

**Topic of assignment:**

***Yemen Crisis Since 2011***

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## ***Introduction:***

Yemen faces its biggest crisis in decades with the overthrow of its government by the Houthis, a Zaydi Shia movement backed by Iran. As the Houthis captured the capital of Sana'a and advanced south toward the Gulf of Aden in March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition launched an air campaign to reinstate Yemen's internationally recognized government.

These developments have derailed a political transition following a 2011 uprising against longtime President Ali Abdullah Saleh. In late January 2011, after a popular uprising in Tunisia, known as the Jasmine Revolution, had forced President Zine-l-Abidine Ben Ali from power, inspiring similar protests in Egypt thousands of protesters gathered in Sanaa and several other Yemeni cities to call on Saleh to step down as president. The protesters chanted pro-democracy slogans and condemned poverty and official corruption. Unlike the Egyptian and Tunisian protests, which seemed to have little centralized leadership, protests in Yemen appeared to have been organized and directed by a coalition of Yemeni opposition groups. Because of these ongoing situations in Yemen, Saleh was forced to step down from the post of President.

After Saleh left office in early 2012 as part of a mediated agreement between the Yemeni government and opposition groups, the government was led by Saleh's former vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, struggled to unite the fractious political landscape of the country and fend off threats both from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Houthi militants that had been waging a protracted insurgency in the north for years. In 2014, Houthi fighters swept into the capital of Sana'a and forced Hadi to negotiate a "unity government" with other political factions. The rebels continued to apply pressure on the existing weakened government. Hadi resigned along with his ministers in January 2015 after his presidential palace and private residence came under attack from the militant group. The following month, the Houthis declared themselves in control of the government, dissolving Parliament and installing an interim Revolutionary Committee led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a cousin of Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. However, Hadi escaped to Aden, where he declared he remains Yemen's legitimate president, proclaimed the country's temporary capital, and called on loyal government officials and members of the military to rally to him.

Saudi Arabia, along with its allies began carrying out airstrikes in Yemen on 25 March 2015. The intervention began in response to requests for assistance from the internationally recognized but domestically contested Yemeni government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

The Saudi-led intervention poses a test for the country's new leadership. (Saudi King Salman came to power in January 2015, following the death of his half-brother, King Abdullah.) Analysts also worry that escalating foreign involvement could introduce sectarian conflict resembling fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Here Amid factional fighting, al-Qaeda's Arabian Peninsula franchise has also found new opportunities to capture territory. Meanwhile, the Houthi advance and Saudi intervention have provoked a humanitarian catastrophe, and many Yemenis have fled by land and sea.

## Background

The modern Yemeni state was formed in 1990 with the unification of the U.S. - and Saudi-backed Yemeni Arab Republic, in the north, and the USSR-backed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, to the south. The military officer Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled North Yemen since 1978, assumed leadership of the new country. Somewhat larger than the state of California, Yemen has a population of about twenty-five million.

Despite unification, the central government's writ beyond the capital of Sana'a was never absolute, and Saleh secured his power through patronage and by playing various factions off one another.

Under Saleh, Yemen faced numerous challenges to its unity. Al-Hirak, a movement of southern Yemenis who felt marginalized under the post-unification government, rebelled in 1994; they have since pressed for greater autonomy within Yemen, if not secession. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the related Ansar al-Sharia insurgent group have captured territory in the



south. The Houthi movement, whose base is among the Zaydi Shias of northern Yemen, rose up against Saleh's government six times between 2004 and 2010.

Washington lent its support to Saleh beginning in the early 2000s, when counterterrorism cooperation became Washington's overriding regional concern. The United States gave Yemen \$1.2 billion in military and police aid between 2000, when the USS Cole bombing in the Yemeni port of Aden first made al-Qaeda a U.S. priority, and 2011, according to the online database Security Assistance Monitor.

Rights groups long charged that Saleh ran a corrupt and autocratic government. As the Arab uprisings spread to Yemen in 2011, the president's political and military rivals jockeyed to oust him. While Yemeni security forces focused on putting down protests in urban areas, al-Qaeda made gains in outlying regions.

Under escalating domestic and international pressure, Saleh stepped aside after receiving assurances of immunity from prosecution. His vice president, Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi, assumed office as interim president in a transition brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and backed by the United States. As part of the GCC's timetable for a transition, in 2013 the UN-sponsored National Dialogue Conference (NDC) convened 565 delegates to formulate a new constitution agreeable to Yemen's many factions. But the NDC ended after delegates couldn't resolve disputes over the distribution of power

### ***Arab spring Revolt in Yemen:***

*"SANA'A, Yemen (AP) — Yemen's 2011 Arab Spring revolt began with a nucleus of young men and women, a mix of socialists, secularists and moderate Islamists. In the capital's "Change Square," they launched their sit-in protest, a dreamy and romantic movement seeking to end autocrat Ali Abdullah Saleh's 33-year rule and transform the poorest Arab nation into a democratic, modern society."*<sup>1</sup>

The activists behind the initial uprising look back at what went wrong, and many of them point to a series of errors — starting when the Muslim Brotherhood's branch in the country, the Islah party, moved in and dominated the protest movement. That turned the revolt into a power struggle between Saleh and the powerful, conservative Islamists. Here the Shiite Houthi rebels who swept into Sanaa said they did so to break Islah's hold.

*"The revolution was taken in a different direction and used by Islah to negotiate with Saleh at the expense of its basic aspirations, There was an opportunity to correct Yemen's political discourse and bring about its long-term recovery, but it was taken away. And look where we are now."*<sup>2</sup> Said Majed al-Madhaji, an activist involved early in the uprising and now a political analyst.

It is a theme heard in many of the countries that saw pro-democracy uprisings against autocrats in 2011. In most, Islamists joined the revolts led by activists they had little common cause with. Because of their stronger organization, they came to dominate the movements and emerged as the strongest players after the autocrats' fall only to prompt backlashes that threw the countries into greater turmoil.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/03/world/la-fg-yemen-rallies-20110204>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/yemenis-in-anti-president-protest-1.870787>

Egypt's 2011 uprising, for example, was engineered and led by secular and liberal youth groups. Islamists led by the Muslim Brotherhood then joined, and after the fall of Hosni Mubarak used their vast resources and organizational skills to win the country's first democratic parliamentary and presidential elections.

But after only a year in office, President Mohammed Morsi was met by massive protests by Egyptians who accused his Brotherhood of trying to monopolize power. Then-military chief Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi removed Morsi, but now his critics fear he is leading the country into even worse autocracy. Many activists in the original anti-Mubarak revolt grumble that if the Islamists had not sought to dominate, things would have turned out differently.

In Libya, what began as protests in a 2011 revolt devolved into an 8-month civil war that finally led to Moammar Gadhafi's ouster and death but left the country in chaos with armed militias running rampant. Many of those militias are Islamic extremist groups. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood and other Islamists sought to dominate the previous parliament, and after losing recent elections they have tried to cling to power, setting up an alternative government.

Back in Yemen in 2011, the "innocent" days of the uprising under the youth activists lasted barely a month before Islah and its ally, Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, commander of an elite armored division with longtime links to armed Islamic extremists, joined.

The money of the Islamists and the might of the soldiers quickly overwhelmed the original activists. The number of protesters grew, the tents became bigger, an elaborate distribution network for food, water and money was set in motion and armed soldiers guarded the encampment. Soon after, the peaceful uprising became a footnote in street warfare between Saleh's loyalists and al-Ahmar's mutinying soldiers, with battles by rockets, mortars and machine-guns in Sanaa.

### ***End of the Revolt:***

The uprising ended in late 2011 with the backroom dealing typical of Saleh's rule. An accord mediated by Gulf nations and sponsored by Saudi Arabia and the United States forced Saleh to step down, but guaranteed him immunity from prosecution.

His ruling party was given half the seats in a new Cabinet, shared with the Islah party and led by Saleh's former vice president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The deal also allowed members of his immediate family to retain their key positions in the military and security forces, effectively perpetuating the hold of Yemen's traditional powers by Saleh, Islah and its allied militant militias, powerful tribal chiefs and the army.

The young revolutionaries went home with genuine change still a dream, not a reality.

*"Yemen's current problems are rooted in the lack of appetite for an inclusive and national discourse by the forces that emerged from 2011 revolution, like Islah. Politics has taken a back*

*seat and armed militias have replaced it," he said. "We are looking at a future of bloody chaos" said prominent analyst Mansour Hayel.<sup>3</sup>*

Since then, Saleh, remaining in Sanaa, played the role of a spoiler, using his loyalists to undermine Hadi and the transition process. The power of Saleh's loyalists was matched only by that of Islah, which went on grabbing more and more key positions in the government, civil service and state institutions while continuing to build its armed militias.

Meanwhile, a key faction, the Shiite Houthi rebels were marginalized, not given a single post in Hadi's Cabinet. The rebel force had battled Saleh's government six times in its strongholds north of the country since the mid-2000s. Since 2011, it has been fighting mainly with its top rivals the conservative Sunnis of Islah's militias and allied tribesmen.

Even as they fought, the Houthis and Islah were sitting at the same table along with other factions in a "national dialogue" led by Hadi, intended to map out the future of the country. The Houthis were particularly active in the dialogue, pressing proposals on establishing a secular system.

*"The Houthis sat on the same table in a five-star hotel discussing Yemen's future with Islah as their supporters fought each other," said Sarah Jamal, a prominent activist and an icon of the 2011 uprising. "The dialogue often appeared oblivious to what was going around in the country, things that were changing conditions on the ground."<sup>4</sup>*

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### ***Hadi in President's Office:***

*"SANA, Yemen — Vice President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi will be sworn in as president of Yemen on Saturday morning in front of Parliament after it was announced Friday that he had won the country's single-candidate election with 99.6 percent of the vote."<sup>5</sup>*

Hadi was the sole candidate in the presidential election that was held on 21 February 2012. His candidacy was backed by the ruling party as well as the parliamentary opposition. The Electoral Commission reported that 65 percent of registered voters in Yemen voted during the election. Hadi won with 99.80% of the vote and took the oath of office in Yemen's parliament on 25 February 2012. He was formally inaugurated as the president of Yemen on 27 February 2012, when Saleh resigned from the presidency and formally ceded power to Hadi.

In March 2013 the National Dialogue Conference was conceived as a core part of the transition process and is intended to bring together Yemen's diverse political and demographic groups to

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.straitstimes.com/breaking-news/world>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013669532870100.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/yemen/france-and-yemen/political-relations-6226/article/presidential-election-in-yemen-21>



address critical issues. In January 2014, Hadi pushed delegates at the conference to break a deadlock on key issues and bring the talks to an overdue close. When those in attendance finally agreed on a final few points, he launched into an impassioned speech that led to a spike in his popularity. It was agreed that Yemen would shift to a federal model of government in the future, a move which have been proposed and forcefully backed by Hadi

In a move to unify the Military of Yemen which suffered from split since the Yemeni Revolution, Hadi began reforming the Military. He issued Presidential decree №104 of December 2012 reorganizing the Military into 5 main branches: Air Force, Army (Ground Force), Navy and Coastal Defence, Border Troops and Strategic Reserve Forces, which includes the Special Operation Command, the Missile Defence Command and the Presidential Protective Forces. The Strategic Reserve Forces replaces the Republican Guard.

### **2012 Bombing in Sanaa:**

*“SANAA // A suicide bomber with explosives hidden under his military uniform blew himself up at a military parade rehearsal, killing 96 soldiers and wounding at least 200 others, according to the ministry of defence. Officials said the attacker was a soldier taking part in the drill in a main square near the presidential palace in the capital.”<sup>6</sup>*

The attack followed an ambush on Sunday on a US military training team. A US military instructor was wounded in the attack, claimed by the militant group Ansar Al Sharia (Partisans of Islamic Law), which is affiliated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

The same group also claimed responsibility for the parade bombing, saying it was in response to the “crimes” of the security forces, who are fighting to dislodge militants from their strongholds in the south of Yemen. The attack came as the military has launched an aggressive operation against militants in the south.

It also follows weeks of turmoil in the upper ranks of the military. Yemen’s new president, Abdrabu Mansur Hadi, has been embroiled in a power struggle with loyalists of ousted leader Ali Abdullah Saleh. Mr Hadi has sacked several of them along with family members from top positions in the armed forces.

The bomber belonged to the Central Security, a paramilitary force commanded by Mr Saleh’s nephew, Yahia, the officials said.

In a statement issued that night, Mr Hadi said to terrorists “ *You wanted to turn the joy of our people with the unity day into sorrow .....and therefore, the war on terrorism will continue till it is uprooted and defeated completely whatever the sacrifices are.* ”<sup>7</sup>

The attack left a scene of carnage, with scores of bleeding soldiers lying on the ground as ambulances rushed to the scene.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/21/215434.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18142695>



*“This is a massacre and a heinous crime. I have never seen such a bloody day in my life,” Mohammed Masani, one of the soldiers at the scene, said.*

*“We were at the end of the practice and getting ready to listen to a speech by the defence minister and the explosion took place,” Mr Masani said.<sup>8</sup>*

Soldiers hand-picked by their commanders from different branches of the military have been practicing together for the parade for a week, said Ahmed Sobhi, one of the soldiers who witnessed the explosion. He cited that as evidence that the attacker was a soldier and not an infiltrator.

The site of the attack had been sealed off by Republican Guard forces for the past 24 hours in preparation for the National Day celebrations. No cars or pedestrians were allowed to enter. The Republican Guard is led by Mr Saleh’s son and one-time heir apparent, Ahmed.

Hours after the blast, Mr Hadi fired two security commanders loyal to Mr Saleh, the state media reported.

*“After the bombing yesterday, Mr Hadi fired Brigadier Abdulmalik Al Tayeb, commander of the central security forces, and Brigadier Mohammed Abdullah Al Qawsi, a son-in-law of Mr Saleh, from his post as a commander of a police division.”<sup>9</sup>*

Brigadier Al Qawsi maintains his position as first deputy of the interior ministry. Mr Hadi also appointed a new deputy for national security.

Mr Hadi in early April fired some of Mr Saleh’s relatives and loyalists from the army but some Saleh relatives defied the decisions for weeks and then gave up after international pressure.

## ***Shia Sunni Conflicts:***

The conflict between Houthis and Salafis in Saada Governorate was renewed in October and November of 2013. Saada government officials accused Houthi fighters of attacking a Salafi mosque in Dammaj in an attempt to drive the Sunnis out, while the Houthis accused the Salafis of using the religious institute as a staging ground for foreign Sunni fighters. The government attempted to intervene to stop the fighting.

*“Two days of clashes between Shiite rebels and Sunni tribesmen fighting alongside hardline Salafists in northern Yemen killed about 23 people sources said on Sunday”.<sup>10</sup>*

Fighting centered for months on a Salafist mosque and Koranic school in Dammaj, which has been besieged by the Shiite rebels known as Huthis. The conflict had spread throughout the Northern provinces by January 2014, embroiling Sunni tribes wary of the power of the Huthis, who have repeatedly been accused of receiving support from Iran.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/05/21/215434.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/yemen-president-vows-to-fight-terror-after-suicide-attack>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Jan-05/243146-clashes-kill-at-least-23-in-north-yemen.ashx#axzz2oNa3sbT8>

*“On Sunday, at least 10 people were killed in Jawf province in clashes between rebels and armed men from the Daham tribe, a tribal chief told AFP.”<sup>11</sup>*

*Seven people were killed at Harf Sufyan, in the northern province of Amran, another tribal chief said on Sunday, while two others died in shelling of Dammaj, in Saada province, Salafist websites reported. Four people died in fighting that took place in Jawf on Saturday, another tribal chief said. Huthi rebels this week took over positions evacuated by Salafist gunmen in the area of Kitaf, north of Saada city, witnesses said, adding the rebels demolished the Salafist Dar al-Hadith religious school and 20 houses.<sup>12</sup>*

The rebels had also warned border guards to evacuate the Bart al-Anan crossing point with Saudi Arabia, in Jawf, according to the head of the force, Colonel Qassem Thawaba.

The officer told AFP he refused to leave, insisting on waiting for orders from his command.

Fighting between Huthi rebels and tribesmen, alongside fighters from the Islah Islamist party, was ongoing as well in Arhab, about 30 kilometers (18 miles) north of Sanaa. Huthis have been battling the central government for nearly a decade in remote Saada province, but the latest fighting between the rebels and the Salafists has given an added sectarian dimension to the clashes.

Analysts have said the Houthis are trying to control more territory in the north in anticipation of a forthcoming conclusion of a national dialogue that could turn Yemen into a federation of regions.

### ***Fall of Sanaa and Houthis protest:***

The Houthis took over Sanaa, following their organized advancement that started in various mountain areas, like a tidal wave slowly moving toward the capital in the past few weeks, and then invading it. Successively, the neighborhoods [under attack] were seemingly giving up. The fighting that took place in the outskirts of the city did not reflect resistance in any sense, as if the capital preferred to surrender to the angry popular expansion. The Houthis then immediately joined the settlement and partnership table, while having all the makings for a successful coup d'état in their grasp. Hundreds of victims died in the sporadic clashes that took place in the suburbs and city center, leaving Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi quasi-surrounded in his residence, while the army's posts were falling or surrendering successively.

Houthis and their supporters started staging protests and sit-ins in Sanaa, demanding a reinstatement of fuel subsidies and calling on the country's transitional government to step down. The protests in Sanaa remained relatively peaceful until September 9, 2014. Security forces opened fire on Houthi demonstrators approaching the cabinet office, killing seven people and injuring many.

Tensions escalated further on September 18th after attempts by the Houthis to seize the area around the Yemen TV building prompted heavy armed confrontation with armed militias linked to the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/837244.shtml#.UtU6aNJDvAk>

<sup>12</sup> <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/salafis-forced-flee-dammaj-government-forces-unable-protect-they-say>

Sunni Islamist Islah party with over 40 people killed. Finally, Prime Minister Mohamed Basindawa stepped aside, accusing President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi of being “autocratic.”

There is no doubt that the fall of Sanaa is, as significant as the rush of ISIS into Iraq a month or so ago, be just as destabilizing

An agreement signed between the Houthis and the Hadi administration and the government was forced to appoint Houthis and representatives from the restive south within the presidential circle. Whether one wants to call this action a mini-coup or an insurgent victory, this event is a huge shift in power relations in Yemen.

Importantly, the fighting in Sanaa has both sectarian and tribal political elements, along with a strong emphasis on retribution. The street battles between the armed Shiite Houthi movement and tribal and Sunni Islamist militias might escalate further with potential for street fights and car bombings. Sanaa’s fall to the Houthis will rewrite many aspects of what is happening to Yemen with regional repercussions.

### ***Sectarian battle:***

Primarily, the first repercussion is within Yemen itself. The country is quickly being drawn into a sectarian battle between the Zaidi Houthis, the Islamists represented by Islah, and ultimately al-Qaeda Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Mixed into this cauldron are Yemeni tribes who pick and choose their sides through ethos and payoffs. The tribes are in many respects “guns for hire” in the toxic mix in the Yemeni capital. AQAP will certainly take advantage of the situation. With the Yemeni President Hadi preoccupied with preserving his power, the joint Yemeni-American campaign to keep AQAP pinned down will likely be in jeopardy. Clearly, the al-Qaeda franchise, along with other Sunni extremists, will push for more sectarian clashes in Sanaa in addition for the potential battles between groups and interests in the country’s secessionist south while the capital sputters politically and burns physically.

The second ramification is the impact on Saudi Arabia. For Riyadh, the situation in Yemen - in the current context of threats surrounding the Kingdom i.e. ISIS to the north - is untenable and dangerous. Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Muslim-led Arabian Gulf states believe that the Zaidi rebels in Yemen are backed by Iranian meddling.

Significantly, Saudi Arabia is likely to feel that it is being squeezed from two directions, both north and south. This pressure, if Riyadh blames Tehran and its partners for the situation on both sides of the country, could provoke more bitter feelings at a crucial time where cooperation is needed in the Levant against ISIS.

The third consequence is a combination of the first two potential effects outlined above: The growing sectarian battle combined with the threat from the north. As we know, ISIS is attempting to build up its capacity as an armed and economically sound organization despite the international calls for war against the group. In addition, ISIS is ultimately pushing for not only a confrontation with the “Crusader” West but also stoking the flames of sectarian tensions in the Levant. AQAP sees this fact, and, as evidence shows, some AQAP member support ISIS. With or without ISIS,

AQAP sees the sectarian battle as a key to winning more territory in Yemen and thus is ready to confront the Zaidi Houthis and their allies in Sanaa. What is seen as an epic battle in the Levant may be joined by an epic battle in the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. This instability and volatility may be the greatest challenge faced by the Gulf States since the advent of al-Qaeda.

Clearly, the southern Gulf States, while joining the international coalition against ISIS, are concentrating too on the Houthi's prospective win in Sanaa. While the southern Gulf States are contributing to the operations against ISIS in kinetic terms, they may be focusing on the requirements necessary to also intervene in Yemen using a combination of force and influence to turn the tide through tribal networks. No southern Gulf State can accept instability on all sides of their borders.

Former Prime Minister Mohammad Basindawa's resignation could be setting the stage for him to come to power as president with Houthi support. This move would be seen as a "win" for political Islamists throughout the region and would likely be unacceptable to Yemen's northern neighbors. There is no doubt that the fall of Sanaa will, as significant as the rush of ISIS into Iraq a month or so ago, be just as destabilizing.

### ***Civil War and foreign intervention:***

Hadi was forced to agree to a power-sharing deal after the fall of Sana'a to the rebel group Houthis. The Houthis refused to participate in the "unity government", although they continued to occupy key positions and buildings in Sana'a and hold territory throughout northern Yemen. Hadi was further humiliated when the General People's Congress ousted him as its leader and rejected his cabinet choices on 8 November 2014.

Three days after Hadi's resignation (21 January 2015), the Houthis took over the presidential palace. Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah tendered their resignations to parliament which reportedly refused to accept them. Then the Yemeni cabinet was dissolved. Hadi and his former ministers remained under virtual house arrest since their resignations.

*SANAA, Yemen (AP) — President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi fled Yemen by sea Wednesday as Shiite rebels and their allies moved on his last refuge in the south, captured its airport and put a bounty on his head, officials said. Hours later, Saudi Arabia announced it had begun airstrikes against the Houthi rebels.*<sup>13</sup>

On 26 March 2015 it was reported that Hadi arrived at a Al-Riyadh airbase and was met by Saudi Defense Minister Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud and Saudi Arabia and its allies launched airstrikes in Yemen against the Houthis.

The departure of the close U.S. ally and the imminent fall of the southern port of Aden pushed Yemen further toward a violent collapse. It also threatened to turn the impoverished but strategic country into another proxy battle between the Middle East's Sunni powers and Shiite-led Iran.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/25/yemen-president-flees-abed-rabbo-mansour-hadi\\_n\\_6936912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/25/yemen-president-flees-abed-rabbo-mansour-hadi_n_6936912.html)

Saudi ambassador to the United States Adel al-Jubeir said his country had begun airstrikes against the rebels. He said his government had consulted closely with the U.S. and other allies but that the U.S. military was not involved in the operations.

The White House said in a statement late that day that the U.S. was coordinating military and intelligence support with the Saudis but not taking part directly in the strikes.

There were indications that others in the region would follow suit: The United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain joined Saudi Arabia in a statement published by the Saudi Press Agency, saying they would answer a request from Hadi "to protect Yemen and his dear people from the aggression of the Houthi militias which were and are still a tool in the hands of foreign powers that don't stop meddling with the security and stability of brotherly Yemen." Oman, the sixth member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, didn't sign onto the statement.

In a statement from the state news agency Egypt, too, announced political and military support. *"There is coordination ongoing now with Saudi Arabia and the brotherly gulf countries about preparations to participate with an Egyptian air and naval forces and ground troops if necessary,"*<sup>14</sup> the statement said.

Arab leaders are expected to meet in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik this weekend for a pre-planned summit, which is now expected to be dominated by the developments in Yemen. It is not clear if Hadi will be able to attend the summit. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies believe the Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, are tools for Iran to seize control of Yemen and say they intend to stop the takeover. The Houthis deny they are backed by Iran.

The crumbling of Hadi's government was a blow to Washington's counterterrorism strategy against al-Qaida's branch in Yemen, considered to be the most powerful in the terrorist network. About 100 U.S. military advisers withdraw from the al-Annad air base where they had been leading a drone campaign against al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP.

Yemen was now facing fragmentation, with Houthis controlling much of the north, including the capital of Sanaa, and several southern provinces. In recent days, they took the third-largest city, Taiz, as well as much of the province of Lahj, both just to the north of Aden.

In fighting in Lahj, they captured Hadi's defense minister, Maj. Gen. Mahmoud al-Subaihi, and then swept into the nearby al-Annad base, which the U.S. military had left.

The Houthis are backed by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the autocrat who ruled Yemen for three decades until he was removed amid a 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Some of the best-equipped and trained military and security units remained loyal to Saleh and they have helped the Houthis in their rapid advance.

Hadi left Sanaa for Aden after escaping house arrest under the Houthis, who overran the capital six months ago. In Aden, he had sought to make a last stand, claiming it as the temporary seat of what remained of his government, backed by allied militias and loyal army units.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32048604>

Security officials in Yemen said the Saudi airstrikes targeted a camp for U.S.-trained special forces, which is controlled by generals loyal to Saleh. The officials said the targets included the missile base in Sanaa that was controlled by the Houthis earlier this year. One of the Yemeni security officials said the strikes also targeted the fuel depot at the base.

The Houthis said in a statement to reporters that Saudi jets hit the military base, known as al-Duleimi, and that they responded with anti-aircraft missiles. Saudi-owned Al-Hadath TV aired pictures of the operation. The dark screen flashed with glaring lights and there was what sounded like machine guns or possibly anti-aircraft missiles.

Riad Yassin, Yemen's Foreign Minister, told Al-Hadath that the airstrikes were welcomed.

*"I hope the Houthis listen to the sound of reason. With what is happening, they forced us into this," he said.*<sup>15</sup>

With Houthis and Saleh forces closing in on multiple fronts, Hadi and his aides left Aden after 3:30 p.m. on two boats in the Gulf of Aden, security and port officials told The Associated Press. The officials would not specify his destination. Saleh said in a speech two weeks ago that Hadi might head for the African country of Djibouti across the gulf, just as leaders of southern Yemen fled.

Officials said Hadi had been preparing for the move since Sunday, when rebel leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi vowed in a fiery speech that his forces will keep advancing south, referring to Hadi as a "puppet" of international powers.

Shortly after Hadi fled his palace in Aden, warplanes targeted presidential forces guarding it. No casualties were reported. By midday, Aden's airport fell into hands of forces loyal to Saleh based in the city after intense clashes with pro-Hadi militias.

Yemen's state TV, now controlled by the Houthis, announced a bounty of nearly \$100,000 for Hadi's capture. The Houthis still face multiple opponents. Sunni tribesmen and local militias are fighting them in many places around Yemen, and the rebels have little support in the south. Some military units remain loyal to Hadi, although they are severely weakened.

Alarmingly, al-Qaida militants have emerged as a powerful force against the rebels, and there are signs of a presence of the even more extremist Islamic The group claimed responsibility for suicide bombings against the Houthis in Sanaa that killed 137 people. AQAP is considered the terrorist group most dangerous to the U.S. because it successfully placed three bombs on U.S. bound airlines, although none exploded. U.S. officials acknowledge their efforts against AQAP are seriously hampered, with the U.S. Embassy closed and the last U.S. troops evacuated.

Although the Houthis are avowed enemies of al-Qaida, they can't project power against the militants the way the Hadi government could with U.S. support. The deeply anti-American rebels have rejected Washington's overtures, officials say. Hadi's exit is a humiliating reversal, coming

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/saudi-airstrikes-target-rebel-bases-in-yemen-2015>

in large part at the hands of Saleh, the man he replaced in 2012 under a deal that allowed the former leader to remain free.

The atmosphere in Aden was tense, with most schools, government offices, shops and restaurants closed. In the few cafes still open, men watched the news on TV. Looters went through two abandoned army camps, taking weapons and ammunition.

Mohammed Abdel-Salam, a spokesman for the Houthis, told the rebel-controlled Al-Masirah news channel that their forces were not aiming to occupy the south.

### ***Humanitarian situation in Yemen:***

Yemen is now in a state of humanitarian crisis. Conflict has resulted in acute increases in unemployment, inflation, food prices and, as a result, food insecurity and malnutrition. More than 13 million Yemenis do not have access to clean water or sanitation, 8.6 million lack access to health care and 1 million children under the age of 5 are suffering from acute malnutrition. The Yemeni people and refugees within Yemen are in desperate need of immediate humanitarian assistance.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, and the poorest in the Middle East. Currently, the people of Yemen are suffering from a severe hunger crisis, which has been intensified by conflict and instability.

Yemen is facing a severe water crisis with some estimates suggesting the capital, Sanaa, could run dry in 10 years. With little being done to harness rainfall in the country, farmers are drilling deeper than ever for water - without any government regulation. Agriculture uses around 90% of the country's water resources - with around half of that being used to cultivate the herbal stimulant Khat. According to UN estimates Half of Yemen's population has no access to clean water.

The UN refugee agency reports that *“About 120,000 Yemenis have been internally displaced since the start of the Saudi intervention and shelter is scarce. Humanitarian groups anticipate possible mass outflows across Yemen’s land borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman, and across the Gulf of Aden to Somalia and Djibouti.”*<sup>16</sup>

Saudi Arabia has enforced a UN arms embargo by air and sea. This has exacerbated these food and fuel shortages; Yemen relies on imports for both. The country imports more than 80 percent of its food, including 90 percent of staples such as wheat and all of its rice, according to relief group Oxfam. Enforcement of the embargo could also hinder delivery of emergency aid supplies, the UN warned.

Meanwhile, the aid group Doctors without Borders reports the near collapse of Yemen’s health-care infrastructure.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/23/yemen-is-going-completely-down-the-drain-says-u-n-refugees-chief/>



## ***Conclusion:***

With a poverty rate of more than 50 percent, Yemen was the Arab world's poorest countries prior to the Houthi offensive and Saudi air campaign. The conflict has pushed the country into humanitarian emergency, UN agencies and relief groups warn. The civilian toll has been high, with nearly one thousand dead and 3,500 injured, by the World Health Organization's count, and critical infrastructure destroyed, according to international aid groups.

Saudi Arabia has led the coalition air campaign to roll back the Houthis and reinstate Hadi's government. Riyadh perceives that Houthi control of Yemen would mean a hostile neighbor that threatens its southern border. It also considers Yemen a front in its contest with Iran for regional dominance, and losing Sana'a would only add to what it perceives as an ascendant Iran that has allies in power in Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus. Riyadh's concerns have been compounded by its perception that the United States is retrenching from the region and its pursuit of an Iranian nuclear deal will embolden Tehran. Journalist Peter Salisbury writes that Saudi Arabia may be trying to restore its longstanding strategy of "containment and maintenance" vis-à-vis its southern neighbor: Keep Yemen weak, and therefore beholden to Riyadh, but not so weak that state collapse could threaten it with an influx of migrants.

The United States' interests include the security of the passage in the Bab al-Mandeb, the chokepoint through which 4.7 million barrels of oil per day transit; and a government in Sana'a that will cooperate with U.S. counterterrorism programs (PDF). In the current conflict, Washington has provided the Saudi-led coalition with logistical and intelligence support, as well as stationed warships in the Gulf of Aden. But while the United States continues to support coalition operations, by late April U.S. officials pressed for restraint, warning their Saudi counterparts that the intensity of the bombing campaign was undercutting U.S. and Saudi political goals—namely, a return to the transition.

The Houthis' assertion of power and the Saudi-led air campaign have militarized the divisions between the parties, and in the short term, conditions may militate against a negotiated settlement. Houthis, who long felt marginalized from Yemeni politics, think that if they even compromise, that will mean defeat and their eventual elimination, while southerners believe that the Houthis pose a reciprocal threat to them. As Iran and Saudi Arabia increasingly perceive each other meddling in Yemen, they will likely up their support to their respective clients. That could introduce a sectarian dimension to Yemen's civil conflict, making the conflict even more toxic. These factors will make it more difficult for Yemen's many parties to return to the negotiating table.

While the Houthis have established their dominance over Sana'a and beyond, they cannot govern Yemen on their own. Without buy in from Yemen's numerous other parties and financial support from its Gulf neighbors, Yemen faces financial collapse, protracted civil conflict, and an escalating humanitarian crisis.

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