

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

The conflict in Yemen: latest developments

Author: Kirsten JONGBERG

ABSTRACT

The Yemen conflict has deteriorated since 2015 despite repeated rounds of peace negotiations. The most recent round of UN-led Talks ended in August 2016 with no agreement. The conflict is in danger of escalating beyond Yemen's borders with frequent Houthi incursions into Saudi Arabia, foreign ships being targeted by missiles from Houthi-controlled areas near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – a major international trade route – and Saudi Arabia and Iran siding with opposite sides in the conflict. The latest 72-hour cease-fire starting 20 October was not renewed when it ended on 22 October. The cease-fire did, however, allow humanitarian aid agencies to step in to start to provide assistance to some of the 21.2 million people across the country who are in need of humanitarian aid. UN OCHA has estimated it needs USD 1.63 billion for its Yemen humanitarian response plan, but it has only received pledges for 47 % of that amount so far. The EU has recently announced a further EUR 40 million for the fund, taking the total EU pledge to EUR 120 million. The European Parliament has called for an EU arms embargo on Saudi Arabia, which is responsible for the majority of the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

This paper was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

The English-language manuscript was completed on 24 October 2016.

It will be translated into FR.

Feedback of all kind is welcome. Please write to the author: kirsten.jongberg@europarl.europa.eu.

This paper will be published on the European Parliament's online database [Think Tank](#).

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1 Recent developments in the conflict in Yemen

1.1 Key statistics on the humanitarian situation in Yemen

The conflict has caused over 10 000 deaths – mostly through airstrikes.

The UN estimates that more than 10 000 people have been killed in the conflict, 4 000 of them civilians. The majority of deaths have been caused by air strikes led by Saudi Arabia¹.

The humanitarian situation is critical.

According to the latest statistics issued by the European Commission's DG ECHO, the humanitarian situation is critical²:

- 21.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance – that represents 82 % of the population of Yemen;
- 14.1 million people need basic health care;
- 14.1 million people are in need of food aid;
- 7 million face emergency level food insecurity (famine);
- 2 million people have been internally displaced because of the conflict.

Access for humanitarian aid is difficult.

Yemen was already the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula before the start of the current conflict and it imports the majority of its food and fuel. The fighting and the air and naval blockade, imposed by Saudi Arabia to enforce the UN arms embargo, have hampered access to the country for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Saudi Arabia-led air strikes have destroyed a significant amount of civilian infrastructure, making the distribution of vital aid difficult once it enters the country.

UN OCHA needs USD 1.63 billion for its Yemen humanitarian response plan.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates it will need USD 1.63 billion for its Yemen humanitarian response plan. To date it has only received 47 % of that amount³.

1.2 Recent diplomatic developments in the conflict

A 72-hour cease-fire started on 20 October. Humanitarian agencies rushed to provide assistance across the country.

UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, declared a **72-hour cease-fire starting at midnight on 20 October**, following calls from the US, the EU and the UN. The cease-fire was welcomed as an opportunity to provide assistance to some of the 21.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across the country. All parties accepted this period of cease-fire, which was subject to renewal.

¹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/united-states-must-help-pull-yemen-back-total-collapse>.

² http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/yemen_en.pdf.

³ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Humanitarian%20Dashboard_Jan-Aug%20Final%20v2.pdf.

Despite UN appeals for a renewal of the cease-fire, fighting resumed on 22 October after the 72-hour period ended, with both sides accusing the other of violations.

Peace negotiations broke down in early August 2016.

The last two months saw a tit-for-tat escalation in violence.

Two ships were targeted by missiles in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a key international trade route.

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen arrived in Sanaa the day after the cease-fire ended to try to negotiate a renewal with both sides. There had been breaches throughout the 72-hour period and all parties rejected the UN's call for a renewal, each blaming the other side for the violations during the cease-fire. It had been hoped that this latest cease-fire, the sixth since March 2015, would pave the way towards further peace negotiations. Both sides have said they are open to negotiations in principle, but each cites the actions of the other as a barrier⁴.

UN-led **peace negotiations broke down in early August 2016** following three months of Talks in Kuwait. On 25 August US Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the US, the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had agreed with the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to restart negotiations for a settlement that would include a withdrawal of the Houthi/Saleh forces from Sanaa, the formation of a unity government and the decommissioning of heavy weapons⁵. The proposals included a 72-hour cease-fire, which the Houthis said they would accept if Saudi Arabia stopped the aerial bombing campaign and lifted the naval blockade. Saudi Arabia refused⁶. No concrete progress has been made on this proposal since August.

Since the breakdown in the latest peace Talks **violence has slowly escalated in tit-for-tat actions**. Houthi forces continued to fire missiles into Saudi Arabia and launch cross-border ground assaults. US drone attacks against al-Qaeda militants in the south of the country continued.

In a new development, a United Arab Emirates (UAE) vessel and a US navy destroyer were targeted by missiles near the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Strait is a major international trade route, which sees millions of barrels of oil pass through it each day. The security of this trade route is of crucial importance for regional and international stakeholders⁷.

1.3 Timeline of recent developments in the conflict

The governor of Yemen's central bank was fired and the bank was moved to the temporary capital of President Hadi's government in Aden.

19 September – President Hadi fired the governor of **Yemen's central bank** and announced that he was **moving the bank to his temporary capital in Aden** from its current location in Houthi-controlled Sanaa. The move is an attempt to financially strangle the Houthi/Saleh movement and is likely to cause a further escalation of violence. The central bank was already on the verge of collapse and the fear is that this will precipitate the economic collapse of the whole country, inducing more wide-spread famine.

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKCN12M0BZ>.

⁵ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/united-states-must-help-pull-yemen-back-total-collapse>.

⁶ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/september-2016>.

⁷ http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/10/yemen-red-sea-trade-route-houthi-attacks.html?utm_source=Boomtrain&utm_medium=manual&utm_campaign=20161021&bt_e=XKyFCZ7IAmGNLsDbsE560ZUtUzJlpqBqyEvjCyWrHkPNLA1wghb2Rn78ECwKUtnf&bt_ts=1477068290354.

Houthi forces fired on a UAE vessel near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

A Saudi air strike on a funeral in Sanaa killed over 140 people and injured over 500. The strike received international criticism.

A US navy destroyer was targeted by missiles from Houthi-controlled areas.

The US retaliated by striking three radar stations, but played down the significance of the direct US involvement.

1 October – The **Houthi/Saleh forces fired on a UAE vessel in the Red Sea** near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

2 October – The **Houthi/Saleh forces announced they were establishing a rival government of ‘national salvation’ in Sanaa**⁸.

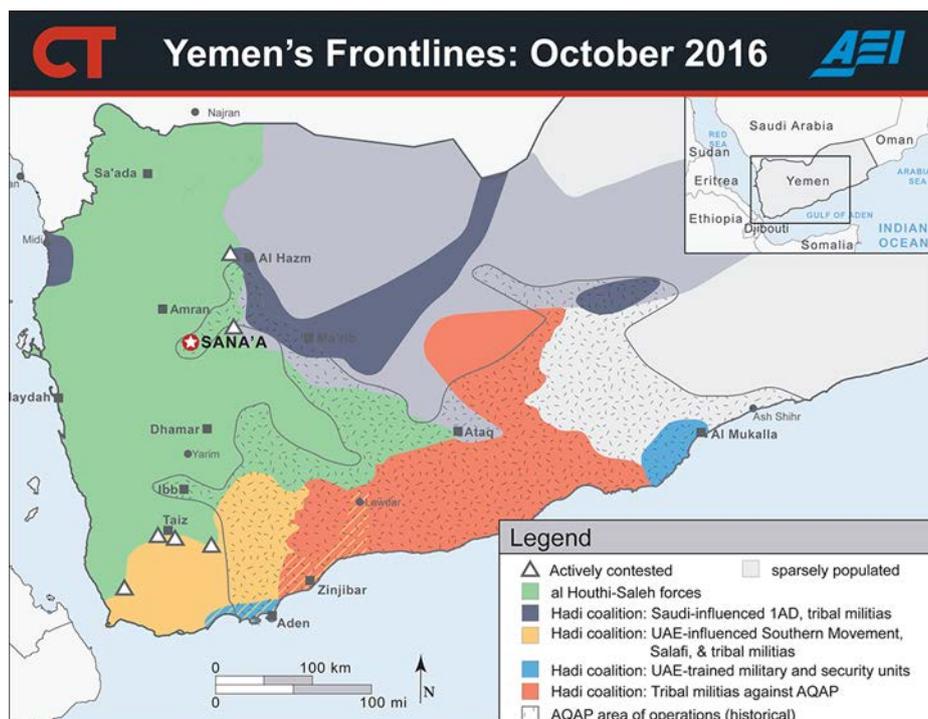
8 October – A **Saudi air strike on the funeral** of the father of a Houthi ally **in Sanaa killed at least 140 people and injured over 500**. Among the dead were a number of the country’s political, tribal and military elite, many of whom were proponents of peace. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for an investigation and the strike was heavily criticised by Saudi Arabia’s allies⁹.

9 October – Two **missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled areas at a US Navy destroyer** near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The Houthis denied carrying out the attack.

12 October – Another missile was launched at the same US destroyer.

13 October – The **US launched cruise missile strikes against three radar stations in the Houthi-controlled area** from which the missiles targeting the US destroyer had originated. This was the first direct US military action against the Houthis, but the US played down the action, saying they took out the radar stations to protect US military ships and personnel¹⁰.

1.4 Map: Frontlines in the Yemen conflict



Source: American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats website, 'Yemen Frontlines: October 2016' by Katherine Zimmerman, 6 October 2016

⁸ <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/yemen-crisis-situation-reports-october-5-2016>.

⁹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/yemens-terrible-war-about-get-worse>.

¹⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-missiles-idUSKCN12C294>.

2 Political Dialogue

2.1 Origins of the conflict, the GCC Initiative and the National Dialogue Conference

Arab Spring protests in 2011 turned violent, resulting in a GCC Initiative to secure early elections and a political transition plan.

The recent conflict in Yemen flows from a sequence of events that started with political protests during the **Arab Spring in 2011** and quickly escalated into an armed conflict between the Houthis (see background section on the Houthi movement later in this paper) and the government of then-President Saleh. There were fears that the already fragile country could slip into full-scale civil war. The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**, with the support of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the European Union, stepped in to **broker an agreement that included early presidential elections in 2012 and a transition plan following the elections**¹¹.

After the handover from President Saleh to President Hadi, the UN and the GCC brought the various factions together in a National Dialogue Conference (NDC).

In February 2012 President Saleh's government was forced, under growing international pressure, to hand over power to an interim government headed by President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Saleh's former deputy. As part of the transition plan the UN worked with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to bring together the Yemen government, key political factions and civil society representatives in a peaceful dialogue, **the National Dialogue Conference, under the auspices of the GCC Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism**¹².

The NDC included proposals for a new federal structure and enforced democratic principles. The Houthis and former President Saleh formed an alliance to oust President Hadi.

The **National Dialogue Conference** resulted in an **Outcome Document** that included a new **federal structure** for the country, based on **principles of democracy, the rule of law**, equal citizenship, a 30 % representation for women at all levels of government and a strengthened voice for youth. A draft constitution was worked on until January 2015. Unhappy with the outcomes of the dialogue and the policies of President Hadi, the Houthis and former President Saleh created an alliance to oust President Hadi from power. This is the basis of the current conflict.

2.2 Repeated rounds of UN Talks fail to prevent further violence

Five UNSC resolutions were adopted between 2011 and early 2015.

The UN Security Council adopted several resolutions on Yemen in the period from 2011 to early 2015, affirming its commitment to the GCC Initiative and discussing the possibility of sanctions¹³.

¹¹ https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/next_steps_in_yemens_transition_paper.pdf.

¹² 'Agreement on the implementation mechanism for the transition process in Yemen in accordance with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)': http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/YE_111205_Agreement%20on%20the%20implementation%20mechanism%20for%20the%20transition.pdf.

¹³ <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/background>.

A new UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, was appointed on 25 April 2015, just days after the UNSC passed resolution 2216.

The Geneva Talks in June 2015 failed to produce concrete results.

The Swiss Talks in December 2015 produced concrete outcomes, but had to be adjourned due to a breakdown of the cessation of hostilities.

Talks resumed in Kuwait in April 2016, but three months of Talks concluded on 6 August with no agreement.

A new approach to negotiations was announced on 25 August 2016, but little progress seems to have been made since.

A **new UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed**, was appointed on **25 April 2015**, just 11 days after the UN Security Council adopted **resolution 2216**¹⁴, calling for a **comprehensive cease-fire** and imposing an **arms embargo** on the Houthi/Saleh forces. The resolution also imposed **financial and travel ban sanctions** on several individuals in the movement. These sanctions have since been renewed until February 2017 through resolution 2266¹⁵.

In the months following the appointment of Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, several attempts were made to bring the parties of the conflict together. **Talks were held in Geneva in June 2015**, but the parties did not meet face-to-face and the Talks did not achieve a reduction in the violence in the country¹⁶.

In **December 2015** a new round of **Talks** was held in **Switzerland** after the Houthis accepted **UNSC Resolution 2216 as the basis for the negotiations**. A cease-fire was implemented at the start of the talks, but quickly fell apart. The Talks produced some positive outcomes, including the creation of a **De-escalation and Coordination Committee**, a set of **confidence-building measures** and an agreement on the general principles of a framework for the implementation of resolution 2216. However, the Talks were quickly adjourned due to the breakdown of the cessation of hostilities agreement, with hopes of reconvening in January 2016¹⁷.

In the end it took months of diplomatic efforts by the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to convene a new round of **Talks that started on 21 April 2016 in Kuwait**. The Talks were preceded by a cessation of hostilities starting on 10 April, which resulted in a temporary reduction in the level of violence during the month of April. However, **the Kuwait talks ended on 6 August without any agreement**, in part due to disagreements over the sequencing of Houthi withdrawals and the establishment of interim political arrangements, which would only follow later. There were also disagreements over the creation of a new national unity government, which President Hadi opposed.

Following a meeting with the GCC, the UK, the US, the UN, the UAE and Saudi Arabia on 25 August 2016, US Secretary of State John Kerry announced that **an agreement** had been reached **on a 'renewed approach to negotiations'** that would tackle the security and political processes at the same time and would result in the formation of a national unity government¹⁸. Little progress appears to have been made on this front and a **72-hour cease-fire, which started on 20 October, was not renewed at the end of the period**.

¹⁴ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2216.pdf.

¹⁵ http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2266.pdf.

¹⁶ <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/print/security-council-briefing-situation-yemen-special-envoy-secretary-general-yemen-ismail-ould-cheikh>.

¹⁷ <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/print/security-council-briefing-situation-yemen-special-envoy-secretary-general-yemen-ismail-ould-cheikh-0>.

¹⁸ <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2016/08/yemen-briefing-and-consultations-on-recent-developments.php>.

3 EU Policy

3.1 The EU position

The EU has pledged EUR 120 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen since 2015.

HR/VP Mogherini has welcomed the latest cease-fire announcement.

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen visited Brussels in April 2016 and thanked the EU for its leadership and the provision of capacity building expertise to the De-escalation and Coordination Committee.

The Council issued two Conclusions on Yemen in 2015, calling for political dialogue and the respect of humanitarian law and human rights.

The EU has committed a total of EUR 120 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen since 2015. The most recent pledge of funds came on 21 September 2016 when the European Commission announced a EUR 40 million aid package at the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini has welcomed the most recent cease-fire announcement¹⁹, as she has with each of the previous cease-fires in Yemen, each time calling for political dialogue, an end of the hostilities and commitment to humanitarian assistance.

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen visited Brussels on 4-5 April 2016 where he met with representatives of the Member States, the EEAS and the Commission, including Commissioner Christos Stylianides. In a joint press conference with HR/VP Mogherini at the end of the visit²⁰, he thanked the EU *'that has exhibited commendable leadership by agreeing to provide, as of tomorrow, an intensive capacity building exercise to the committee members of the De-escalation and Co-ordination Committee which will work to bolster adherence to the Cessation of Hostilities in order to identify any breaches and find the right tools to deal with them, shall they arise'*.

The European Council produced two Council Conclusions on Yemen in 2015, one in April²¹ and one in November²². Each called for political dialogue as the only way to resolve the conflict and reaffirmed the EU's support for *'the efforts of the UN Secretary General and the Special Envoy for Yemen to achieve a resumption of negotiations, fully in line with the framework provided by the GCC initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and relevant UN Security Council resolutions'*. The Conclusions stressed the need for humanitarian intervention and for all parties to respect International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

¹⁹ http://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/12476/statement-by-the-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-on-the-ceasefire-in-yemen_en.

²⁰ <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/visit-yemen-envoy-brussels>.

²¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/20-council-conclusions-yemen/>.

²² <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/16-council-conclusions-on-yemen/>.

3.2 The EP position

7 July 2016 – The EP recommendation to the Council on the 71st session of the UN General Assembly called for coordinated humanitarian action and a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to defuse tensions.

In its [recommendation to the Council of 7 July 2016 on the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly](#), the EP stressed the need for a **coordinated humanitarian action under UN leadership**, called for a **humanitarian pause** to allow the delivery of life-saving assistance, called *‘for an impartial and independent investigation into all alleged violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law’*, and encouraged *‘a policy of rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in order to defuse regional tensions’*.

25 February 2016 – The EP resolution on the humanitarian situation in Yemen called for an EU arms embargo against Saudi Arabia and condemned the targeting of civilian infrastructure.

The EP adopted a [resolution on the humanitarian situation in Yemen on 25 February 2016](#). The resolution called *‘on the VP/HR to launch an initiative aimed at imposing an **EU arms embargo against Saudi Arabia**, given the serious allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law by Saudi Arabia in Yemen’*. Additionally, the resolution **condemned the targeting of civilian infrastructure**, including hospitals, by the Saudi-led coalition and called on all sides to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It stressed the need for a **coordinated humanitarian action under UN leadership** and stated its belief that **political dialogue** was the only way to achieve peace. The resolution **singled out Iran and Saudi Arabia** as being *‘instrumental in resolving the crisis’*.

9 July 2015 – The EP resolution on the situation in Yemen called for political dialogue to be led by the Yemenis themselves.

An earlier EP [resolution of 9 July 2015 on the situation in Yemen](#) welcomed the work done by the UN and noted the progress of the Constitution Drafting Committee. It emphasised that **political dialogue must be led by the Yemenis themselves**. It also expressed **strong concerns about the actions of AQAP and ISIL/Daesh** in the country.

4 Background

4.1 The Houthis and the beginnings of the current conflict

Ansar Allah was established by Hussein al-Houthi in the 1990s to revive Zaidism (a branch of Shia Islam).

The Houthi movement was initially formed by Hussein al-Houthi in the **1990s to revive and defend Zaidism, a branch of Shia Islam**, against Saudi-imported Wahhabism and Salafism. Despite starting as a sectarian initiative, the Houthi movement draws most of its power and support from tribal politics, rather than exclusively religious alliances.

The Houthi military opposition started after the US invasion of Iraq.

The Houthis **opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq in the early 2000s** and attacked President Ali Abdullah Saleh, for his support of the invasion. The group was able to create a strong coalition in the northern governorate of Saada by regrouping tribal factions that wanted to challenge the President’s authoritarian rule.

The Houthis drew support from other groups opposed to President Saleh in 2011.

The Houthis took part in the National Dialogue Conference in 2012.

In 2014 the Houthis allied with former President Saleh and led a new attack, reaching the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014.

President Hadi initially fled to Aden in February 2015, then fled the country entirely in March.

Saudi Arabia and allies started a bombing campaign to reinstate President Hadi's government, who has now established a temporary capital in Aden.

During the **Arab spring in 2011, the Houthis expanded their influence** and drew support from other groups across the country that also rejected President Saleh's regime.

During the transition of power from President Saleh to President Hadi, **the Houthis took part in the 'National Dialogue Conference'** (NDC). One of the outcomes of the NDC was the **proposal for a federal division of Yemen into six regions**. Although well-received by the majority of political factions, the Houthis and elements of the Southern Movement²³, objected to the way some of the regional lines were drawn.

Peaceful dialogue was short-lived as the Houthis, fed up with the lack of progress and President Hadi's perceived cozying up to Islamist leaders²⁴, took advantage of instability in the interim government in **early 2014 to launch a new attack from the north, reaching as far as the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014**. Paradoxically, to achieve this the Houthis formed an **alliance with their previous enemy, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh**, with the aim of overthrowing the government of President Hadi and push the Islamists further south. This move on the capital created a great breach in the country between the northern regions controlled by the Houthi/Saleh alliance and the southern and oil-rich eastern regions nominally controlled by President Hadi.

In early 2015 the Houthis reinforced their control over the capital Sanaa and surrounded the presidential palace. **President Hadi escaped to the southern port city of Aden in February. He fled to Saudi Arabia in March 2015** when the Houthis pushed to take control of the whole country, with the backing of security forces loyal to former President Saleh²⁵.

The push south and the exile of President Hadi raised alarm in **Saudi Arabia** and a number of other Arab States, **who began a bombing campaign** to push back the Houthis and reinstate President Hadi's government. **The US, the UK and France provided logistical and intelligence support**. President Hadi returned from his exile in Saudi Arabia after six months and established a **temporary capital in the city of Aden**.

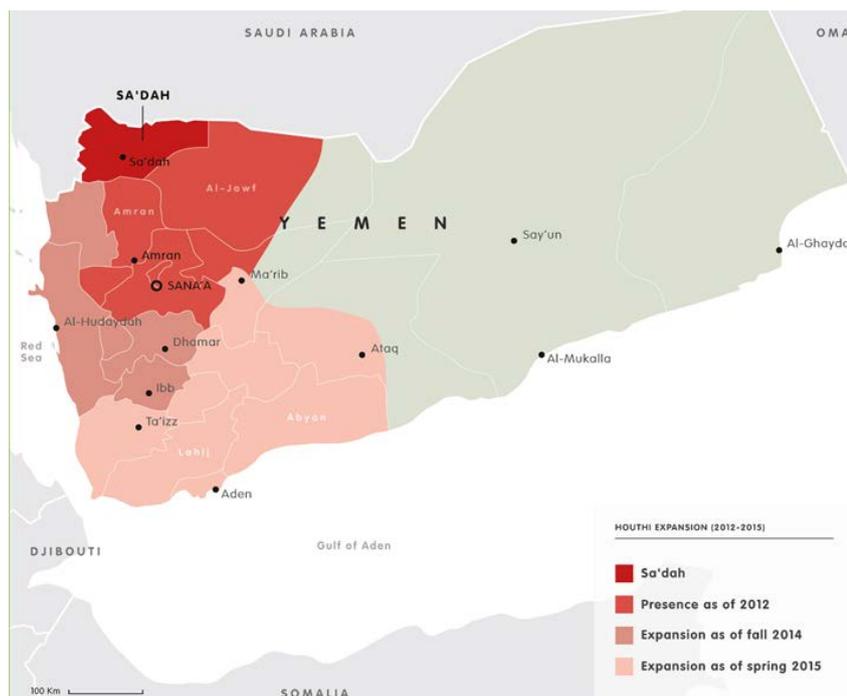
²³ The Southern Movement emerged around 2007 as 'an umbrella of factions and figures calling for a return to autonomy in the south' – the south of Yemen was an independent country (the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen - PDRY) until the unification of Yemen in 1990: <http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>.

²⁴ The Islamist leaders encompass disparate groups, including Al Qaeda and moderate members of Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood, all of whom supported tribal militias that were long-standing rivals of the Houthis:

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2016/10/the_yemen_conflict_is_not_just_a_proxy_war.html.

²⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423> and <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31645145>.

4.2 Map: Houthi Territorial Expansions (2012-2015)



Source: European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu), [Mapping the Yemen Conflict](#)

4.3 The Saudi-Iran axis

Although the Houthi movement was originally created to revitalise Zaidism, its platform is more tribal and political than sectarian. Yemen has traditionally not been divided along sectarian lines and, until recently, intermarriage between different sects of Muslims was common and widely accepted. Nevertheless, external sectarian pressures have seeped in to Yemen and kindled tensions.

Iran is thought to be one of the principal foreign backers of the Houthis, although the true extent of Iran's support and involvement is disputed. Iran and the Houthis share ideological goals, but Iran follows a different branch of Shia Islam to the Houthis.

Some analysts have called the Yemen conflict a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's official reason for entering the fray was to support the legitimate government of Yemen against the insurgents. However, analysts largely agree that Saudi Arabia's motivations come, at least in part, from a fear of the interference of Iran in its back garden and Iran's rise as a political and military power in the region. Some have gone as far as to call the conflict **a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran**.

*'When outside countries became involved militarily, Yemen was wedged into the pressure cooker of Middle East geopolitics, making it even harder to reach a modicum of peace.'*²⁶

²⁶ http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2016/10/the_yemen_conflict_is_not_just_a_proxy_war.html.

4.4 Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIL

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is one of Al Qaeda's most successful franchises. The group has taken advantage of unrest to take control at various times of cities and areas across the south of the country. The US continues to lead a campaign of drone strikes against the group.

The Islamic State is also active in the conflict, but is not as influential as AQAP.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is one of Al Qaeda's most successful franchises, made up (at least initially) of jihadist fighters returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. The group took advantage of the chaos and instability during the Arab Spring in 2011 and the transition of power from Saleh to Hadi to take control of key cities in Abyan province in southern Yemen. They were driven out and into the mountains further east in 2013²⁷.

Taking advantage of the distraction caused by the Houthi invasion of the capital Sanaa in 2014, AQAP took control of the city of Al Mukalla and surrounding areas in early 2015, but were driven out by Yemeni and Emirati troops in April 2016²⁸.

The US continues to lead a campaign of drone strikes against AQAP²⁹.

AQAP competes for recruits against the Islamic State, which started active operations in Yemen in March 2015 with suicide attacks on mosques in Sanaa killing 140 people³⁰. The group, which is seen as a foreign entity by many Yemeni, has not been as successful as AQAP, which has strong links to local tribal factions³¹.

²⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/key-facts-war-yemen-160607112342462.html>.

²⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36128614>.

²⁹ <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/10/us-steps-up-attacks-against-aqap.php>.

³⁰ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/key-facts-war-yemen-160607112342462.html>.

³¹ <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/yemen-crisis/p36488>.