and 81 districts; and over 6.4 million square meters of land have been cleared. Over 120,000 explosives have been cleared and, of these, 13,000 have been destroyed. UNDP has worked in conjunction with YEMAC on several of these initiatives.

• In July 2017, the UNDP started implementing Phase V (2017–2020) of its program in Yemen, which includes support for YEMAC in preparing the request for an extension to its Mine Ban Treaty Article 5 deadline, due for submission by March 2019. It has identified four desired outputs:

   o Mine and unexploded ordinance (UXO) contamination is mapped and the impact assessed nationwide.
   o Mines and UXO are efficiently cleared in priority areas.
   o Risk education is increased in affected communities.
   o Survivors are screened, rehabilitated, and supported.

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24 https://ye-yemac.org/gallery/
25 https://www.msf.org/trapped-mines-yemen
27 https://ye-yemac.org/mre/
Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) conducted an assessment mission to Sanaa in October 2017 to explore the possibilities for establishing a program to support YEMAC’s MDD capacity.33

Several celebrities have also been outspoken on the issue of land mines, notably Prince Harry, who has followed in the footsteps of his mother Princess Diana on raising awareness of the horrors of land mines and active demining efforts in other countries. Prince Harry has previously visited minefields in Angola and Mozambique, and is a patron of the land mines charity HALO Trust.

In a 2017 speech at Kensington Palace, Prince Harry noted that his mother had been "shocked and appalled by the impact that landmines were having on incredibly vulnerable people and on children in particular".

"At the time, the attention my mother brought to this issue wasn’t universally popular; some believed she had stepped over the line into the arena of political campaigning – but for her this wasn't about politics; it was about people… Collectively we have the knowledge, skill, and resources to achieve it, so let's make future generations proud."

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30 https://www.unicef.org/appeals/yemen.html
32 https://danishdemininggroup.dk/danish-demining-group/where-we-work/yemen