

Houthis: The Second Arm of Iran in the Region to subjugate the Arabian Peninsula

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Abstract: *Houthis militia became an international issue in Yemen and Arabian Peninsula. At the time, Houthis militia didn't control a part of Yemen only, but they interpret in regional and neighboring countries. Having full military, media, educational, financial and logistic support from Iran, they have started their armed activities in 2004 against central government of Yemen. This paper aims to illustrate the role of Houthis militia in implementing Iranian's strategy to subjugate Arabian Peninsula. This paper also explains internal conflicts of this militia with central government of Yemen during 2004 to 2018.*

Key words: *Houthis Militia, Yemen, Iran*

A. Introduction

Houthis is an armed militia in Yemen. Since 2014, they could control a large part of Yemen including the capital Sana'a by force. Houthis or Ansar Allah (Supporter of God) started their activities in north Yemen (Sa'dah city) at the beginning of 90s of the last century. Houthis began as a moderate theological movement that preached tolerance and held a broad-minded view of all the Yemeni peoples [1]. Government of Yemen at that time gave them support (or at least let them grow up) to face the rising tide of Saudi-backed Salafism in their area. Within ten years (1994-2004), benefiting of Iranian support, they could establish a strong base for their activities and attract hundreds of followers in Sa'dah city. Like many Iranian-backed groups such as Hezbollah, the Houthi movement attracts its Zaidi-Shia followers in Yemen by promoting regional political-religious issues in its media, including the overarching US-Israeli conspiracy and Arab "collusion" [2] [3].

Houthis, during 2004-2010 had entered into continuous wars against central government of Yemen. These conflicts with government led to more tensions and thousands of victims of both sides. Houthis insurgency started in 2004 in north

Yemen (Sa'dah City) and continued to 2010. It was known in Yemen as Houthi rebellion, Sa'dah War, or Sa'dah conflict. It began in June 2004, when Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a leader of the Zaidi sect in the area, launched an uprising against the Yemeni government. Initially, most of the fighting took place in Sa'dah Governorate in northwestern Yemen, but some of the fighting spread to neighboring governorates Hajjah, 'Amran, al-Jawf and the Saudi province of Jizan [4].

Like many Iranian-backed groups such as Hezbollah, the Houthi movement attracts its Zaidi-Shia followers in Yemen by promoting regional political-religious issues in its media, including the overarching US-Israeli conspiracy and Arab "collusion" [5] [6]. In 2003, the Houthis' slogan "The God is great, death to the US, death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam", became the group's trademark [7]. But Houthi officials rejected the literal interpretation of the slogan. The Houthis participated in the 2011 Yemeni revolution by participating in street protests and coordination with other opposition groups. Houthis joined the national dialogue conference in Yemen as part of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative to mediate peace after the unrest. However, the Houthis later rejected the provisions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement. In November 2011 stipulating the formation of six federal regions in Yemen, claiming that the agreement did not fundamentally reform the government and that the proposed federalism divided Yemen into poor and rich areas. Houthis also feared the deal was a blatant attempt to weaken them by dividing areas under their control between separate regions [8].

In 2014–2015 Houthis took over the government in Sana'a with the help of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and announced the fall of the current government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi [9]. Houthis have gained control of most of the northern part of Yemen's territory and as of 2017 are resisting the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen that claims to seek to restore the internationally recognized Yemeni government [10] to power. Additionally, the Islamic State militant group has attacked all of the conflict's major parties including Houthis, Saleh forces, the Yemeni government, and the Saudi Arabian-led coalition forces [11].

B. Main Subject

1. Background

Houthis or (Ziddiyah - fiver) was in Yemen since 1200 years. Actually, Houthis are part of Ziddiyah sect in Yemen and they were more near to Sunni than Shia all the past time. After 1991, Houthis have contacted with Iran and they got much support to start their religious and military activities. Since this time, they changed their belief and doctrine to become twelves as Shia in Iran. Houthis now in Yemen are very small group but they are very ideologically organized and committed to their leadership representative with Shia Twelver (Ethna Ashariyat). Houthis began as a moderate theological movement that preached tolerance and held a broad-minded view of all the Yemeni peoples [12]. But they changed quickly to be armed group and involved in many conflicts with central government. Although Houthis adopted anti-America and anti-Jewish slogan, but they have never been an enemy for either America or Israel. During six years of war with central government (2004-2010), thousands of victims of civilians, army and triples that were around Houthis activities were a result of this war. Hundreds of homes, infrastructure, schools and mosques were destroyed and thousands of families replaced their residence to near and safe cities.

In 2011, Houthis participated in the Yemeni Revolution, as well as the ensuing National Dialogue Conference (NDC) [13]. However, they rejected the provisions of the November 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council deal on the ground that "it divided Yemen into poor and wealthy regions" and also in response to assassination of their representative at NDC [14]. But, this was a reason to start their military activities against government and whole country's organizations. In May 2012, it was reported that the Houthis controlled a majority of Sa'dah, Al Jawf, and Hajjah governorates; they had also gained access to the Red Sea and started erecting barricades north of Sana'a in preparation for more conflict [15].

On 20 January 2015, Houthi militia seize the capital. The militia officially took control of the Yemeni government on 6 February, dissolving parliament and declaring its Revolutionary Committee to be the acting authority in Yemen [16]. During a few months, militia had spread to control many cities including Hodeida

and Aden. On 27 March 2015, in response to perceived Houthi threats to Sunni factions in the region, Saudi Arabia along with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan led a gulf coalition airstrike in Yemen [17]. This war caused high waves of exodus, famine, poor, disease, and all country's employees without salaries and many serious problems to the country.

2. Iranian Support

According to constitution of the Iranian Islamic revolution, Republic Islamic in Iran has to export revolution out of borders and support the most vulnerable in the world. Based on this fact, Iran put many plans in somehow they spread Iranian revaluation out of borders. Former Yemeni officials have claimed that the Houthis have received significant support from Iran in the form of weapons, money and training since 2004, while Houthi leadership denies having received weapons or financial support from Iran [18]. On the edition of 8 April 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the US knew Iran was providing military support to the Houthi rebels in Yemen [19]. In 2013, photographs released by the Yemeni government show the United States Navy and Yemen's security forces seized a class of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles not publicly known to have been out of state control [20]. In April 2016, the U.S. Navy intercepted a large Iranian arms shipment, seizing thousands of weapons, AK-47 rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers that likely were headed to Yemen [21]. The former president Ali Abdullah Saleh –who had been in conflicts with them for two decades but sought an alliance before switching sides again and his death during the 2017 battle of Sana'a– has accused Iran of supporting the Houthi many times. Saleh stated that "The real reason they received unofficial support from Iran was because they repeat same slogan that is raised by Iran death to America, death to Israel". He also said "The Iranian media repeats statements of support for these Houthi elements. They are all trying to take revenge against the USA on Yemeni territories" [22]. However his claims of material support remained unsubstantiated.

Iran is sending advanced weapons and military advisers to Yemen's rebel Houthi movement, stepping up support for its Shi'ite ally in a civil war whose outcome

could sway the balance of power in the Middle East [23]. Preventing Iranian shipments of advanced air defenses is another urgent concern. After examining Iranian ballistic missiles fired into Saudi Arabia from Yemen, the UN Panel of Experts concluded in January that Tehran "is in non-compliance with paragraph 14 of resolution 2216 (2015)," referring to the arms embargo imposed on the Houthis under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Last month's Sayyad-2C seizure would only add to that rap sheet if confirmed. The United States should therefore work with the Yemeni government and the coalition to expose any further Iranian smuggling of SAM or electronic warfare systems, which could threaten civilian aviation as easily as military aircraft. Actually, in recent months Iran has taken a greater role in the two-year-old conflict by stepping up arms supplies and other support. This mirrors the strategy it has used to support its Lebanese ally Hezbollah in Syria. Iran's hardline rulers planned to empower Houthis militia in Yemen to "strengthen their hand in the region". They are planning to create a Hezbollah-like militia in Yemen. To confront Riyadh's hostile policies ... Iran needs to use all its cards. Using Houthis in Yemen or Hezbollah in Lebanon is as a tool to control Saudi Arabia and this all is a part of Iranian strategy to subjugate the Arabian Peninsula and the Holy places Mecca and Medina.

3. Local and Regional Conflicts

Houthis have launched several local and regional wars since 2004 till now (2018) in Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Houthis believe in power and only power to impose their vision and achieve their objectives as followers of Iran regime. These wars included many periods as following:

- ***June–September 2004:*** From June to August 2004, government troops battled supporters of al-Houthi in the north Yemen (Sa'dah city) [24]. Estimates of the dead range from 500 to 1,000 [25]. On 10 September, Yemeni forces killed Rebel leader Hussein Badreddin Al-Houthi [26]. Since then, the rebellion has been led by one of his brothers, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi (Current leader), while his father, Badreddin al-Houthi, became the group's spiritual leader [27].

- ***March–June 2005:*** Between March and April 2005, some 1,500 people were killed in a resurgence of fighting between government forces and supporters of the slain cleric, now calling themselves Houthis [25]. In May 2005, the rebels rejected an offer of a presidential pardon by President Ali Abdullah Saleh after their conditions for surrender were refused by the government and minor clashes continued. On May 21, the government released estimates of the impact of the insurgency, announcing that it was responsible for 552 deaths, 2,708 injuries, and over US\$ 270 million in economic damages [28]. On 23 June 2005, the Houthis' military last commander Abdullah al-Ruzami surrendered to Yemeni authorities after tribal mediators worked out a deal with the government [27].
- ***November 2005 – 2006:*** Fighting broke out in November 2005 and continued until early 2006. Houthis during this time assassinated many of pro-government tribes and persons in Sa'dah and nearby cities. The fighting ended before the Presidential elections that year [29] and in March 2006, the Yemeni government freed more than 600 captured Shi'a fighters [30]. There was no data with regards to casualties in 2006, but they were said to be significantly lower than those of the previous year [31].
- ***January–June 2007:*** Fighting broke out on 28 January 2007, when militants attacked a number of government installations, killing six soldiers and injuring 20 more [32]. Further attacks on 31 January left six more soldiers dead and 10 wounded [33]. A further ten soldiers died and 20 were wounded in an attack on an army roadblock near the Saudi Arabian border on 1 February [34]. Though there was no official confirmation of militant casualties in the attacks, government sources claim three rebel fighters were killed in a security operation following the 31 January attacks [35]. In February, the government launched a major offensive against the rebels involving 30,000 troops [36]. By 19 February, almost 200 members of the security forces and over 100 rebels had died in the fighting [37]. A further 160 rebels were killed in the subsequent two weeks [38]. A ceasefire agreement was reached on 16 June 2007. The rebel leaders agreed to lay down arms and go into exile in Qatar (by whom the agreement had been mediated), while the government agreed to release rebel

prisoners, help pay for reconstruction and assist with IDPs returning home [39]. In total some 1,500 people were killed by the conflict in 2007, including 800 government troops, 600 rebels and 100 civilians [31].

- ***March–July 2008:*** Armed incidents resumed in April 2008, when seven Yemeni soldiers died in a rebel ambush on 29 April [40]. On 2 May, 15 worshippers were killed and 55 wounded in a bombing at the Bin Salman Mosque in Sa'dah as crowds of people left Friday prayers. The government blamed the rebels for the bombing, but the Houthis denied responsibility [41]. Shortly after the attack, three soldiers and four rebels died in overnight skirmishes [42]. On 12 May, clashes between Yemeni soldiers and rebels near the border with Saudi Arabia killed 13 soldiers and 26 rebels [43]. During fighting in May 2008, a total of 1,000 government forces were killed and 3,000 injured. Some 70,000 people were displaced by the fighting [31]. President Saleh declared an end to fighting in the northern Sa'dah governorate on 17 July 2008 [44].
- ***August 2009 – February 2010:*** (Operation Scorched Earth): On 11 August 2009, the government promised to use an "iron fist" against the rebels. The Yemeni troops, backed by tanks and fighter aircraft, launched a fresh offensive, code-named Operation Scorched Earth, against the Houthis in the northern Sa'dah province. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced by the fighting [45]. The conflict took on an international dimension late in the month. Clashes were reported between the Houthis and Saudi security forces near the border [46]. Also, Yemeni officials captured a boat in the Red Sea that was transporting anti-tank shells and, according to some reports, five Iranian "instructors" sent to help the Houthis [47]. In late October, heavy clashes in the area of Razih led to the Houthis capturing two military headquarters and killing Yemeni General Amr Ali Mousa Al-Uuzali [48]. In early November, General Ali Salem al-Ameri and regional security Chief Ahmed Bawazeir were killed in a Houthi ambush as they were returning from Saudi Arabia [49].
- ***November 2009:*** (Attacking Saudi Arabian Borders): The conflict took on an international dimension on 4 November 2009 when the Houthis attacked the Saudi border killed one of the Saudi border guard and seized Al Khubah Village

and other Village [50]. The rebels took control of a mountainous section inside Saudi Arabia, in the border region of Jabal al-Dukhan and occupied two villages inside Saudi territory [51]. Saudi government officials said only that the air force had bombed Yemeni rebels who had seized a border area inside the kingdom, which they said had now been recaptured [52]. The fighting between Yemeni and Saudi forces and Houthis killed at least 119 Yemeni government forces, 263 Houthis, 277 civilians and 7 foreign civilians [31]. Saudi casualties were confirmed at 82 at the time [48]. With more soldiers killed in subsequent clashes and missing soldiers being found dead, however, the casualties rose to 133 killed by 22 January 2010 [53]. On 13 January 2010, Operation Blow to the Head was launched in an attempt by the government to capture the city of Sa'dah. Security forces claimed they killed 34 and arrested at least 25 Houthis [54]. On 25 January 2010, the Houthis offered a truce. There have however been allegations that the Saudis launched new air raids on 29 January, thus breaking the truce [55].

- **2010 conflict with pro-government tribes:** On July 2010, clashes broke out between Houthis and members of an army-backed tribe in the region of Souffian. Forty-nine people were reported killed in the clashes, including 20 tribal and 10 Houthi fighters. The Houthis also managed to surround the Yemeni military bases in the region [56]. On July 27, Houthis seized a military post at al-Zaala in Harf Sufyan, capturing 200 soldiers of the army's Republican Guard. Tribal sources claimed they had inflicted 200 fatalities on the Houthis in al-Amsheya while suffering only 30 dead themselves [57]. In total, between 195 and 281 people were killed during this round violence, with the majority of the casualties on the Houthi side [58].

C. Full State Coup

- **2011 Yemeni Revolution:** Houthis joined the revolution of Yemeni youth (Arab Spring) like another parties and organizations and they were welcomed like others. The main goal for youth, opposition parties and other organizations including houthis that participated in the revolution is downgrading the system of Ali Abdullah Saleh. At the beginning, houthis group has small part of

revolution where they have no clear role in the course of events. With the passage of time, houthis attracted some of young people, tribesmen, stakeholders and other strata of society, especially the zayddi sect in northern Yemen. After the signing of the Gulf Initiative, under which Saleh stepped down from power, all the Yemenis including Saleh regime have participated in the new government. The houthis remind in the streets and called for the continuation of the revolution. At the same time, Houthis gained control of greater territory. By 9 November 2011, Houthis were said to be in control of two Yemeni governorates (Sa'dah and Al Jawf) and close to taking over a third governorate (Hajjah), [59] which would enable them to launch a direct assault on the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. In May 2012, it was reported that the Houthis controlled a majority of Sa'dah, Al Jawf, and Hajjah governorates; they had also gained access to the Red Sea and started erecting barricades north of Sana'a in preparation for more conflict. By 21 September 2014, Houthis were said to control parts of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, including government buildings and a radio station [60]. Houthis in September 2014 overthrew the new government and took control of the country by force of arms. After the coup, houthis have formed a new presidential council and government with the old regime (Saleh Regime) to rule the country. They eliminated all the other parties and civil organizations including the elected president and new government. Houthis have responsibility of violations of international humanitarian law such as using child soldiers, shelling civilian areas, forced evacuations, executions and human shielding.

- **2014 to 2018:** after National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in Sana'a which hold from March 18, 2013 to January 24, 2014, Yemenis negotiated an agreement for peaceful change [61]. The National Dialogue established a new social contract and opened a new page in the history of Yemen in addition to paving the way for democratic governance founded on the rule of law, human rights and equal citizenship. This negotiation resulted in a successful agreement but failed implementation of the agreement. The Houthis and pro-Saleh forces were able to take advantage of the weakness of the transitional government and moved aggressively into Sana'a and overthrew President Hadi and his

government. On 20 January 2015, Houthi rebels seized the presidential palace in the capital. President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was in the presidential palace during the takeover but was not harmed [62]. The movement officially took control of the Yemeni government on 6 February, dissolving parliament and declaring its Revolutionary Committee to be the acting authority in Yemen. On 27 March 2015, in response to perceived Houthi threats to Sunni factions in the region, Saudi Arabia along with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan led a gulf coalition airstrike in Yemen [63]. The military coalition included the United States which helped in planning of air strikes, as well as logistical and intelligence support [64]. The alliance between Saleh and the Houthi broke down in late 2017, with armed clashes occurring in Sana'a from 28 November until Saleh has been killed by Houthis on 4 December in the same year. Until the end of 2018, several conferences of peace between all parties in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Sweden has been held, but did not emerge of a specific results due to the Huthis' intransigence. This situation led Yemeni government and coalition countries to think about military solution as desired by most of Yemenis or accept the political solution as desired by the Houthis.

D. Future of Houthis Militia

After success of Hezbollah mission in the North of Arabian Peninsula, Regime in Iran activated its plan in South Arabian Peninsula. Iranian's strategy caused a deep worries for Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region. Based on this fact that Iran plays a very dirty role in the region to spread and export their revolution in all the world, strongest countries in the region especially Saudi Arabia will do anything to stop Iran. Saudi Arabia led a collation included some countries in the region to remove Houthis control of Yemen. People in Yemen also realize that Houthis and their project are formed and supported by Iran. These all leads to determine the future of the militia in Yemen. Without a sudden change in the situation or entrance of another world's great power such as America or Russia, the militia will lose all its power and control of Yemen in a few months again. The militia control a small part of Yemen at the time (2018) and the area of their control receded day after day.

There is no future for any militia even it has power, weapon and support. We have many example such as al Qaeda, ISIS and many other militias around the world. These militias could control some areas, cities or even countries but they will finally be disappeared. World and people will never let them do what they want according to their aggressive behavior, ideology and real risk. For Yemeni people, Houthis was the reason behind all destruction of infrastructure, killing thousands of people, bombing homes and mosques, internal replacement and removing Yemeni republic constitution. In addition, Houthis was the reason behind the forming regional coalition operations on Yemen.

E. Conclusion

Houthis and Hezbollah are the strongest arms of Iran in the region. Iran effectively has control of four important countries in the region including Yemen, Iraq and Syria, as well as Lebanon. This control is a part of the Iranian plan to subjugate the Arabian Peninsula. Geographically, Saudi Arabia as the main rival of Iran in the region is surrounded by Yemen, Iraq and Shia in east Saudi Arabia where those area together are subjected to the Iranian control and implementing its agenda. Ali Akbar Velayati, International Affairs Advisor to Supreme Iranian Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, stated in October 2014 that "We are hopeful that Ansar-Allah has the same role in Yemen as Hezbollah has in eradicating the terrorists in Lebanon" [65]. Iran is trying to take revenge against the Saudi Arabia and USA on Yemeni territories. In another words, Iran uses Yemen as a pressure paper to negotiate with west and achieve its goals such as continuation of its nuclear program and regional control. Houthis, from the first appearance on the Yemeni scene, caused devastation, destruction and wars in Yemen. They are the responsible of destabilizing of Yemen and region security and causing a lot of destruction of Yemeni lives, properties and infrastructure. Future of Houthis Militia is determined by the Yemenis and other countries in the region. Although this militia controls some of Yemeni cities including the capital, most of Yemenis and region are agreed to eliminate this militia as soon as possible while houthis and United Nations are believing in political solutions.

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