



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	Yemen
Question(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Background on the Yemeni armed forces2. Information on the compulsory military service3. Information on the recruitment of returnees and whether they are forced to join the military upon their return
Date of completion	15 October 2019
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Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	---

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This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).

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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 14 October 2019. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.



COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Background on the Yemeni armed forces

After the takeover of Sana'a in September 2014, the Houthis took effective control of major state institutions in Yemen including the ministries of defence and interior, leaving the official Yemen National Army (YNA), a legitimate armed force under the government of president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, to be formed from the remnants of the military personnel and 'bolstered by mass recruitment of tribal and other fighters'. Chatham House indicates that up to 70 % of the army, police and paramilitary groups joined the Houthi-Saleh alliance at the beginning of the war, with senior military personnel loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh providing military support to the Houthis.¹

Created between October and December 2015, the YNA was formed by removing military leaders allied to Saleh and recruiting some 200,000 fighters, according to the official statistics quoted by Abaad Studies & Research Center². In a 2016 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) paper, security environment in Yemen was described as fragmented to an extent that, according to one interviewee, it was 'often impossible to determine reliably which unit is allied with whom unless you are on the ground', with frequent instances of desertions and defections from the Yemeni armed forces. Young soldiers were reportedly easily persuaded to join the Houthis after the promise of double salaries or death threats.³

In September 2019, the YNA has an estimated personnel of some 450,000–500,000, with its presence concentrated in the governorates of Al Jawf, Mareb and Hadramawt, as well as in the city of Taiz. Real numbers may be reportedly lower, with one source describing the official statistics as 'extremely vague', noting that 'accurate figures are still impossible to obtain' as a result of many 'ghost soldiers' enrolled only in order to receive their salaries.⁴ Sources quoted by the CSIS in 2016 indicated numbers as different as 60,000 or 450,000 soldiers forming the YNA.⁵

Southern Resistance Forces (SRF), active in the south and described as being 'among the most capable in Yemen', are sometimes also seen as being under the control of the internationally recognised Yemeni government, even though reportedly controlled remotely from the United Arab Emirates.⁶

¹ Chatham House, *Between Order and Chaos; A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen*, September 2019, [url](#), pp. 22-23; UN Security Council, Letter dated 22 January 2016 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2140 (2014) addressed to the President of the Security Council', 26 January 2016, [url](#), p. 25

² Abaad Studies & Research Center, *Yemen's National Army in the hot Fighting Fronts*, June 2018, [url](#), pp. 5-6

³ CSIS, *The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen*, 14 July 2016, [url](#), p. 38-39

⁴ Chatham House, *Between Order and Chaos; A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen*, September 2019, [url](#), p. 23; CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), *The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen*, 14 July 2016, [url](#), p. 20

⁵ CSIS, *The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen*, 14 July 2016, [url](#), p. 34

⁶ Chatham House, *Between Order and Chaos; A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen*, September 2019, [url](#), p. 24; Jamestown Foundation, *Some Old, Some New: Grievances, Players, and Backers in the Conflict in Southern Yemen*; *Terrorism Monitor* Volume: 17 Issue: 17, 10 September 2019, [url](#)



A research paper by the Chatham House describes the relationship between the YNA, Houthis and SRF as follows:

‘In practice, the YNA is legitimized by international support for the government, while the SRF is attempting to build legitimacy by creating southern Yemeni ‘state’ institutions. The Houthis are not internationally recognized, but control most of the pre-war institutions of state.’⁷

2. Information on the compulsory military service

Article 36 of the Yemeni Constitution from 1990, as amended in 2001, states that:

‘The law stipulates the conditions for military service, promotion and disciplinary procedures in the military, police and security forces.’⁸

Article 60 of the Constitution further notes that:

‘Defending religion and the homeland is a sacred duty, military duty is an honour, and national service is to be organized by law.’⁹

Amongst the consulted and listed sources and during the time dedicated to prepare this query response, a law stipulating conditions for military service in Yemen could not be found.

Yemen abolished mandatory military service in 2001.¹⁰ Before the abolition, it was reportedly obligatory for all males between 18 and 30 years of age who finished their secondary education to serve in military for one year with a possibility of an alternative service in the civil sector.¹¹ According to the CIA World Fact book 2018 overview of Yemen, there is ‘no conscription’ in the country and the minimum age for voluntary military service is 18 years old. Those who join the army voluntarily are obliged to serve for two years.¹²

In 2007, the government reportedly announced its plan to reinstate the compulsory military service as a way to fight unemployment, with an expectation that some 70,000 new recruits would join the

⁷ Chatham House, *Between Order and Chaos; A New Approach to Stalled State Transformations in Iraq and Yemen*, September 2019, [url](#), p. 38

⁸ Yemen: Constitution [Yemen], 10 February 2001, [url](#)

⁹ Yemen: Constitution [Yemen], 10 February 2001, [url](#)

¹⁰ Critical Threats, *Gulf of Aden Security Review*, 15 September 2017, [url](#); CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), *The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen*, 14 July 2016, [url](#), p. 21; CORI, *Yemen: Information on military service and treatment of deserters/draft evaders in Yemen*, 6 November 2014, [url](#)

¹¹ ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zum Jemen: Zwangsrekrutierungen durch die Huthi-Milizen, Auswahl der Rekruten: Kriterien (Alter, Stamm, Religion, Ausbildung) und Regeln (z.B. Freistellung); Folgen bei Weigerung [a-10337-1]*, 10 October 2017, [url](#); IRB, *Yemen: Information on conscription in the law and practice*, 1 January 1995, [url](#)

¹² CIA, *The World Factbook, Yemen*, 2018, [url](#)



army.¹³ A 2013 Child Soldiers International report indicated that the conscription plan was not put in place.¹⁴

The CSIS mentioned the event in their July 2016 report on the armed forces in Yemen:

‘In 2007 conscription was reintroduced in response to the growing threats of terrorism. The draft, however, was implemented [with] little consistency in general, and even less in southern Yemen where the Southern Movement and growing opposition to Saleh’s rule made it more difficult to enroll reliable youths.’¹⁵

In November 2012, a newly established committee of military affairs published a plan to reorganise and restructure the armed forces. The plan included a ‘reactivation of the law of the mandatory national defense service’. According to the plan, the optimal size of the Yemeni national army would consist of around 375,000 persons, of which 15 % would be reserve soldiers and officers once the obligatory military service is re-established.¹⁶

In April 2017, it was reported that the Houthis tried to use their influence over former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in order to help to pass a law to impose obligatory military service on students who had completed the secondary education. According to the Saudi paper al-Hayar, Saleh refused to bring such proposal to the parliament.¹⁷ In September 2017, Houthis’ leader Abdelmalik al-Huthi announced on Al-Masira, the group’s TV channel, that they would reintroduce conscription in Yemen, without specifying further details.¹⁸

In a July 2016 report, the CSIS explained the challenges of estimating the actual number of soldiers loyal to the government in Yemen, caused also by an informal recruitment into governmental forces, illustrated as follows:

‘[a]n army commander in region X fighting the Ansar Allah [the Houthis] asks the local tribal chief for, say, 1,000 men for two months (some to fight, some to work in logistics, others in

¹³ Global Security, Yemen Military, n.d., [url](#); IRB, Yemen: Military service; reported cases of forced recruitment and conscription by government authorities and armed groups, including by Al-Qaeda, in regions other than those under Houthi control (2015-December 2017) [YEM106027.FE], 8 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴ Child Soldiers International, Yemen, Report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in advance of Yemen’s initial periodic report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, March 2013, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵ CSIS, The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen, 14 July 2016, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁶ Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, The Restructuring of the Yemeni Army, 2018, [url](#), pp. 43, 47

¹⁷ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zum Jemen: Sind in von Houthis kontrollierten Gebieten die Houthi-Milizen die offiziellen (nord-jemenitischen) Streitkräfte oder besteht daneben eine Art offizielle (nord-jemenitische) Armee? Gibt es eine generelle Mobilisierung und eine Art allgemeine Wehrpflicht, Ahndung von Verstößen dagegen [a-10337-2 (10338)], 10 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zum Jemen: Zwangsrekrutierungen durch die Huthi-Milizen, Auswahl der Rekruten: Kriterien (Alter, Stamm, Religion, Ausbildung) und Regeln (z.B. Freistellung); Folgen bei Weigerung [a-10337-1], 10 October 2017, [url](#)



transportation, etc.). The commander agrees to 'register' the men for one year, pays the tribal leader for 8 months and pockets the rest.'¹⁹

Sources interviewed by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in 2017 stated they were not aware of instances of forced recruitment by Hadi's government forces. They further indicated a voluntary aspect of the service mostly because of a lack of employment opportunities in the country, adding that 'the arrangement in each region varies' because of the fragmentation of the territory under the government's control.²⁰

One witness interviewed by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) explained that men in Yemen are pressured to join the 'war effort':

'Men have become the fuel of the war, they don't necessarily want to fight, but they have no choice, either because they are forced to fight, or feel pressured to do so to be seen as good family men, or because they would prefer to fight rather than have their children die of hunger.'²¹

Sources indicate that various pro-governmental tribal militias and armed groups fight alongside the regular army in Yemen, doing their own recruitment of new fighters.²² No further information regarding this kind of recruitment could be found amongst consulted and listed sources.

Cases of forced recruitment of detainees at the Al-Bureiqa coalition base in the Aden governorate, controlled by the United Arab Emirates, were reported in 2019.²³

3. Information on the recruitment of returnees and whether they are forced to join the military upon their return

No specific information on the recruitment of returnees to Yemen by the governmental forces could be found in the consulted and listed sources.

¹⁹ CSIS, The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen, 14 July 2016, [url](#)

²⁰ IRB, Yemen: Military service; reported cases of forced recruitment and conscription by government authorities and armed groups, including by Al-Qaeda, in regions other than those under Houthi control (2015-December 2017) [YEM106027.FE], 8 December 2017, [url](#)

²¹ HRC, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014; Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, 3 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 151-152

²² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the report submitted by Yemen under Para 8, Paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, 31 January 2014, [url](#); Global Security, Yemen Military, n.d., [url](#)

²³ HRC, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014; Report of the detailed findings of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen, 3 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 53, 60



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