

Decisive Storm in its fourth year ..

Do the Gulf states want to win over Iran or have ambitions in Yemen?



Policies Analysis Unit

State Assessment

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Introduction

On March 26, 2015, Saudi-led Arab Coalition launched a military campaign in Yemen to confront the Houthis, who took control of the Yemeni state institutions through a military coup on September 21, 2014, forcing President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi to leave Sana'a for Aden and then to Saudi Arabia. The military campaign, that was called "The Decisive Storm", was launched at President Hadi's request to restore his legitimacy. Less than 30 days later, the name of military operations changed to "Restore Hope." Saudi Arabia and Iran began a war of revenge and extinction beyond their borders.

Before the military operations, the Iran-backed Houthi group had almost completely taken over the country, while al-Qaeda took over other provinces in southern Yemen. Three years later, despite the liberalization of the Arab-backed legitimacy in more than 80 percent of Yemen's territory. Houthis control the most populated provinces in the north, including the capital Sanaa and Hodeidah, which contains the largest port of Yemen (west). These areas are inhabited by more than half of the population of Yemen.

In this paper, we try to read the scenarios of the war in Yemen after three years since the beginning of military operations, the context of alliances, the control and power and the impact of all that on local and regional balances as well as on the economic and humanitarian situation of the Yemenis.

The Field Situation

After three years of military operations, the military map has not changed significantly, since the government forces liberated the Mukha port from Houthis in January 2017. That event was followed by a standstill in military operations despite multiple names.

The Houthis control most of the northern governorates, including the capital Sana'a, Amran, Sa'ada (except two districts in Saada where battles are still going on), Mahweet and Hajja (except parts of Midi and Harad), some directorates of Taiz, one directorate of Lahj, Hodeidah (except the directorate of Khokha and parts of Hays), as well as the entire provinces of Ibb and Rayma). These areas are the most densely populated in the country.

The legitimate government nominally controls

most of the southern provinces but in reality those provinces are controlled by forces loyal to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia including Aden (the interim capital) but the government in Aden challenges with the "security belt" forces and the so-called Southern Transitional Council, both are loyal to UAE. The situation is the same in Dhale, Lahj, Shabwa, Hadramout, Mahara, Abyan and Socotra. These areas are less densely populated but contain oil and other resources. UAE-backed southern forces try to move to liberate the coastal areas towards Hodeidah (with attempts to persuade the Tehami movement and the Salafis who are leading the battles on the ground in Hodeidah to accept the forces of Tariq Saleh, which Abu Dhabi collected and trained after the killing of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh on 4 December 2017 by the Houthis) while the



legitimate and popular resistance forces move with Saudi support in Sa'ada, Al-Jawf, Nehm and Arhab in an attempt to restore balances on the ground. These moves may change many scenarios if the Arab Coalition is serious in its support to the legitimacy in Yemen. But if the Arab Coalition's tendency only aims to achieve the coalition's own strategic interests, not the restoration of the Yemeni state as the Arab Coalition announced at the beginning of war in Yemen, these moves will remain in the cycle of exhaustion.

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Any military moves to liberate Sana'a or Hodeidah can change many scenarios, while it will remain in the cycle of attrition if the Arab Coalition has a tendency to achieve its own ambitions, not including the restoration of the Yemeni state

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The Humanitarian Situation

According to a study by the Abaad for Studies and Researches Center⁽¹⁾, the civilian deaths only by the alliance (Houthi - Saleh), between 21 September 2014 and the end of 2017, are up to 14350 people. The number of casualties may be doubled if we consider the victims of accidental strikes by the Arab Coalition aircrafts, in addition to military victims from both sides.

UN says that the situation in Yemen is an "entirely man-made catastrophe". According to a report by UN Human Rights Commission for the period from March 2015 to 30 August 2017, at least 5144 civilians were killed, including 1184 children, and more than 8749 people were injured, including 1592 children.

According to the report, Arab Coalition airstrikes continued to be the leading cause of injuries among children and overall civilian casualties. The report accuses the Arab Coalition of killing about 3233 civilians.⁽²⁾

The report says that the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis and the army units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh (the Houthi/Saleh forces) were responsible for some 67 per cent of the 1,702 cases of recruitment of children for use in hostilities. The report says that UN Human Rights monitors frequently observed children as young as 10 who were armed and uniformed, manning checkpoints. It says that Houthis/Saleh forces were also responsible for widespread arbitrary or unlawful detentions.⁽³⁾

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that some three million people in



Yemen have been forced to flee their homes since the conflict began, more than seven million people are at risk of famine, and close to 19 million people out of a population of 27.4 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.⁽⁴⁾ Since April 2017, more than half a million people have been struck with cholera in an outbreak linked to the lack of access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation. A diphtheria disease outbreak was recorded in Yemen by the beginning of 2018. Almost 1500 people were affected and dozens died out of the new epidemic.⁽⁵⁾

The Disintegration of Alliances

The war began, according to local and international military alliances, between two local parties, but then the war became a regional and local one. The war produced local militias, driven by external parties, in areas under the government control,

after it was only in areas under the control of Houthis who are supported by Iran.

First: Houthis /Saleh

The Iran-backed Houthi group allied with former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who facilitated the invasion of Sanaa through a network of military and tribal loyalties that he established during his 33-year-long rule and remained loyal to him even after he was ousted from power in 2011. The Houthi-Saleh alliance varied in more than one form following the start of military operations in 2015. The alliance was represented in the so-called the Supreme Political Council that was announced in July 2016. The council formed a government of both sides until it collapsed in early December 2017.

The Council continued - until the beginning of the fourth year of the war – to do the functions

of the Presidency of the Republic by issuing decisions and appointments and playing roles and responsibilities that come exclusively within the authority of the legitimate government. Now the Houthis have been alone in controlling all the state institutions within the territories they control.

The Houthis killed former President Ali Abdullah Saleh on December 4, 2017 after a series of accusations exchange between Saleh and Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi that started in August 2017 in two competing speeches before celebrations on the 35th anniversary of the General People's Congress party. That was the day that revealed the power of Saleh and Houthis as the Houthis appeared to be more powerful. The Houthis allowed Saleh to celebrate but on conditions. In the ceremony in Al-Sabeen Square in Sana'a, Saleh came out with a pre-written paper under the protection of Houthi Special Forces.

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**The Houthis have been
in control of all state
institutions within
provinces they control.
The longer they hold, the
more they gain, but they
lost the political cover by
killing their ally Saleh**
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On August 26, there was a more bloodthirsty message from the Houthis to Saleh, when they killed Khaled Ahmed Zeid al-Radhi, the military commander close to Saleh and the head of foreign relations at the General People's Congress party, in the first armed clash between the coup allies in the center of the capital Sana'a.⁽⁶⁾

On September 12, 2017, a direct conversation took place between Abd al-Malik al-Houthi and Ali Abdullah Saleh in an attempt to ease the tension; however, the differences soon erupted again at the end of November 2017. On December 1, Saleh changed his loyalty from the Houthis to the Arab Coalition and called for opening a new page with Saudi Arabia ⁽⁷⁾, The Arab Coalition welcomed this step and called the declaration of Saleh as "blessed intifada"⁽⁸⁾. It was also welcomed by the legitimate

government as President Hadi announced in a statement the "opening of a new page."⁽⁹⁾ But the Houthis used this declaration to eliminate their former ally and new rival, Saleh. They launched a massive campaign of arrests against the leaders of the General People's Congress, and killed military and partisan leaders loyal to Saleh. The conflict ended in favor of the Houthis after five days of fierce fighting in the southern neighborhoods of the capital Sana'a. At the end the conflict, the Houthis killed their ally, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, on December 4, 2017. ⁽¹⁰⁾

During the past three years of this war, the Houthis managed to neutralize the tribes of Sana'a by threatening and intimidating them, or by establishing new tribal leaderships to fill pro-Saleh tribal leaders. The Houthis provided the new tribal



leaders with weapons and men and helped them to be influential in order to stop any movement in supporting Saleh. The Houthis also swallowed the main power of Saleh, the Republican Guard, through recruiting more Houthi members in the Republican Guard and lobbying commanders who were loyal to Saleh in order to serve the Houthi group. This is what happened when Saleh asked forces and tribes loyal to him to move against the Houthis. They remained restricted only with slow movement in Sana'a and some other provinces such as Amran, Mahweet and Hajja, but the Houthis quickly suppressed that movement in Sana'a and other provinces in a few days, although the Arab Coalition aircrafts carried out several strikes targeting the Houthis in the central Sanaa during clashes with the forces of "Saleh".⁽¹¹⁾

The killing of "Saleh" was a shock to the local, regional and international community, especially to parties in the Arab Coalition, particularly the United Arab Emirates that was counting on "Saleh" to weaken the Houthis by announcing disengagement with them and confronting them from within Sana'a, but that did not happen. After killing Saleh, the Houthis had their grip on Sana'a and a large part of the highlands.⁽¹²⁾

In the days and weeks that followed, the Houthis crushed Saleh's supporters who stood up against them and seduced some others. In addition to Saleh, the Houthis killed the Secretary-General of the General People's Congress party, Arif al-Zouka while Tariq Saleh, Saleh's nephew, managed to escape during the clashes to the south of Yemen after speculations about his death.⁽¹³⁾



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The Houthis have surrounded the tribes of Sanaa, created new tribal leaderships, and controlled the Republican Guard. But experts have doubts over the ability of the Arab Coalition to re-produce Saleh's network in light of the split of the General People's Congress

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The end of the Houthi-Saleh alliance has given the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and forces loyal to the legitimate government of Yemen an opportunity to confront only one rival to restore the legitimacy. UN experts who are interested in Yemen's affairs said: "The end of the Houthi-Saleh alliance opened a window of opportunity for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and forces loyal to the Government of Yemen to regain territory. This window is unlikely to last for long, however, or to be sufficient in and of itself to end the war." ⁽¹⁴⁾

However, the UAE that seems to be a strong partner in the Arab Coalition, insists on finding solutions in the rubble of the Saleh family. Abu Dhabi seemingly has forced Riyadh to reconsider the status of Saleh's son, Brigadier General Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, and started to establish a military camp for former commander of Special Forces during the regime of Saleh, Brigadier Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, and to lobby the remaining forces who used to be loyal to Saleh in order to form new forces to confront the Houthis, who early realized the future role of Saleh family

members within the Arab Coalition after Saleh's death, so they kidnapped many of his relatives as a means of pressure if one of them attempt to revive Saleh's tribal and military network, which, in fact, has become weak.

The end of the Houthi / Saleh alliance has made the Houthis lose the political cover ⁽¹⁵⁾ they used to move under, but this cover was remedied by the group by reviving a new GPC party. In January 2018, Sadiq Amin Abu Ras was appointed as a new president of GPC to replace Saleh. The Houthis also restored the parliamentary sessions "formal" - although the number of deputies does not exceed 44 members, mostly loyal to "Saleh" ⁽¹⁶⁾, is contrary to the quorum, which refers to 151 deputies ⁽¹⁷⁾ - Saleh al-Samad, head of the so-called Supreme Political Council, said that the Council gets its legitimacy from the "Parliament". ⁽¹⁸⁾

On the other hand, the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and the legitimate government failed to hold a conference to announce a new leadership for the General People's Congress party despite the split in the GPC in 2015 between former president Saleh

and the current president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

We can say that parties in the Arab Coalition contributed to the state of disintegration and conflict experienced by the GPC. Abu Dhabi absorbed the military and political leadership that will support the Arab Coalition against the Houthis with its absolute rejection of the legitimacy of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, while Riyadh supports other leaders who support the Arab Coalition against the Houthis, as well as support the legitimacy of President Hadi. Some analysts see it as an exchange of roles between the UAE and Saudi Arabia to reach more control of the GPC that they try to revive to manage Yemen in the future.

Internationally, it was clear that there was anger at the killing of Saleh, not only among the Britons and Americans, but even the Russian attitude towards the Houthis changed. Moscow was shocked with the killing of Saleh whom it was counting on to keep its interests in Yemen in any future solutions. Russian withdrew the rest of its diplomatic mission

in Sana'a ⁽¹⁹⁾ a few days after the killing of Saleh. In February 2018, Moscow communicated directly with Ahmed Ali Saleh, who is in Abu Dhabi, and who, theoretically, is included in the UN sanctions according to the UNSC resolution 2216.⁽²⁰⁾

Ahmed Ali represents an attempt by Moscow to find out his ability to revive the network of Saleh and to know closely the reality of UAE and Saudi support to Ahmed Ali and his cousin, Tariq Saleh, although they both do not recognize the legitimate government.

According to a report by UN experts, they believe that Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, or Khalid Ali Abdullah Saleh or any other member of the Saleh family has no ability to reconstitute Saleh's network. The Republican Guard and the Special Forces now find themselves before two options, to join the legitimate government forces and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia - which they have been fighting for more than three years - or to join the Houthis who executed Ali Abdullah Saleh and senior military commanders. Any attempt to



The end of the Houthi-Saleh alliance has provided a new opportunity for the Saudi-led Arab Coalition to confront one rival, but this opportunity is unlikely to last for a long time



engage in comprehensive resistance against the Houthis would be complicated as the Houthis recruited their members in the Republican Guard and deployed them in different fronts. This move by the Houthis prevented Saleh from being able to mobilize large numbers of loyal soldiers in a short time when he needed them during clashes with the Houthis in Sana'a on 3 December 2017. ⁽²¹⁾

Second: The Legitimate Government and Arab Coalition

The Saudi-led Arab Coalition is fighting to restore legitimacy in Yemen after the Saleh-Houthi alliance led a coup against the internationally recognized government on 21 September 2014. The coalition intervened at the request of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who gave a legal cover to the Decisive Storm against the Iran-backed Houthis as the Gulf countries have concerns over an Iranian control in Yemen - the side of the Arab Peninsula

through which Iran can target the national security of the Gulf. The UAE, the second force in the Arab Coalition and the actual command of the coalition operations in southern Yemen, has been undermining the legitimate government authorities and marginalizing them in the liberated areas. This has led to:

Building militias out of the state control:

The United Arab Emirates has built “paramilitary” formations, mostly from the “Salafis” (30,000) since the beginning of 2016 and it continues to train and equip them. ⁽²²⁾ This force is called the “security belt” in Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Hadramout, Shabwa, Mahara and Socotra.

These paramilitary formations operate outside the Yemeni General Staff and are the main source of undermining the powers of the legitimate government. ⁽²³⁾ They are also highly trained and equipped with very modern weapons. Its members



were selected from tribes that have close relations with the UAE. In addition, that force is regional, not only in the south, but even deeper. For example, the Shabwani elite force was formed from members of specific tribes from the same Shabwa governorate, and that would make other tribes alienate and dissuade that military force and create tribal differences. This move by UAE will also establish for separate states, not on the basis of one national army for the country as a whole. ⁽²⁴⁾ The UAE believes that these militias can take control of the southern provinces, and it started to use them for reprisal actions such as the burning of headquarters of political parties and newspapers, the pursuit of activists, kidnapping and assassinations against resistance leaders and parties who refuse to subject to authorities that they believe are “illegitimate.”

Security failure:

The government faces difficulties in imposing its authority in the liberated governorates of Aden, Hadramout, Mahrah, Lahj, Shabwa and Abyan, as well as Al-Dalea governorate, except the districts of Demt, Juban, Husha and parts of Murais that are still under the control of Houthis.

The variety of loyalties of the security and military forces, most of which are loyal to the UAE, the Yemeni government lost the power to impose its influence. Thus security breaches increased and the phenomenon of political assassinations has expanded in a frightening manner since the UAE and its “security belts” took the responsibility for security in those provinces.

Administrative failure:

The legitimate Yemeni government has failed to manage liberated governorates. Since the





dismissal of Khaled Bahah, the pro-Emir of UAE, in April 2016, from his positions as Vice President and Prime Minister, and the appointment of Ali Mohsen Saleh Al-Ahmar as Vice President and Ahmed Obaid Bin Dagher as Prime Minister, the government faced many administrative problems amid an increasing dispute between Abu Dhabi and President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The dispute reached to the extent that an Emirati aircraft intervened to strike forces loyal to President Hadi in February 2017, during what was known as events of the airport. According to information that the Yemeni presidency did not deny, President Hadi described the role of Abu Dhabi in his country as an “occupation” ⁽²⁵⁾ in a meeting with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, President of UAE, Mohamed bin Zayed. In May 2017, Abu Dhabi supported the formation of the so-called Southern Transition Council, as an alternative parallel authority to the government in the liberated provinces in the south of the country. The Yemeni government has failed

to regularize the salaries of its employees, along with a major failure on the services side.

Economic failure:

The internationally recognized government failed to revive the Yemeni economy and to operate the ports under its control. The transfer of the Central Bank of Yemen from under the authority of the Houthis in Sana’a to the authority of the legitimate government in Aden in September 2016 resulted in the government incapacity to pay the salaries of the government employees- that does not mean that the presence of the Central Bank of Yemen in Sana’a would be better. The government could not move to stop the collapse of the local currency. The local currency is in the worst situation as it gradually lost its value during the three years of war (from 250 riyals per dollar to more than 500 riyals per dollar at the beginning of 2018).

The Saudi government has recently announced a deposit of \$ 2 billion, but although it has stopped the collapse of the Yemeni riyal for a temporary

period, the main problem is the cessation of oil and gas exports because the coalition prevents the government from exporting oil and gas without knowing the reasons. Prime Minister Ahmed Obeid bin Dagher appealed to “ the Arab Coalition, after Saudi announced the financial deposit, to allow his government to export.”⁽²⁶⁾ The Yemeni government also failed to manage the ports and airports as the forces loyal to the UAE “security belt and elite force” completely control ports and airports in liberated areas.

These forces have previously prevented the Yemeni President and military leaders from returning to Aden. The Central Bank of Yemen and the Aden Ports Authority have repeatedly accused the “Coalition Cell” / UAE of preventing a plane, carrying amounts of Yemeni riyals that were printed in Russia, from landing at Aden airport,⁽²⁷⁾

and preventing large vessels carrying salaries from anchoring in Aden, despite the ability of the port to receive them. This move by UAE eventually forced a number of ships to leave after months of staying in the middle of the sea. ⁽²⁸⁾

The coup in Aden:

The United Arab Emirates was involved in working against its ally, the legitimate government, represented by President Hadi. In addition to undermining the legitimate government’s performance on the ground, preventing it from stabilizing in the temporary capital of Aden, and creating parallel entities to the army, UAE has showed President Hadi as a weak president who has not popularity in the south, and in the north alike.

Abu Dhabi - without any objection from Riyadh – has recently supported a new coup in Aden.



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The only interest of Abu Dhabi, in the war in Yemen, is to control the Yemeni ports and miles of the coastline to achieve the goal of being a superpower energy
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On 28/30 January 2018, the Southern Transition Council (STC) succeeded in taking control of Aden within two days with support from pro-Emirati militias that used UAE arms as well as support from Emirati air force, according to media outlets. The militia surrounded the Presidential Palace in Ma'asheeq, where the Yemeni government is based and has drawn the flags of secession (flag of former Southern Yemen before unification in 1990) on its gates.

Aidarous al-Zabidi, head of the so-called Southern Transitional Council, and the "security belt" force have prevented any new Governor of Aden from approaching the governorate building or handing over the house of the new governor of Aden ⁽²⁹⁾ since al-Zabidi was dismissed from his position as governor of Aden in April 2017.

The UAE has full control on Socotra, the strategic island in the Arabian Sea, and it is fully managed by its officials. The UAE has begun to build military bases there and in other strategic islands such as Miyoun Island, which controls Bab al-Mandab.

What is happening now is that the group of

UAE-backed separatists in southern Yemen has targeted the legitimacy in the southern provinces (they have seemingly succeeded to a certain extent) are now moving to build a state within the state, ⁽³⁰⁾ exploiting the chaos in the country. That means the establishment of southern states based on the sub-identity that was fed by the UAE through paramilitary formations outside the state, and the purchasing of tribal and military loyalties. Hadramout, Shabwa, Mahra, Lahj, Socotra and al-Dhalea have thousands of forces, either as "security belt" or as "elite forces". They all have a separate leadership and they believe that they have a different cultural, geographical and social identity that is not related to the "State of the South" that the Transitional Council calls for. ⁽³¹⁾

Fighting Terrorism:

It is difficult to speak of a quick and decisive role of the UAE in combating terrorism, even though the local forces they have trained were justified to fight al-Qaeda, the "state organization," Daesh, and the Houthis. That happened indeed in April 2016 when UAE special forces along with Hadramout elite



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It is difficult to talk about an Emirati victory against terrorism as some mistakes have helped al-Qaeda elements to withdraw to safe shelters in mountains without any resistance
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force could liberate Mukalla (center of Hadramout) from al-Qaeda, and forces moved in August 2017 to liberate the headquarters of al-Qaeda in Azzan directorate in Shabwa from al-Qaeda.

In February 2018, the Hadramout Elite Force loyal to UAE announced a new military operation called Al-Faisal in Wadi Hadramout. The force is trying to extend its influence throughout the province and control the positions of the First Military Region of the Yemeni Army.

However, this is not the end of the story. The UAE and Yemeni forces, loyal to UAE, did not really fight al-Qaeda. The elements of al-Qaeda withdrew to shelters in the mountains and remote villages. The mistakes of the UAE contributed closely to the existence of those shelters. The recruitment in the Elite Force in Hadramout and Shabwa was based on narrow tribal loyalties. The UAE-backed militias committed extensive human rights abuses. The UAE also arrested many citizens allegedly related to terrorism. They were brutally tortured in secret prisons, and some of them were detained two years ago.

Under torture, the UAE interrogators extracted

wrong information from those detainees, who were really not associated with any of the terrorist organizations, but with political groups that oppose to the UAE orientation in the southern provinces.⁽³²⁾

The bombing of a US drone, the ground military campaigns, and the joint air landing by Abu Dhabi and Washington have resulted in fatal errors that led to several deaths among civilians, as happened in al-Bayda in early 2017.⁽³³⁾ This means recruiting more innocent people, who object such mistakes, in terrorist groups.

At the same time, the United Arab Emirates supports an armed militia with thousands of fighters led by Adel Farea al-Thubhani, Abu al-Abbas, in the central city of Taiz. Abu al-Abbas- according to a Gulf-US list of terrorism in Yemen- is linked to al-Qaeda. But at the same time, the UAE is hindering the liberation of Taiz from the Houthis. The liberation of Taiz and the southern mountainous highlands would facilitate the liberalization of Hodeidah, which has a strategic port. This has made some observers of the situation in Yemen assess the Arab Coalition's operations as exhaustion rather than liberation.

Supporting Saleh's family:

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pinned their hopes since the beginning on supporting the Saleh family to split from the Houthis to make them weaker. But Saleh's death was so easy and this almost three-year-old hope has become a hell for the coalition. The UAE now supports the return of Tarek Saleh, the nephew the late president, and plans to establish a parallel force to the government forces to confront the Houthis, but do not take instructions from the government. The attempt to rely on the return of Ali Abdullah Saleh's family is based on the same erroneous assumption that led the two countries, UAE and Saudi, to continue to push for a division between Saleh and the Houthis as a solution for war.

In addition, Ahmed (Saleh's eldest son who stays in Abu Dhabi), or Tarek Saleh or any member of Saleh's family does not have the same influence

in the Yemeni tribes as the late Saleh used to do. Many tribal sheikhs who have supported Saleh will hesitate to support Ahmed and his family after defeating his father. ⁽³⁴⁾

The support for Saleh's family by establishing a new parallel force to the Yemeni Army, along with other formations, targets the Yemeni legitimacy, which has not yet been recognized by any member of the late president's family.

Third: The Arab Coalition and the main objective of military operations

The Arab Coalition in Yemen has the sole objective of "restoring Yemeni legitimacy to power" at a request from Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who was elected by the Yemeni people in February 2012 elections according to the Gulf Initiative and its executive mechanism. This was confirmed in Security Council Resolution 2216 that recognized Hadi as the legitimate president of Yemen.





After three years of war, the Arab Coalition became more fragmented. In June 2017, the State of Qatar was exempted from its task of participating in the coalition through protecting the Saudi border and providing the legitimate government with services, as one of the consequences of Gulf-Gulf disputes. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and Yemen cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar, closed the only border crossing to Qatar via Saudi Arabia, and imposed an air embargo against Qatar. Qatari media, financed by Doha, began talking about violations of the Arab Coalition in Yemen, allowing the Houthis to appear on the Qatari al-Jazeera TV, newspapers and websites and centers of studies in Doha, the matter that did not happen before, except in rare cases.

On the ground, the Arab Coalition appears to be divided over the main objective for which the war broke out. The UAE is busy with building “permanent” military bases near the Bab al-Mandab Strait and turning the South Yemen into a major source of energy, regional power and international influence. ⁽³⁵⁾

Recent events in Aden (28/30 January) have

demonstrated that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are sometimes at odds in this complicated and multi-layered war. While the Saudis support President Hadi’s authority as an ethical and legal reason for their intervention in Yemen, a senior Emirati security official publicly call for overthrowing him (President Hadi). ⁽³⁶⁾

By entering the third year of military operations in Yemen, Abu Dhabi does not appear to be interested in the Houthis, especially since their fight was - from the very first instance - an excuse to establish a military presence in southern Yemen.

The only interest of the United Arab Emirates is to control 2,000 km of the Yemeni coast, the central pillar of Abu Dhabi’s plan to become an energy superpower, pursuing this goal relentlessly, instead of negotiating over joint use of ports and investments in the country’s energy infrastructure. Saudi Arabia, for its part, sent special military forces - not related to the Arab Coalition - to Mahrah, benefiting from concerns by the neighboring state of Oman and Mahrah tribes which are loyal to it over a possible presence of Emirati forces in Mahrah, and to prevent any direct armed

clashes between Oman and the UAE (the two countries have historical enmity). The preliminary information says that there is a Saudi campaign of nationalization among people of Mahrah similar to the UAE nationalization of people in Socotra as Oman had previously nationalized people from Mahrah.

Riyadh is seeking to build an oil port in Mahrah, on the Arabian Sea coast, the dream of Saudi Arabia to breathe south, on the Indian Ocean, without worry about Iran's threats around the Strait of Hormuz.

Five years after the transformation of Kharkhir province in Najran, southern Saudi, into a store of crude oil and the evacuation of all its inhabitants, Saudi can possibly extend an oil pipeline and establish a port in Mahrah for lower costs and in a short time, compared to the port of Mukalla, which was part of Saudi Arabia's old strategy. But the negative point in this project is that the continuation of the Iranian threat as the pipeline will pass near Saudi border with Oman, the close ally of Iran, but it will be safer if the pipeline pass through Mukalla as it will go through Yemeni tribes which are loyal

to Saudi Arabia.

By being present on the Arabian Sea, Riyadh can also prevent the smuggling of arms to its borders through Yemen.

Saudi Arabia faces a new crisis with Yemen in a war it led to support the Yemeni legitimacy. The new labor laws will lead to the departure of nearly 1.2 million Yemeni workers who are working in many professions in Saudi as the Saudi authorities have decided the "Saudization" of jobs and make work opportunities exclusive to Saudi nationals. In addition to new fees the Saudi authorities imposed on the non-Saudi residents.

They want the residents to pay 100 Saudi riyals per month for each person residing on its territory, so Yemeni residents will be indirectly forced to return to Yemen since the business opportunities will be reduced and chances of staying in Saudi with their families under such high costs will remain very limited. The amount will double over the next four years to 400 Saudi riyals per person in 2022. Yemenis born in Saudi Arabia and lived there for decade are in danger of displacement.



Five years after the start of the construction of a giant oil tank in Kharir, which was evacuated from inhabitants, Riyadh deployed a special force, unrelated to the operations of the Arab Coalition, to Mahrah and seeks to establish an oil port in Mahrah away from the concern over Iran's threats to close the Strait of Hormuz



Tens of thousands have returned to Yemen amid the hell of war. Riyadh has offered a big service to the Houthis who can use this problem in their propaganda internally and externally.

The Yemeni government has failed to prove the strength of its relationship with Riyadh as it failed to deal with this complicated file, which seems to be a new means of pressure by Saudis to achieve future interests in Yemen, but many young men, who are expelled from Saudi, may escape from unemployment and indigence to armed groups. Thus, Iran can invest this file to implement its desire to make Yemen a country of chaos and a permanent threat to Gulf security.

The Greed of War in Yemen:

In a realistic reading of the dramatic war in Yemen, the Arab Coalition is not looking for a quick and easy victory in Yemen. Rather, it wants to achieve strategic interests, foremost of which is preventing the emergence of a strong Yemeni rival in the region. The Gulf fear of this has led the Gulf countries to adopt tactical policies to achieve those strategic interests without a realistic reading of the dangers, consequences and sudden events that maybe have not been taken into account before the launch of the Decisive Storm, making Iran benefit from changes.

First: The policies that some Gulf countries seek to implement:

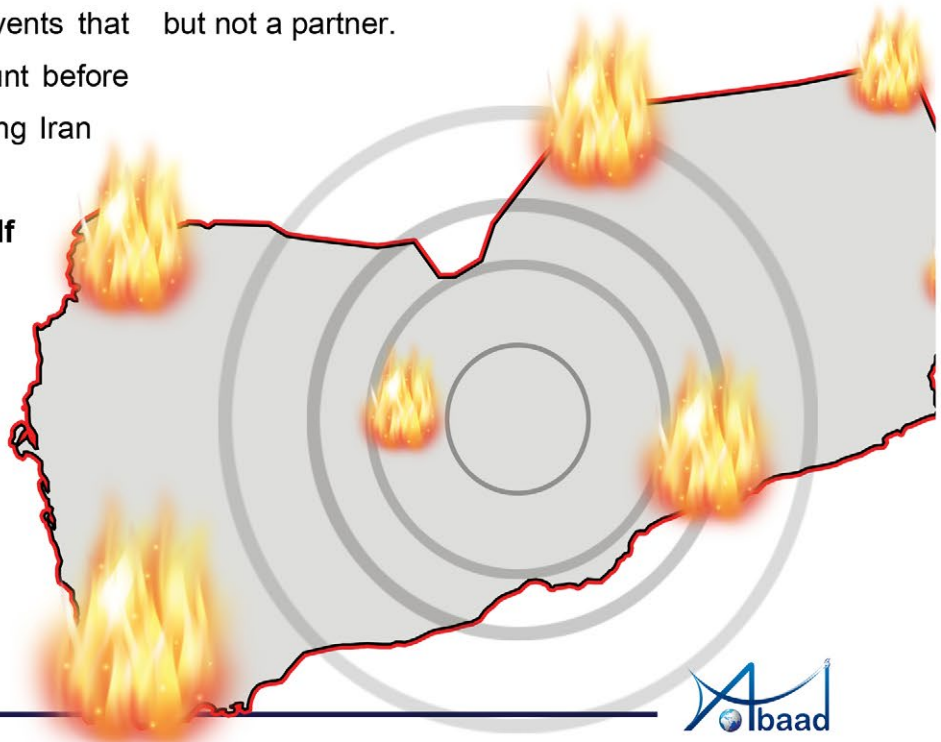
1 - Dismantling solid blocks in Yemen:

Traditional social structures, military forces, ideological systems and political parties have been dismantled while doctrinal, regional and militia

alternatives have emerged spontaneously. However, there are concerns over the Islah Party, which appeared as a cohesive political force, especially after the disintegration of the General People's Congress party and the killing of its former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. These fears could push the Arab Coalition to prolong the battle in an attempt to exhaust the National Army and popular resistance, which is believed to lean on the Islah party, whose members are fighting on the ground in the war alongside the legitimacy.

2. Fragmentation of Yemen:

There is a widespread belief among some parties in the Arab Coalition that supporting the fragmentation of Yemen will make it easier to control the country in the future through tools that are currently being created, including armed militias, regional media, and partisan and political groups that are concerned with historical differences. The fragmentation does not mean to return Yemen to the south and north states but to divide Yemen into several states and sultanates that will be easy to manipulate until the Gulf finds a new strong subordinate on the ground, but not a partner.



3 - Creating Chaos:

Some members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially Oman and Qatar, believe that the prolong of war in Yemen is an ideal strategy to exhaust the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and that this war could make Yemen a hotbed of chaos to dismantle the alliance of countries that are involved in the blockade against Doha, which those countries see as a punishment against Iran's Gulf allies.

Second: The strategic interests of the Gulf States:

1 - The UAE seeks to control the ports in the south, on the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, and the west ports on the Red Sea coast. It seeks to fully control the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the island of Socotra. The Emiratis seemingly realize the importance of Aden and Mocha for the Britons, and the importance of Hodeidah and Socotra for the Americans, so Abu Dhabi does not mind to make understandings with London and Washington on the influence.

2 - Saudi Arabia mainly seeks to secure its southern border, but it has an ambition to get a breathe passage on the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean to export its oil products to China and Asia without any concerns about Iran's threats to control the Strait of Hormuz in the Arabian Gulf. Saudi Arabia is aware of the importance of oil-rich areas in Yemen, especially Hadramout, Shabwa and Marib, for the Americans and French. Therefore, Riyadh does not mind to support Washington's long strategy to combat terrorism in those provinces and surrounding provinces, even to the level of deploying international forces on the



ground. Saudi also has concerns about any future oil discoveries in Al-Jawf desert, which is adjacent to Saudi Arabia, especially as it may transfer conflicts of countries to border with Saudi Arabia.

3 - Oman believes that war in Yemen is an opportunity to strengthen new regional and international alliances against the UAE (its historical opponent). The persistence of the Houthis as a force on the ground to threaten Saudi Arabia is a guarantee to redraw the map of influence within Yemen, particularly in the neighboring province of Mahrah.

4 - After the declaration of the blockade against Qatar by four Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, Doha established alliances with Tehran and this change was reflected on the field in the form of indirect support to the Houthis as expressed by some of the Qatari media leaders. It is clear that Qatar does not want the Houthis to be defeated in Yemen to take revenge against countries that blockade Qatar.



Threats to regional security:

1. Supporting the division of Yemen will create non-national entities, possibly a sectarian entity in Saada on the northern border with Saudi Arabia under the rule of Houthis and with support from Iran, and a regional entity in the south, near the Omani border, with support from UAE.
- 2 - Controlling the areas of wealth, especially the oil regions and ports, will create closed areas in the highlands between Taiz and Saada through Ibb, Dhamar, Sanaa, Hajja, Mahweet and Amran which contain more than two thirds of the population of Yemen. Thus, these provinces maybe areas of wars, conflicts and chaos, and militant groups may emerge to threaten border with Saudi Arabia, as the Houthis have done, especially as Abu Dhabi and Riyadh are effectively in the range of missiles of any group controlling north-north high-altitude areas.
- 3 - Failure to restore the legitimacy of the state in Yemen and the disruption of the country will reflect

negatively on the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia. The coalition intervention will be legally described as an occupation that ended with the division of Yemen.

- 4 - Saudi Arabia will lose its last field allies on the ground, if it accepts the dismantling of solid blocks (potential allies) and the disruption of geography.
5. The situation in Yemen will permanently threaten the security of the Gulf, and millions of poor Yemenis will become fighters with trans-border gangs and entities, especially those backed by Iran.
6. A national doctrine will be created to be borne by the coming generations that will clash with the Gulf states due to their support to the fragmentation of Yemen, whether those allied with Iran or those who are against Iran, in case the Saudi-led Arab Coalition fails to restore the state in Yemen.

Scenarios of war in Yemen:

President Hadi, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are racing to recruit as many Salafis as they can to

build their own combat brigades to ensure their own allies on the ground. President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi handed over the leadership of Brigades of the Presidential Guard to Salafis. He appointed Salafist Mahran al-Qubati as commander of the third brigade in Aden and Salafist Adnan Ruzaiq as commander of the fifth brigade in Taiz. The UAE also appointed Salafist Hani Bin Buraik as commander of the security belt, and it also fights Houthis in the west coast with brigades under the leadership of Salafis, including Hamdi Shukri and others.

Saudi Arabia fears that other parties may use Salafists. It also fears from the Salafis recruitment as it tries to improve its international reputation, but the Houthi strikes on its border forces have pushed Saudi to support Salafi fighters to fight against Houthis on its border and invade Saada. Saudi is also training two Salafi battalions to push them towards its southern border in Jizan and to move, along with the National Army, towards Midi and Haradh.

This competition on the militarization of Salafis in Yemen, along with the tribal groups that are included in the popular resistance and the regional forces in the south, will have future consequences, especially if the Arab Coalition ignores the restoration of the Yemeni state, because this would create an armed conflict ideologically, regionally and tribally. The existence of different forces that do not subject to the Yemeni legitimacy may change into dangerous jihadist militias that can be mobilized by armed terrorist groups.

The possibility of disagreement between the parties of the Arab Coalition is still low, although Saudi Arabia and the UAE have many contradictions.

»
President Hadi, Saudi Arabia and UAE are racing to recruit the largest number of Salafists to build combat brigades to have more loyal allies on the ground
»

One of such contradictions is Riyadh's acceptance of an understanding with the influential Yemeni party, the Islah Party, unlike Abu Dhabi's position that looks at the Islah party as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood that threatens it, despite the meeting that brought together the Islah leaders with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed under the patronage of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in December 2017, following the killing of Saleh.

Despite tensions, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are unlikely to split in two different ways in the near future. The two countries share the belief that the Houthis and Iran pose an existential threat to the region, and their dispute with Qatar may ease the gap between them. However, Abu Dhabi may outperform Riyadh in achieving strategic interests in Yemen because any chaos or disruption in this complex country does not threaten UAE directly because it does not have common border with Yemen.

This makes Yemen actually face three scenarios for war:

First Scenario: (The State Restoration)

The implementation of the plan of the Decisive Storm for the restoration of the Yemeni state and the overthrow of the coup (through compelling Houthis to implement the UN resolutions) or through completing the liberation of the capital Sana'a and other provinces under the Houthis control. This scenario is (supported by the Yemeni legitimacy and there is a Saudi tendency to achieve it). Supporting the National Army and tribal resistance to reach the mountains of Arhab that are overlooking Sana'a in parallel with the restoration of the port of Hodeidah will push the coalition to declare victory and end the war in Yemen and hand over the leadership to the legitimacy of Yemen and the National Army.

This scenario maybe unexpected in light of (manipulation by some parties in the Arab Coalition) in the liberated areas and preventing the legitimate President Hadi and the government, led by Ahmed Obeid bin Dagher from restoring the interim capital of Aden and managing the state's affairs as well as preventing the Parliament from holding its sessions in Aden, (but Saudi fears and the outside pressure) while the Houthi force is still threatening the neighborhood, in addition to the failure of the UAE's options to reactivate the late Saleh's family and the Republican Guard forces may push Saudi to (accept a political agreement to which Houthis must be abide) or to support moves by the legitimate government's forces towards Sana'a and Hodeidah. This depends largely on Saudi strategy and the objectives of its intervention.

This scenario remains to be difficult one but it is safe and supports the national security of Yemen and the Gulf.

Second Scenario: (Division Projects Scenario)

Supporting the division of Yemen by bringing the country into a new cycle of political dialogues that may be exploited by Houthis in the north and the secessionist movement in the south to rearrange themselves on the ground, regain their exhausted strength, train new recruits and obtain qualitative weapons. Thus, the Houthis in the north and the Transitional Council in the south will be able to stabilize their feet more than before. Thus, small civil wars with regional and sectarian spirit may break out to threaten the social fabric of the Yemeni community. Iran always enjoys riding on such internal conflicts to realize its dream of domination. Information says that there are more than three thousand fighters, trained by Iranian experts, are involved in the brigades of the Transitional Council, and the council's chairman, Aidarous al-Zubaidi supervised the training in camps in Beirut and Eritrea before the Decisive Storm.

If the Houthis and the separatists succeed in dividing the country, the country will open its door to all local and international partition projects and so multiple conflicting states will emerge.

This scenario is expected and UAE and some international parties support it but it threatens the Yemeni unity and the security and stability of the Gulf in a long-term.

Third Scenario: (Chaos scenario)

The continuation of war for another year means the fragmentation of the Arab Coalition and Houthi alliances and the appearance of other new alliances with non-national interests that will be managed by the regional and international conflicts. This will change war in Yemen into a long-stand chaos to exhaust the Yemeni people. Iran and its regional allies support this scenario as they believe that war against the Houthis in Yemen is the black hole for sucking the power of Saudi and UAE, and that chaos in Yemen is the most appropriate scenario to make Yemen a permanently threat to the oil-rich Gulf, and to give Iran an opportunity to exist on borders of the big rival, Saudi Arabia. This scenario is the closest one to the reality. If it happens, it will put Yemen and the Gulf on the pink of collapse in a short-term.

Margins :

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Follow the margins :

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