

# FULCRUM GLOBAL



*The publishing arm of the Society for Defense and Strategic Studies (SDSS)  
at American Military University (APUS)*

## INTELLIGENCE BRIEF #1

**NAME OF PRIMARY ANALYST:** Cameron Grischott

**SUBJECT:** Yemen Civil War: Impact on the Persian Gulf

**COUNTRY/REGION:** Yemen/Persian Gulf

### **BACKGROUND OF SUBJECT:**

The armed conflict between the Hadi government forces (Yemeni government backed by the Saudi Arabian government) and the Houthi forces (rebels backed by the Iranian government). Other actors include the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula.

### **CUSTOMER QUESTIONS/RFI:**

1. What were the original causes of the conflict?
2. What are the regional impacts of this conflict?
3. What is the humanitarian impact of this conflict?
4. How has the conflict allowed for terrorist organizations to spread in Yemen?
5. What impact does this conflict have on U.S. national interest?

### **CURRENT ASSESSMENT:**

The conflict began when the Houthi (Shiite rebels with ties to Iran) took control of the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. Following the fall of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi's government, a coalition of Gulf states led by the Saudis had initiated economic and military strikes against the Houthi rebels. In 2016, attempts at a peace deal by the U.N. failed and the fighting continued between the two sides. The interception of Iranian weapon shipments in-route to the Houthi rebels by naval forces enforcing embargoes against Iran, has led to Iran using their own naval convoys in the region. The involvement of both sides has started to create a bigger divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the country, mirroring the ongoing problem in the region.

This conflict has led to a large scale humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Currently, more than half of the civilian population does not have access to secure food sources. There are less than half of the health facilities functioning. A majority of the population does not have access to piped drinking water and do not have any access to safe water. Over 22 million people have been affected by this conflict in Yemen alone. The lack of controlled infrastructure has led to a problem in providing aid to civilians that have been affected or displaced by the conflict.

In addition, the chaos that has resulted within the Yemeni borders has allowed for groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL to gain control of territories throughout the country. Al-Qaeda has been known to target the Houthi rebels and ISIL has also claimed responsibility for attacks against two mosques used by Shia Muslims. Both of these organizations share a similar goal of removing the current government. They also plan on replacing it with an Islamic state and removing all western influences from Yemen.

The U.S. government has primarily targeted al-Qaeda and ISIL members in the country as well as having deployed a small number of U.S. troops to advise and assist Yemeni and Saudi-backed forces in retaking territory from these terrorist organizations. The U.S. has also provided intelligence and logistical support to the Saudi-backed forces for their effort in the Yemen Civil War. As of now, a majority of the armed conflict has not included U.S. military assets.

#### **ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT:**

The ongoing conflict caused a larger rift between those that have stronger ties with the Saudis and those with stronger ties to the Iranians throughout the Persian Gulf region. Countries on the Saudi Peninsula are part of the Saudi-backed forces targeting Houthi rebels; this puts them at risk of becoming targets of Iranian retaliation via their economic interests in the region.

The interception of Iranian shipments to the Houthi rebels has led to an increase in Iranian naval activity and influence. The U.S. has tried to minimize their own military influence in the conflict to prevent an increase in calls for other foreign governments from outside the region from becoming more involved, such as Russia. In addition, the influence by certain countries in the U.N. Security Council could be a factor on why there are currently no U.N. peacekeeper involvement in this conflict area.

Currently there are restrictions on humanitarian aid due to the primary ports of entry being controlled by the Houthi rebels. This has caused the ports to become targets by Saudi backed forces to prevent the importation of weapons and supplies to the Houthi rebels. The limitation of supplies and the terrain around the country is making it more difficult for civilians that are in need of vital supplies. This prevents them from being able to move to better locations to obtain the supplies they require for basic life requirements. The lack of open ports has also created a problem for foreign governments to send medical aid via ships. For example, hospital

ships trying to provide much needed medical support to the civilians that have been affected by this conflict find that the lack of open ports makes it more difficult for them to implement their mission.

Military strikes by the Saudi-backed coalition have been split between regions since non-government militia groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda have taken control of various regions around the country. This also forces humanitarian aid workers and supplies to need more security support for reaching civilians who are in need of relief. Additional security is also needed for humanitarian aid operations in order to prevent the resources from being seized by these terrorist/militia organizations. However, with the terrorist groups targeting of Houthi/Shia targets has made it so they are able to primarily operate in the Hadi-controlled areas with support from the locals.

The targeting of terrorist organizations by U.S. forces puts some strain on relations with the civilians in the Hadi-controlled regions of the country. With the terrorist groups targeting the Houthis they could be seen in a similar way as the Hadi-government forces by the locals. This does allow for more U.S. resources to be used for more than just intelligence and logistic support. However, there are current limitations that are preventing the U.S. military being more involved in the conflict, without the potential of having possible hostile interaction with Iranian military forces in the Persian Gulf area.

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