

# Struggle for Influence and Proxy War in Yemen



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مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث  
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Abaad Studies & Research Center (Abaad) is a non-profit organization that has a license from Yemen's Social Affairs Ministry No. (436) issued on October 18 2010.

focuses on politics, intellect, democracy, election, political parties, terrorism, freedoms as well as economic and social issues.

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He supervised and participated in most of the studies, researches and publications of the Abaad Center since the center was established in January 2011.

He participated in several international researches such as Al-Qaeda in Yemen- chapter (Al-Qaeda and the Regime), issued by Al-Mesbar Center in the United Arab Emirates 2010.



He contributed to a book entitled “Iran and the Arab World After the Nuclear Agreement” within the Iranian project, issued by the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Kennedy School, Harvard, 2015. He also contributed as a researcher to a book entitled “The Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Winter” within the International Security Program - Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Kennedy School, Harvard, 2017.

He has many studies, including a study on the transfer of Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan to Yemen, Foreign Policy magazine, and a study on Yemeni diplomacy - Outlets of Power, the Journal of International Politics of Al-Ahram Center in 2013. He participated as a researcher in the Qatar Project in Conflict Areas 2012.

He presented discussion papers in the activities of the Al Jazeera Center for Studies, the Arab Center for Research, the Carnegie Center, the Brookings Doha Center, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the American University in Lebanon Center, the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Tawakkol Karman Center for World Peace conference, Istanbul Aydin University (IAU), the American University in Lebanon, the centers of King Faisal and King Abdulaziz, and the United Nations’ organizations.

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## **Summary:**

The Republic of Yemen, with its geographical location and promising wealth, is of great importance, as it is the gateway to the Arabian Peninsula, and it overlooks the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the most important corridor for international trade, and is located on open waters on the Arab Sea and the Indian Ocean on the one hand, and the Red Sea linking three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe on the other hand. All this makes it a country with a great influence on the Gulf regions and the Horn of Africa, and even northern Arabia and Africa, which are linked to Europe.

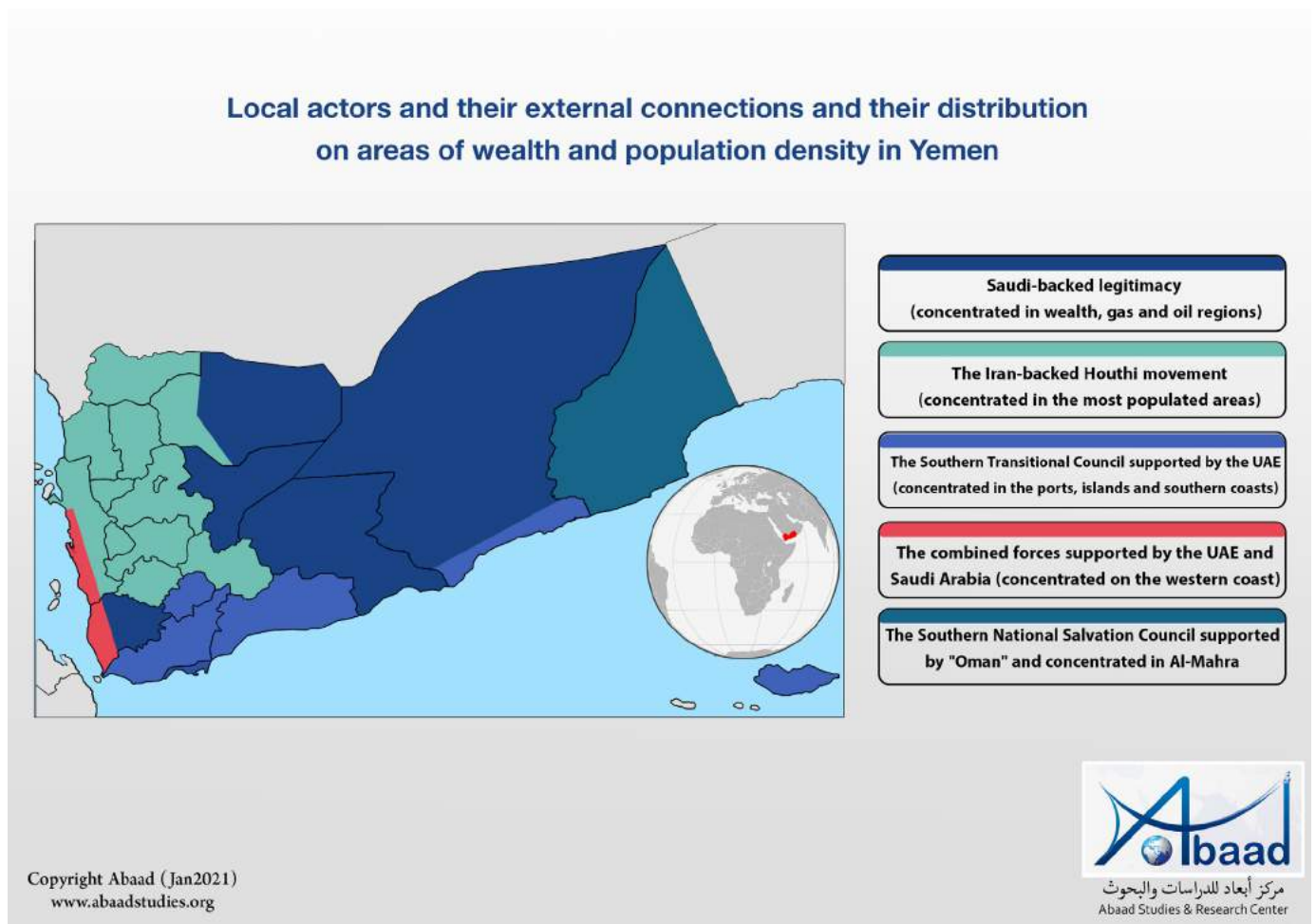
This study focuses on the situation in Yemen as a proxy battlefield between regional and international powers that aspire to control this important region, either to enhance their military and economic capabilities or to increase their security effectiveness in order to avoid similar war and chaos.

The study focuses on the local actors and their role in the presence of regional and international actors, and tracks the strategic objectives of the Iranian presence in Yemen through the Houthi movement, which tightened its grip on the capital Sana'a in 2014, and provided a justification for the Saudi-Emirati military presence in Yemen through the Arab coalition that was announced in 2015 with the aim of restoring the state and toppling the Houthi coup.

The study reveals the true goals of the Iranian presence in Yemen, which it considers a human warehouse that enables them to access the Gulf oil areas and Islamic sanctities. It reveals the unspoken goals of the Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which consider the war as an opportunity to achieve their strategies in reaching gas and oil regions, open seas, coasts and ports that enable them to control territorial control to remain influential states, important to their international allies, despite the competition and perhaps conflict between Abu Dhabi and Riyadh that was reflected on the ground between their local allies, which led to another coup in Aden 2019 against the legitimacy of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who the coalition intervened to support.

Saudi Arabia is trying to rebalance the legitimacy that has entered into disagreements with its partner in the coalition, the UAE, by forming a legitimate government that accommodates the Southern Transitional Council, an ally of Abu Dhabi on the ground, due to fear of increasing Iranian influence. But when the new government arrived at Aden Airport to manage the country's affairs from inside the country, it was received with an attack with missiles, which undoubtedly is supported by regional parties.

The study also focuses on other regional and international actors besides Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, such as Israel, Turkey, Russia and China, and before them, the United States of America and Britain.



Figur (1) Strategic areas of local actors' control

# **Introduction:**

On December 30, 2020, guided missiles fell near a plane carrying all ministers of the new Yemeni government formed in Saudi Arabia equally between its allies in the legitimacy of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, and the UAE's allies in the Southern Transitional Council.

Local parties exchanged accusations of targeting the government that has been exiled in Riyadh for five years, but they unanimously agreed that regional parties are behind the logistical support for the perpetrators. The legitimate government accused the Houthis of being behind the attack with support from Iran, while the Houthis accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The tragic attack that killed and injured dozens of local officials, media correspondent and three of the ICRC's humanitarian relief workers, was the most prominent example of Yemen's transformation into a battlefield of a regional proxy war.

For its strategic location, Yemen attracts regional and international powers that struggle for influence. Whoever has an influence in Yemen will rule one of the most important global trade routes to the east and west.

The strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait, the waterway that connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean, gained its importance after the digging of the Suez Canal, which is the world's shortest shipping route between north and south, about 12% of the global trade passes through it.

As it is clear in the map, the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Suez Canal represent the entrance and exit to the Red Sea, one of the most important seas on the planet in terms of trade and strategy since ancient history. The struggle to control it and secure the passage of ships through it began since the earliest eras, beginning with ancient Egypt (Pharaonic) through successive empires, and even the great and regional powers of our time.



Yemen strategically locates at the gateway to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states, which have huge reserves of oil and gas and strong relations with international powers. Yemen, with its difficult geographic and political nature, is an important region for influencing the oil-rich Gulf States, especially neighboring Saudi Arabia, the Horn of Africa and the rest of other countries bordering the Red Sea.

The Bab al-Mandab Strait is a turbulent passage in which a series of challenges affect the countries bordering it, especially the countries that suffer from fragility of their systems and internal conflicts, which negatively affect the security and safety of the international trade corridor.

A report issued by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) indicates that the Horn of Africa has witnessed the proliferation of foreign military bases and a mobilization of naval forces since 2001. The most visible aspect of this presence is the spread of military installations around the Bab al-Mandab strait, at the entrance to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden,<sup>1</sup> either to confront the maritime piracy and terrorist operations, or for reasons of preserving the interests of those countries, or for their expansion in the Horn of Africa for the purpose of self- defense, or to impose threat to the Arab Gulf states.

Historically, those bases were used by the British colony for expansion. Britain used the "Aden base" as a starting point for its strategic expansion aimed at controlling the Red Sea and preventing any other force from approaching it. It occupied Egypt in 1882, and then went to the southeast in the same year to occupy the ports of Zala` and Berbera in Somalia, for using them in military operations against the Axis countries. Then it occupied Sudan in 1899, under the pretext that those lands were under the Ottoman control and were not included in the agreement in 1877<sup>2</sup>,

or to influence navigation and impose taxes, as the Arabs were expelled from the Indian and African trading centers after the Portuguese invasion of the Red Sea and the centralization at its entrance in 1502, in a direct threat to the interests of the Mamluk state in Egypt and the Levant. The Portuguese persisted in their war, so they worked to attack Arab ships and prevent them from conducting commercial activity in the Indian Ocean waters without permission from the Portuguese.<sup>3</sup>

This was evident in Yemen after the Iranian-backed Houthi armed group took control of the capital, Sana'a, in September 2014. Most of countries withdrew their missions, which led to the formation of a regional coalition, led by Saudi Arabia, in 2015, to restore the legitimate government to Sana'a and end the Houthi coup. Among the justifications behind the Arab coalition is securing the Bab al-Mandab strait and preventing Iran from establishing a foothold in Yemen.

## Local Actors and Their External Engagements

During the war years, many local actors emerged on two main levels. The local actor linked to a larger local party and the local actor that is associated or allied with an external support and financier. These local parties are distributed on the Yemeni geography, and focus in their internal conflict on areas of wealth, population density, and strategic location, either to win the war or to use them in any expected negotiations to reach peace in the country, or to serve a regional or international ally.

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Each side wants to become the dominant party to get big gains in the transitional period, or to be the power that will run the country after the war depending on the principle of distributing political shares according to control and influence on the ground.

At the same time, some states and regional powers support these local entities, parties and actors to obtain political,

military and economic gains, and a long-term influence in the country, even if this leads to the division of Yemen into authoritarian leaders, or the division of Yemen, as in the past, into sheikhs, emirates, sultanates, and multiple states. The regional countries depend, in their intervention in Yemen, on support from major powers to pass their agenda in the country.

Areas of control in Yemen until January 2021

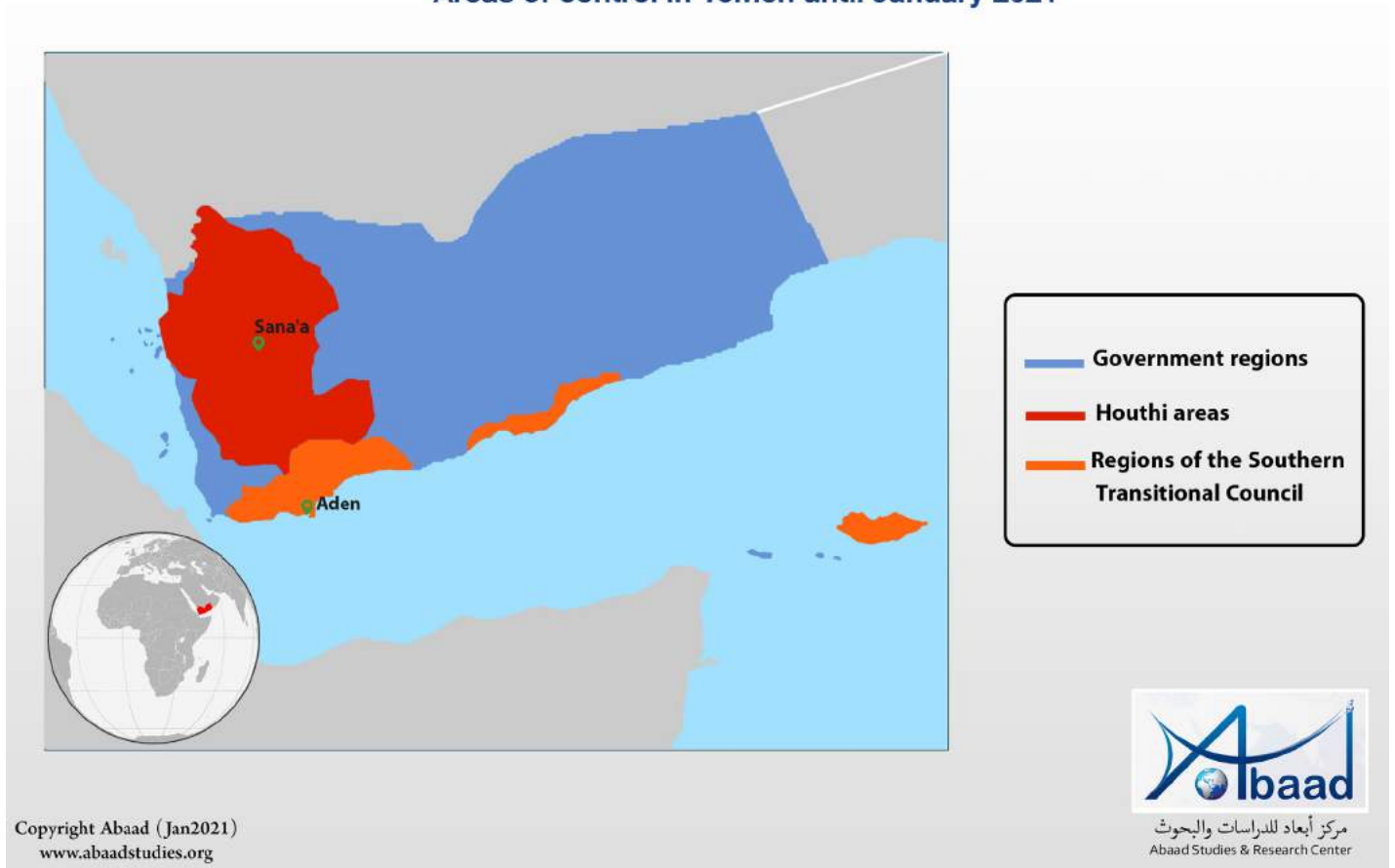


Figure (2) Areas of control until January 2021.

The distribution of local and regional actors in Yemen is divided on the map as follows:

### **Areas of population density:**

The Houthis control most of the governorates with population density (the population of Yemen is 30 million) except for the city of Marib, where more than 2.5 million displaced people live, most of whom have sought a refuge in the governorate for fear of persecution by the Houthis, and the city of Taiz, where almost 3 million people live.

The Houthis have turned this ordeal into an opportunity, as densely populated areas formed a storehouse of fighters, taking advantage of the state of poverty to recruit people into their ranks in exchange for food aid or low salaries. The Houthis also exploited the population density for the sake of taking levies from merchants and businessmen, who import most of what Yemenis need to

the Houthi-controlled areas, which strengthened the war economy in Yemen and highlighted new financial centers, most of them loyal to the Houthis, and provided a constant source for what the Houthis call “the war effort,” which is considered one of the reasons behind the war prolonging.

**The struggle for wealth:** Unlike many countries in the Middle East, Yemen, located on the edge of the Asian continent and the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, has a number of offshore exploration sectors offered for the hydrocarbon industry. There are so far eleven explored sectors, three of which are in the Red Sea, four locate in Mukalla and Saihout regions off the southeast coast, and four others near the Socotra Island. <sup>4</sup>

These sectors were discovered in 1984,<sup>5</sup> and in the 1990s, but they have not been explored.

In the Mukalla Basin – Saihout, for example, is relatively unexplored, although it was discovered in the 1990s, only ten wells were drilled for exploration. As for the Red Sea basin, it extends along the western coast of the country, and in nearby islands such as Kamaran Island. <sup>6</sup>

Recent studies indicate that most of the exploration sectors are ready for work and there are promising prospects that Yemen can have huge "reserves" of gas and oil.<sup>7</sup> Yemen has 13 sedimentary basins, which are distributed over a large area of the country. The geological information confirms that Yemen has a potential petroleum wealth in a number of basins,

and other basins give good indicators of main elements necessary for oil accumulations, in three basins from very ancient periods such as the "Sana'a Basin" and The Empty Quarter Basin and Socotra Basin. <sup>8</sup>

According to the US Energy Information Administration, Yemen has been proven to have oil reserves of around 3 billion barrels and 17 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.<sup>9</sup> The Yemeni government indicates that the total quantity of the discovered oil until 2006 estimated at 9.7 billion barrels in the 11 productive sectors,<sup>10</sup> apart from the 15 sectors that were offered to international oil companies in 2013.

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**Recent studies indicate that most of the oil sectors explored in Yemen have reached a stage of maturity, amid promising prospects for obtaining huge "reserves" of gas and oil.**

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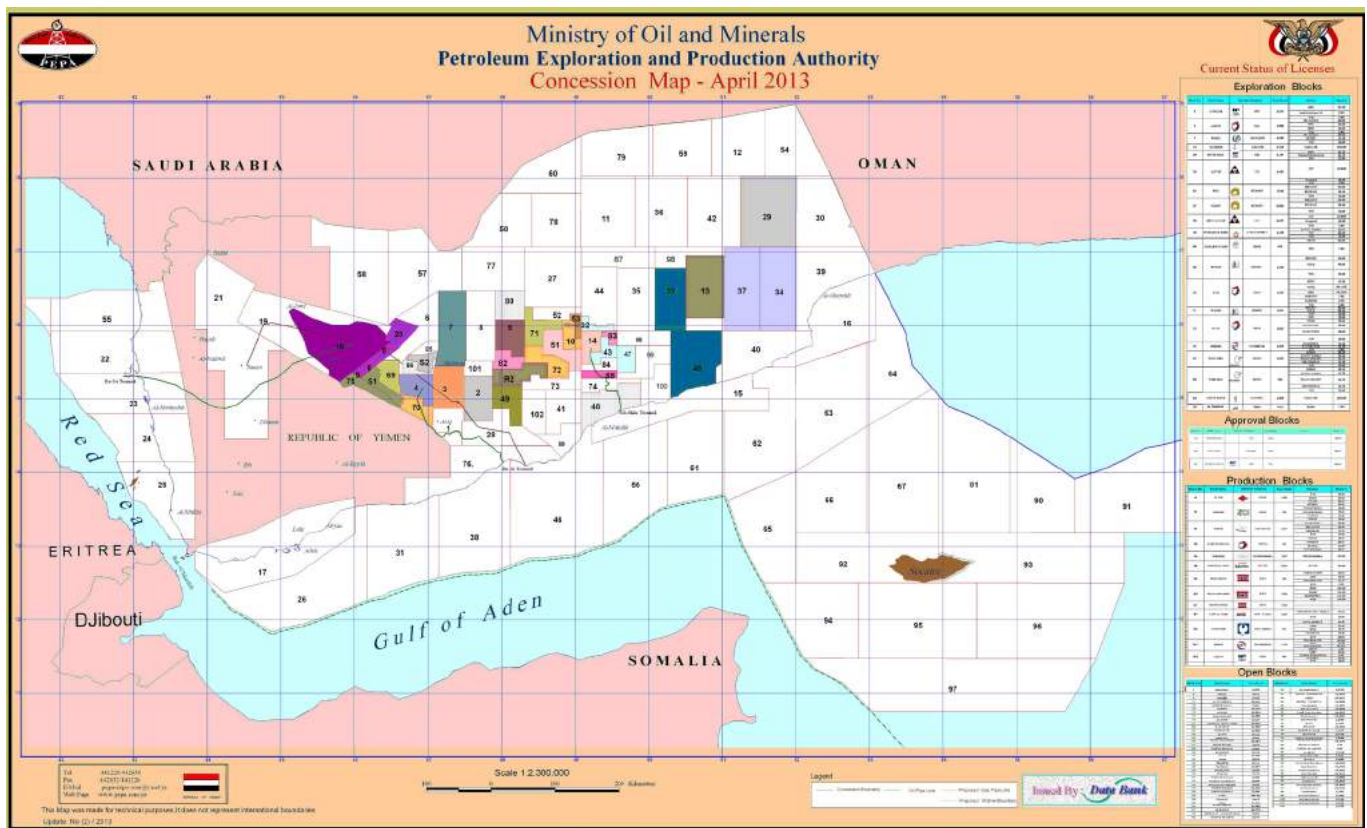


Figure (3) A map of the oil sectors updated in 2013 showing the productive, discovered and promising sectors <sup>11</sup>

In March 2013, the Yemeni government offered 10 offshore and five onshore oil sectors for competition between international oil companies. And the maritime sectors in which the competition was announced: “Hodeidah sector 23 in the Tihama Red Sea basin,” “Utab sector 62, Muklat Basin - Saihout,” “Midi sector 55, in the Tihama Red Sea basin” and “Masna`a sector 61 in the Mukalla Basin - Saihout.” “Kamran sector 22 of the Tihama Red Sea basin,” “Bahri sector 92 of the Socotra Basin,”

“Moon sector 16 of the Gezi-Qamar Basin”, “Mommy sector head 93 Socotra Basin”, and “Abd al-Kuri sector 94 of the Socotra Basin”, and Samha 95 in the Socotra Basin.

As for the onshore sectors, they include “North Sinao Sector 12 in the Empty Quarter Basin”, “North Green Sector 79 in the Empty Quarter Basin”, “Shipping Sector 54 in the Empty Quarter Basin”, “South Saar Sector 80 in the Messila Basin - Seiyun”, and “Wadi Deiber Sector 88 in the Messila Basin - Seiyun.” <sup>12</sup>

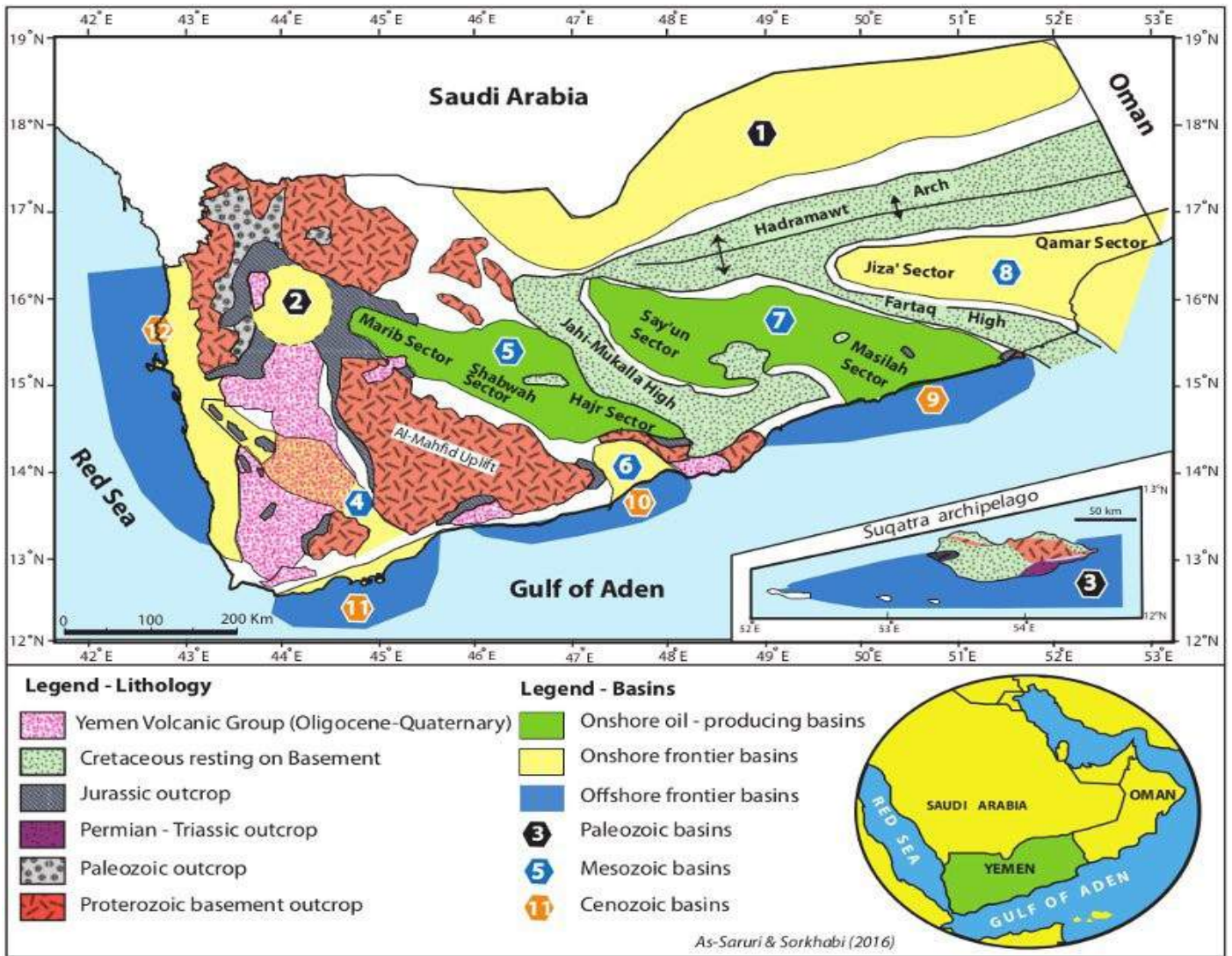


Figure (4) shows the new discoveries of oil and gas areas in Yemen <sup>13</sup>

As it is evident from the interactions of events, the major powers played the supportive role to the regional actors involved in the Yemeni crisis. At the same time, the regional actors supported the local actors to achieve their goals. The local actor does not necessarily have the desire to be a tool in the hand of the regional actor.

Rather, the local actor believes that supporting the movements and goals of foreign countries achieves his local goals, in what he sees as an "exchange of benefit between the two parties." This leads us to ask: How do regional and international political developments affect the dynamics of the conflict in Yemen?!

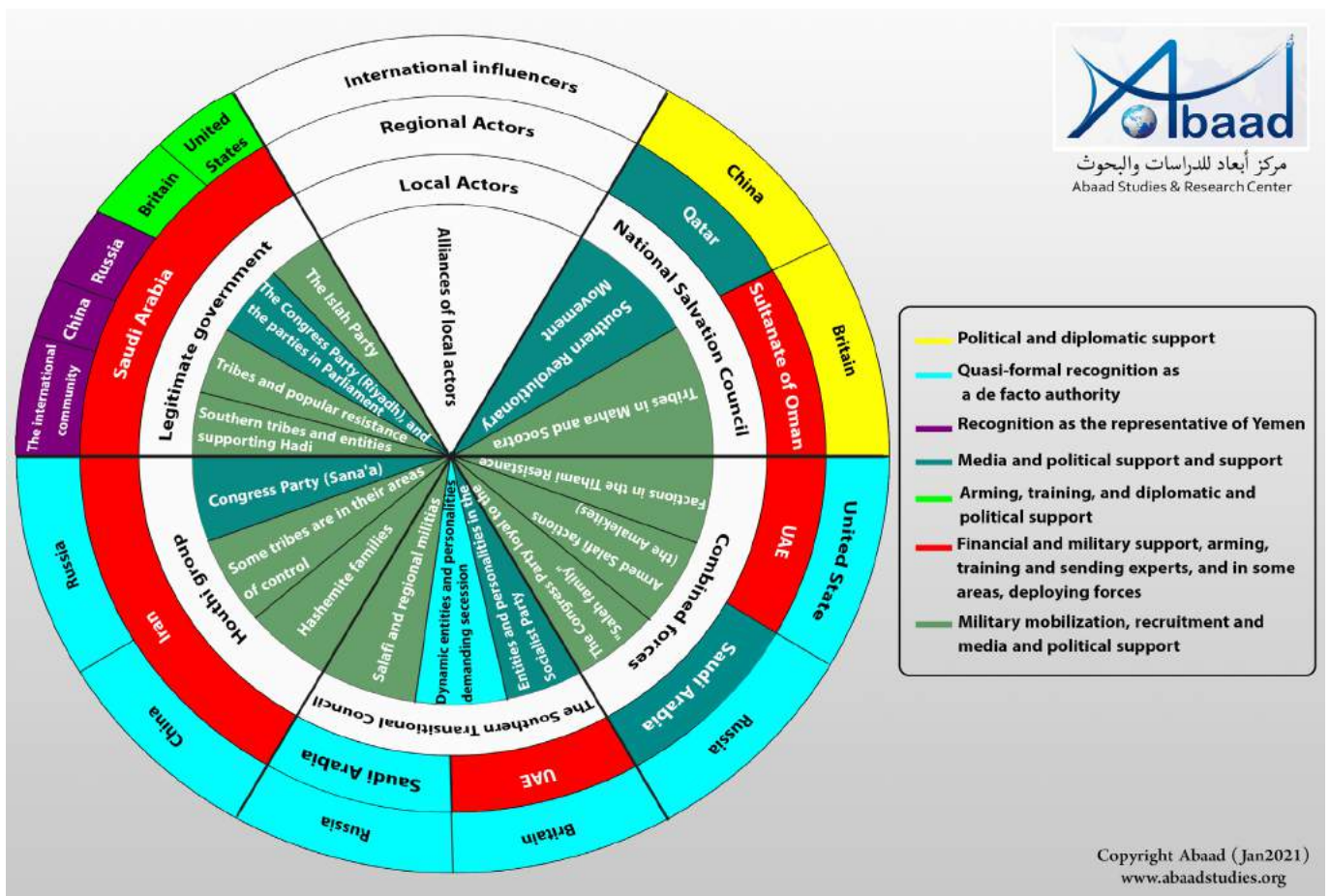


Figure (5) Infographic highlights relationship between international influencers and the local and regional actors.

Looking at Figure 4, a change in the policy of any regional actors or international influencers towards any local actors may affect the fortunes of their opponents.

The policy of regional actors towards their allies or enemies on the ground depends upon the extent to which their interests are achieved. The policy of international influencers towards local actors is related to coordination and a policy of exchanging interests with regional actors.

This matter is linked to the foreign policy of those countries' administrations.

For example, Iran depends, in its support for the Houthi group, on the extent to which it achieves its influence on the ground in Yemen. Likewise, Saudi Arabia tends towards its allies in the legitimate government. However, during the past years, Iran's support for its Houthi allies increased, while Saudi support for the legitimate government decreased.



## The Ambitions of Regional Actors and the Policy of International Influencers

Certainly, the location of Yemen near the Bab al-Mandab strait attracts the ambitions of several countries, including the countries of the region. The interference of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran in Yemen is part of a multiple agenda, some of which are linked to a regional conflict and some to strategic interests, but all of them are racing to take advantage of Yemen's location to achieve influence or to prevent investments which they believe may threaten their national economics and political security, or to achieve part of their ambitions to reach "gas" areas and invest in this sector instead of the main reliance on Qatar's "gas", for instance.

### First: the ambitions of regional actors

Most of the regional actors seem to have already begun to work on achieving their own goals using local actors. These ambitions and the relationship with local actors can be referred to as follows:

#### A) Iran's dream of holy sites and Gulf oil:

Iran, which presents itself as a large emerging and influential power in West and Central Asia, aims to reach the main sea outlets in the region to control them and use them in the game of the international geopolitical influence. It is also moving according to the constitutional principles on which the modern republic was founded after the Khomeini revolution (1979). It seeks to export the revolution to what it describes as "vulnerable peoples."

Iran has tried to find a foothold in Yemen since the nineties by attracting some leaders of the "Zaidi sect" that exists in the northern governorates of Yemen, and the leaders of separatist movements that arose in southern Yemen after the summer war (1994). But its presence in Yemen did not consolidate until after the 2011 revolution, taking advantage of a wide gap created by a retaliation campaign against the revolution, led by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled Yemen for 33 years, and also the openness and tolerance by the "Government of Accord" with the armed movements during the transitional period. The Houthis participated in the National Dialogue Conference, which was a major political event in the country, without giving up their arms. This encouraged Tehran to send weapons to the Houthis and train their leaders. It also did the same with leaders of the separation movement in the south, including Aidaroos al-Zubaidi,

who is now the head of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council. After the war launched by the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in Yemen in 2015, Iran increased its support for the Houthis in multiple stages. Iran relies, in its support for the armed group in Yemen, on several matters, most notably is the extent of the armed group's advancement on the ground, its control of territories, its stability in its traditional areas, and its loyalty to Iran in each new stage of support. The group's leaders, who are loyal to Tehran, got high positions in the Houthi movement.

In southern Yemen, the military separatist movements switched their allegiance to another regional actor, the UAE, which used Iran's former allies and established the "Southern Transitional Council." In the STC's armed militias, estimated at 120,000 fighters, have been trained by the UAE that continues to provide military and financial support to those militants.

## Iran's ambition in Yemen

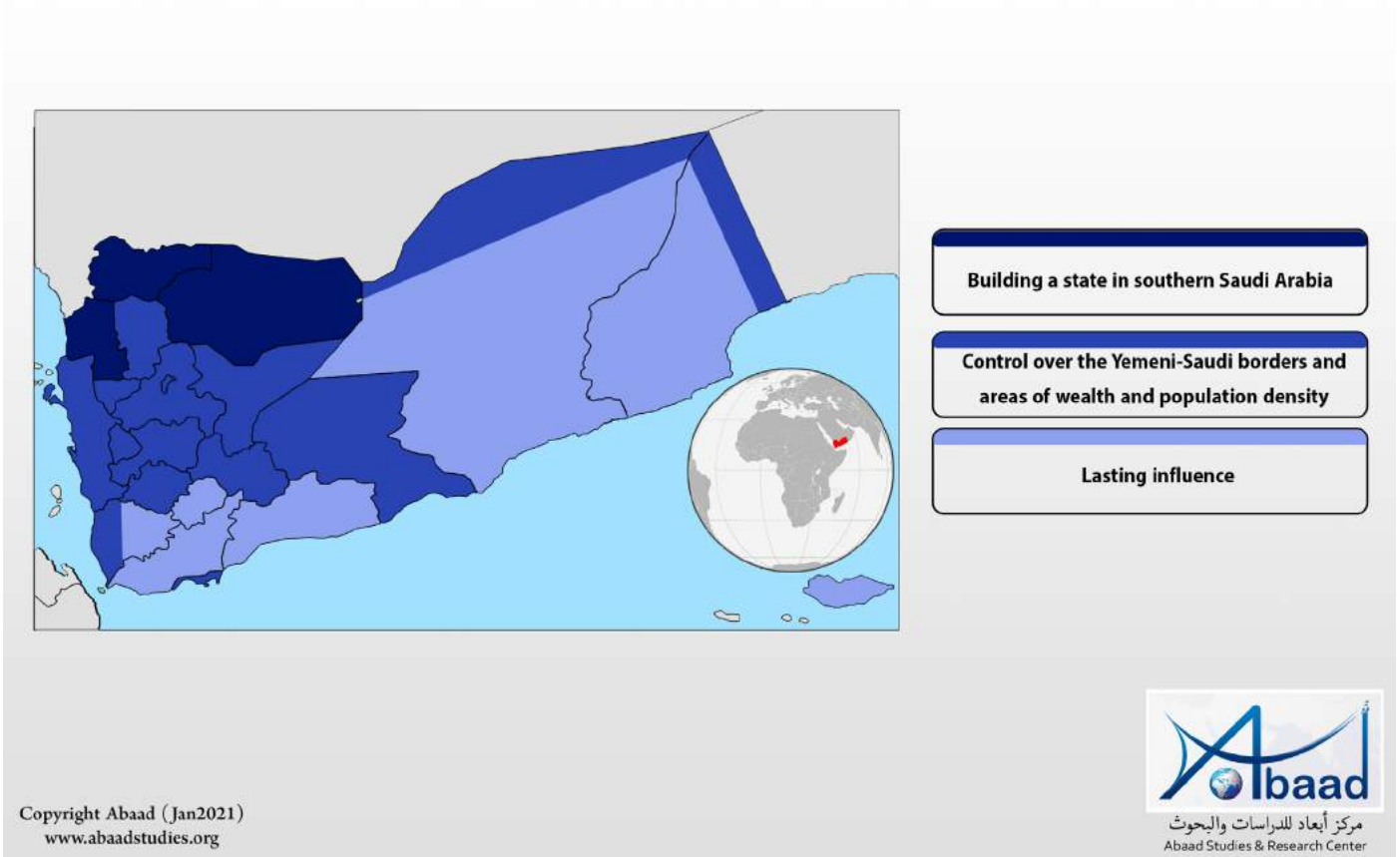


Figure (6) Areas of Iran's ambition in Yemen.

**With its support for the Houthis, Iran aims to find a foothold in the Arabian Peninsula for several reasons:**

The presence on borders with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran's traditional opponent, is an Iranian ambition and dream that Tehran did not expect to quickly obtain.

This Iranian influence against Saudi Arabia is very low in costs compared to what Tehran spends in Syria. Iran has been dreaming of an access to the Holy Sites in the Kingdom and the sources of oil for a long time.

Strategically, Iran views Yemen as well as Iraq and Syria as a human traitor in which it facilitates recruitment, polarization, and building armies.

- Gaining influence in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, as well as controlling the Strait of Hormuz. Thus, Iran will have control over the most important sea routes for trade and energy, which makes the region's oil under its mercy.

- Iran is looking for a wide regional and international role, and believes that its survival as a permanent threat to the Gulf States, allies of America and Europe, which depend on the Gulf oil, gives it the opportunity to play that role. The Iranian presence in Yemen supports its plans to expand in Africa, especially with the countries of the Horn of Africa.

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During the past years of the war, Iran provided the Houthis with a lot of "financial, military and political" support. The Houthis showed a tangible development in the use of specific weapons over the years of the war.<sup>14</sup>

In September 2019, they were able to target Saudi oil installations, 1100 km. The attack led to the reduction of the Kingdom's production of crude oil by 5.7 million barrels per day, which is equivalent to half of the Kingdom's production of oil.<sup>15</sup>

Iran has repeatedly denied supporting the Houthis in Yemen, but in August 2020 the Iranian army admitted providing military support to the Yemeni group.<sup>16</sup>

Iran has sent military experts to Yemen, including Abdul-Ridha Shahlai, the right-hand of "Qassem Soleimani" - the commander of the Quds Force, who was assassinated by the United States in early 2020.

Washington announced Shahlai presence in Yemen in December 2019 and charged him with responsibility for the transferring of weapons and ammunition to the Houthis and helping them plan military operations, and contributing to developing the combat capabilities of the Houthis.<sup>17</sup>

Washington offered \$ 15 million award for any information leads to him. It attempted several assassinations on his life, including an assassination attempt with an air strike at the same night of killing Qassem Soleimani.<sup>18</sup>

Iran does not provide military support alone to the Houthis, it also supports the group financially. The Iranian religious groups, the regime, and the government committees formed to support the Houthis through collecting donations from Shiite shrines and seminaries, businessmen and religious associations in Iran and countries around the world to support the Houthis.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, a report by the United Nations experts indicates that Iran has granted the Houthis an oil ship worth \$ 30 million dollars per month.<sup>20</sup>

The media machine of Iran and its allies also provide permanent media support to the Houthis, and the Houthi TV channel (Al Masirah) broadcasts from southern Lebanon, along with other channels.

Iran provides significant political and diplomatic support to the Houthis. This support increased until the armed group was recognized as representative of Yemen, as Iran accepted - in August 2019 - a diplomatic representative for the Houthis group in Tehran, appointed by the Houthis after a meeting between the Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdulsalam and the Supreme Leader in Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,<sup>22</sup> in a great symbolic recognition, as Khamenei rarely meets with Iran-supported groups in the Arab world.

Recently, Iran has pushed its relationship with the Houthis to a new level with the arrival of its “ambassador” to Sana’a, named "Hassan Erlo." This move increased the Iranian-Houthi diplomatic relations. The Houthis have also appointed an ambassador to represent them in Syria, Iran's ally in the region.<sup>23</sup>

## **The arrival of "Erlo" to Sana'a indicates many things as follows:**

- The Iranians are anticipating any progress in consultations between the Houthis and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, by confirming and intensifying their alliance with the Houthi group.
- Iran needs for a greater presence within the Houthi group and it wants to know the extent of the armed group's influence in the areas of its controls in northern Yemen. Erlo's agenda was noticeable in the first weeks of his arrival in Sana'a. He attended a religious ceremony for the Houthis (the Prophet's birthday)<sup>24</sup> and referred to the strength of the Houthi mobilization. He also met with most of the officials loyal to the Houthis (military, politicians, parliamentarians, economists, and even farmers),<sup>25</sup> the Houthis established an honorary Senior leader for "Earlo" in the Yemeni presidential house, where he met "Mahdi Al-Mashat," head of the political council of the Houthi group.<sup>26</sup>

- It is believed that Erlo is a member of the Quds Force, affiliated to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (classified on the American terrorist lists). Historically, Iranian ambassadors in Iraq have been members of the Quds Force, including its current ambassador to Sana'a. And its presence is linked to the Houthi battles in the east of the country,<sup>27</sup> as the Houthis are trying to reach the city of Marib, the last stronghold of the legitimate government. Earlo was associated with the Houthis at least with the beginning of the Arab coalition operations, as Iranian Persian-speaking sources indicate that "Erlo" was in charge of the Yemen's affairs office in the Iranian Foreign Ministry after the Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015.<sup>28</sup>

Confirming that "Erlo" is a leader in the "Quds Force", the US Treasury Department classified him in its lists of terrorism (08 December 2020), accusing him of supporting efforts of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard - Quds Force - to provide advanced weapons and training for the Houthis.

He has also coordinated with senior commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard - Quds Force - to support Houthi operations throughout the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen. <sup>29</sup>

Erlo maintained a relationship with the former Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander, Qassem Soleimani.

- The US placing of "Erlo" on terror lists banned any other country to deal with the Houthis as a de facto authority. It also indicates that the United States considers the presence of "Erlo" in Yemen, along with other leaders of the Quds Force, as a confirmation of strong relationship between the "Quds Force" and the Houthi group, which is used as one of the factors that push the "Donald Trump administration" to consider the Houthis as a terrorist organization. <sup>30</sup>

## **B) Emirati ambition to lead the Middle East:**

Yemen represents a major battlefield for the United Arab Emirates.

While the government forces, supported by the Saudi-led Arab coalition, in which the UAE represents the second military force, were close to stop the Houthi advance and confine their presence in key areas of influence, the UAE focused on its own agenda, which weakened the capabilities of the government and Saudi Arabia to confront the Houthis.

Through its presence in Yemen and other countries in the region, the UAE is looking for a regional influence that would make it a reliable partner for the United States in the Middle East, especially in the fight against terrorism.

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By supporting some of the parties fighting against the Houthis, the UAE hopes to confront the "Yemeni Islah Party", a political party that is classified by Abu Dhabi as close to the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, against which the UAE has been fighting since 2011, despite the Islah party's continued denial of any relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. The UAE does not aim to confront only the Muslim Brotherhood, but it also aspires to have

a greater geopolitical influence in the region without any hindrance. The UAE's strategy to raise its geopolitical position includes a maritime dimension. Abu Dhabi has moved to take control of strategically important shipping routes in the region and it is fighting in Yemen all those who oppose it, even the president and other government officials<sup>31</sup>, most of whom are not members of the Islah, but they repeatedly point to the dangerous role the UAE.<sup>32</sup>

### Emirati ambition to lead the Middle East through Yemen

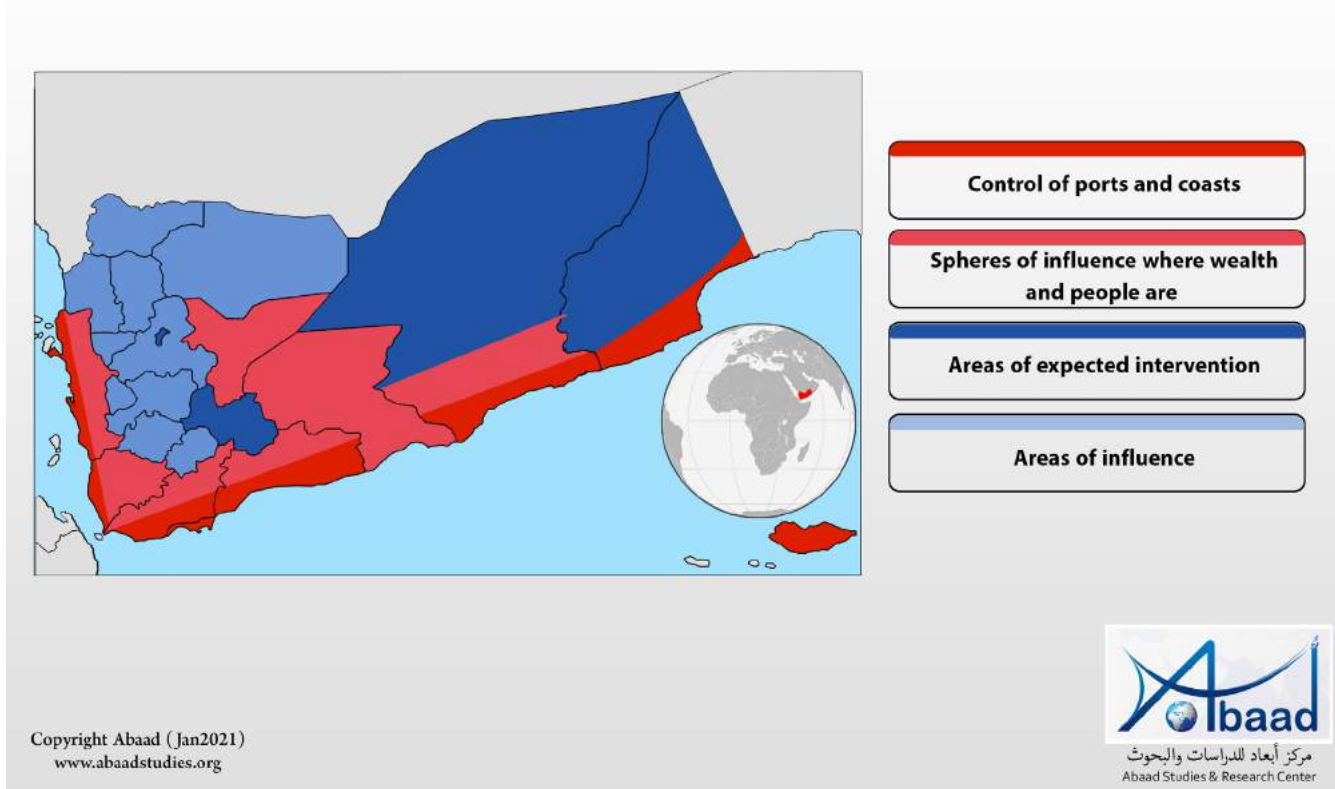


Figure (7) UAE ambitions and goals in Yemen



## **What does the UAE want in Yemen?!**

Abu Dhabi considers its presence in Yemen at the top of its priorities outside the borders, and a measure of its resilience. While Abu Dhabi and Riyadh share the same concerns over the Iranian presence in Yemen, the UAE does not see the Houthis as a threat on the scale of its fears, as Saudi Arabia does. Therefore, the UAE announced its exit from the war against the Houthis in 2019, and left Saudi Arabia behind after the repercussions of the war reflected on the foreign policy of the coalition countries, as the war entered the sixth year and its prolongation has become a stain for western allies of the two countries, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Although the UAE announced its military withdrawal, it inherited the land and power to its local allies in the south, who took control of major bases in the country, where oil, gas, strategic ports and islands. The Emiratis seek to effectively control over most of the Yemeni coastline,

and to have influence over the governorates and areas near the coast, including areas of oil and gas. It is part of a geopolitical strategy in the region, where the UAE has also moved to expand its presence and influence around the Bab al-Mandab Strait, in addition to its naval bases in “Assab” in Eritrea and Berbera, in the Somaliland (the breakaway region).

The UAE also controls the Yemeni island of Socotra<sup>33</sup> as a colonial power trying to control the Bab al-Mandab Strait.<sup>34</sup>

**The Emirati desire in Yemen can be indicated through several aspects:**

### **•Yemen as a military influence:**

The UAE has multiple military bases in Yemen, along its coastline. Despite the withdrawal of its forces, its paramilitary armed formations control these bases, in addition to a permanent military presence in Balhaf in Shabwa and the Socotra Island.

• **Yemen as an influence in the foreign policy:** The UAE can use Yemen to influence the regional actors, especially "the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," and to make promises to several countries, including Russia, the United States, Britain and Israel that Abu Dhabi's presence in Yemen would support their military and security policies in the region. <sup>35</sup>

• **Energy sources and disrupting the economy:** The UAE has built an advanced military base in the Balhaf area of Shabwa governorate, which is the port of the liquefied natural gas, and prevented the Yemeni government from exporting it. The UAE is trying to find new alternatives to obtain gas instead of relying on its neighbor, Qatar, in the event that differences between the two countries expand. In addition to the liquefied natural gas, the UAE prevents the Yemeni government from exporting oil and controls most of the ports, including al-Nashima in Shabwa, and al-Shahr in Hadramout. <sup>36</sup>

The UAE is accused of trying to prevent

Aden from returning to its "golden age" - in the 1950s, when it was one of the busiest ports in the world, the second after New York, and became a competitor to Dubai. <sup>37</sup>

The UAE also took control of the strategic port of Mocha on the Red Sea, in western Yemen, and stopped it from operating, turning the main Yemeni port and its surrounding areas into an advanced military base. The Dubai Ports World (a government company) also sought to obtain an agreement with the Houthis to manage the port of Hudaydah, but the process was hampered after the Saudis discovered the Emirati steps. <sup>38</sup>

• **Yemen as a commercial market:** Yemen is a country of 30 million people and still need a lot of infrastructure to catch up with its neighbors in the Gulf. Therefore, Abu Dhabi sees Yemen as a commercial opportunity to diversify the economy. It has monopolized the sale of oil derivatives to areas under the government control. This led to a conflict between the legitimate government and local officials under the control of Abu Dhabi. <sup>39</sup>

The Yemeni government has rejected increasing pressure from the UAE to obtain a license to operate two mobile phone and internet companies,<sup>40</sup> but it established them on the Socotra archipelago, despite the government's refusal.<sup>41</sup>

In Socotra, the UAE also has a monopoly on flights to and from the archipelago, and it carries out marketing and tourism activities for Emirati companies. Abu Dhabi prohibits any other flights that are not booked through its airports or tourism companies there.<sup>42</sup>

### C) Saudi Arabia strategy:

Saudi Arabia had a historical influence on Yemen over the past decades, and the two countries entered into wars and struggle for geopolitical influence. However, during the past three years, the Saudi influence appeared weak compared to the role it plays as a leader of the Arab coalition, in contrary to the role played by the UAE and Iran in Yemen.

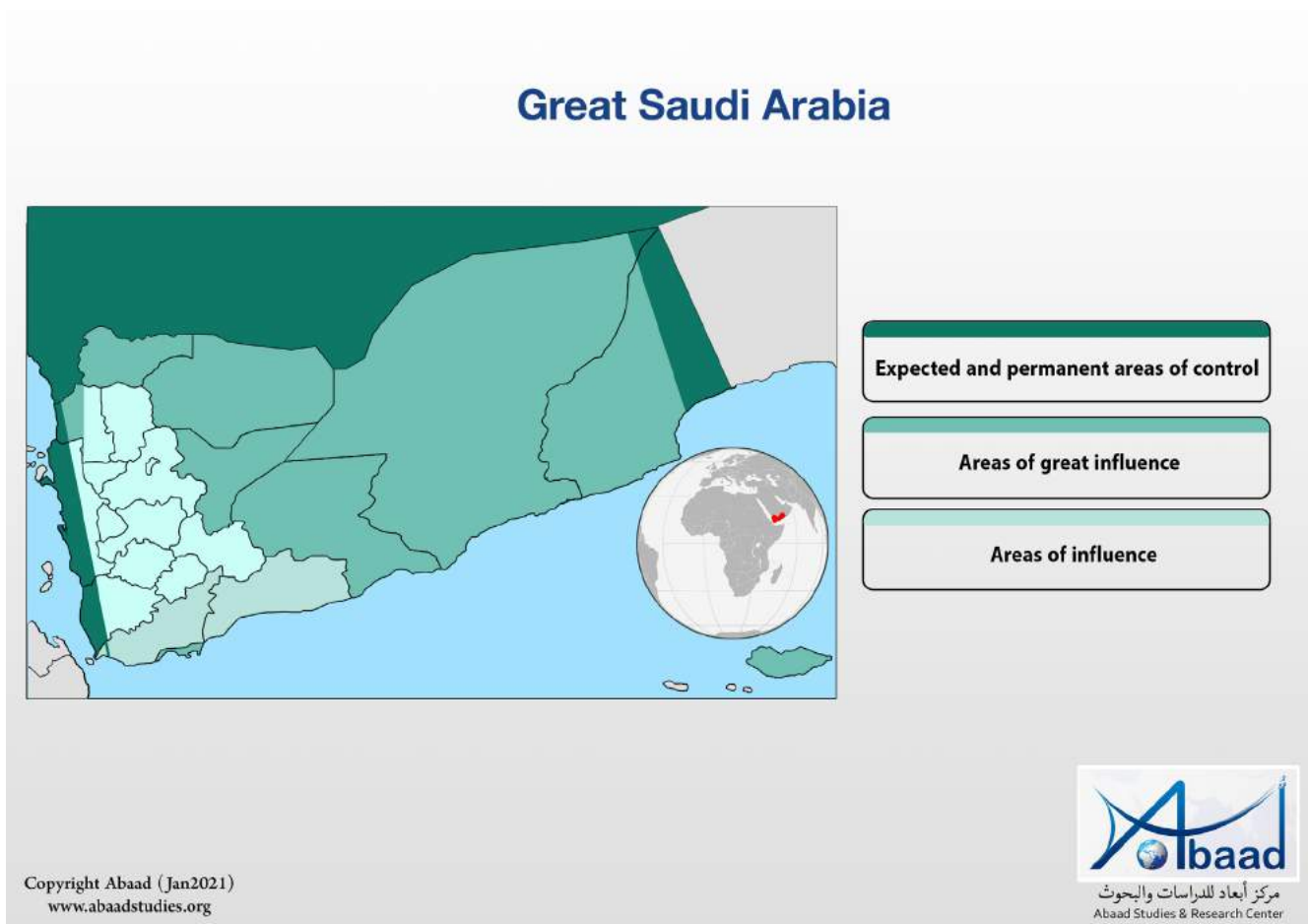


Figure (8) The Saudi vision on areas of its influence and control.

Despite this seemingly weak role, the Kingdom holds the last word within the coalition it leads in Yemen, and it is the regional actor that is difficult for any of the local parties - and even regional actors - to bypass, including its opponents, the Houthis. Saudi Arabia's position and its stay in Yemen is linked to a number of special goals outside the declared goal of confronting the Houthi armed group and stopping the Iranian influence in Yemen. The special goals include:

- **Areas of Saudi ambitions in Yemen:** Shabwa, Hadramaut and Mahrah governorates have represented the regions of the “Great Saudi Dream” for decades, where the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wants to have a port that leads to the Arabian Sea to export oil instead of relying on the Gulf ports and the Strait of Hormuz, which is under Iran’s control.

The need for getting this dream true increased after five years of converting Kharkheir governorate (affiliated to Najran region, southern Saudi Arabia) into a store of crude oil and evacuating all its residents.

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**The governorates of Shabwa, Hadramaut and Al-Mahrah have been areas of "The Great Dream of Great Saudi Arabia" for decades, where Saudi Arabia wants to have a port that leads to the Arabian Sea to export oil instead of relying on the Gulf waters and the Strait of Hormuz, where the crisis with Iran is not solved until now.**

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It has become possible to extend an oil pipeline and establish a port in Mahra at low cost, and in record time compared to the port of Mukalla,<sup>43</sup> which was part of the old Saudi strategy.

Saudi Arabia has already started building the port and extending the oil pipeline, and it is also building an international road of 300 km, from its borders to the coast of Mahra. The Yemeni government did not provide a comment on this, even if there was an understanding about it.

Saudi Arabia also maintains its control over the land, sea and air ports to Mahra governorate, where it controls al-Ghaydah airport, the port of Nishtun, and the two border crossing points with the Sultanate of Oman. Saudi deployed hundreds of soldiers and vehicles in the province.

- **An advanced military base:**

Saudi Arabia has built an advanced military base in the Socotra governorate. It is the island where the UAE plans for a long-term stay.

This base will enable Saudi officials to monitor the Arabian Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and to act in the event of any maritime problems.

Saudi Arabia had begun studying the establishment of a base in a place adjacent to the American base (Camp Lemonier) in Djibouti<sup>44</sup> - on the opposite coast of Yemen near the Bab al-Mandab strait. In January 2017, Djibouti announced that it finalized an agreement with Saudi Arabia allowing it to build a permanent military base in the Horn of Africa after Saudi Arabia signed a security agreement with the Djiboutian authorities, as part of their preparations to build the base.<sup>45</sup>

But there was no progress in building the military base in Djibouti - as it is considered the first Saudi military base outside the borders - instead, in early 2018, Saudi forces arrived on the Yemeni island of Socotra to solve the problem between the Yemeni government and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>46</sup>

But those forces, which began in dozens, became nearly 1,000 Saudi soldiers two years later, and new camps were opened. Despite the presence of this large Saudi force, the forces did not move to protect the Yemeni local authorities in the archipelago when the Southern Transitional Council militants took control of the governorate in June 2020. In October 18, 2020, a Saudi military transport plane (C130 Hercules) landed at the Socotra International Airport,<sup>48</sup> in competition with the United Arab Emirates.<sup>49</sup> Saudi Arabia is also moving alongside its military presence in Socotra through the "Saudi Program for the Development and Reconstruction of Yemen", which was established in 2018 under the initiative of King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Within these programs, new schools were opened on the island, and a number of infrastructure projects

are underway like water infrastructure projects that were controlled by the Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Foundation, which Abu Dhabi used as a cover to build influence in the archipelago and buy loyalties on the island.<sup>50</sup>

**Preventing any outside influence beyond it:** Saudi officials have been concerned that their influence in the neighboring country has diminished as a result of two parallel developments:

The first is the Arab Spring (2011), the traditional Yemeni elites who remained loyal, supported and funded by the Saudis for decades were shaken by the emergence of new forces and groups with influence beyond those traditional elites such as the Yemeni Islah party, the Houthi group, separatist movements in southern Yemen, and civil society organizations and leaders came up after the Arab Spring.

The second is the fear of using Yemen as leverage to stir trouble in Saudi Arabia, due to other regional battles. It also happened with Iran, which increased its support for the Houthis to ease the pressure on it in Syria. Therefore, Saudi Arabia aims to restore its traditional influence in Yemen, in a way that prohibits the presence of any external influence beyond it, including the Emirati, Qatari and Omani influence, as well as the influence of the Horn of Africa in Yemen.

Therefore, Saudi Arabia wants to restore its old strategy, Yemen of crises, but not divided, so it turns into a zone of concern and an extension of a proxy conflict, not a strong Yemen that is able to break the Saudi mantle.

In addition, all Yemeni components resort to the kingdom in the event of disputes between local actors, preventing any influence of regional actors or international influencers in Yemen without a Saudi approval and supervision.

## **D) Oman and Qatar:**

While Muscat fears the Emirati and Saudi influence in Yemen, mainly for geopolitical reasons, Doha opposes the continuation of the war as part of a game of political intimidation after the imposition of a siege on it by four countries, "Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt", and its removal from the Arab coalition fighting the Houthis in 2017 (A cautious reconciliation with Qatar was announced during the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, on January 5, 2021).

The Sultanate of Oman has a long border with Yemen through Mahra governorate.<sup>51</sup> It is influencer and influenced by events in Socotra.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the presence of a non-Yemeni force in the two governorates raises the fears of Omani officials from using it as a pressure card - due to the border problems between the Sultanate and the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Muscat has a neutral foreign policy, but developments in Yemen and the increase in regional actors have become an increasing challenge to this neutrality. Where regional actors, including Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Tehran, support, finance and arm local Yemeni actors, which affects the Sultanate and the threat coming from Yemen.

The Saudis view their military operations and influence in Mahra as a way to put pressure on Oman at a time when Oman is seen as weak due to its weak economy and the recent death of Sultan Qabous in January 2020. Saudi Arabia and the UAE want to force Oman out of what they see as the Iranian and Qatari orbit.<sup>53</sup>

In the same context, controlling the borders with Yemen is crucial to Oman's security for historical and tribal reasons.<sup>54</sup> However, controlling the long border, which crosses mountains and deserts, is a challenge even with the well-trained and equipped Omani Frontier Force,

a mechanized infantry brigade. Smuggling along the border is still widespread, and it represents a mainstay of Mahra's economy.<sup>55</sup>

To reduce regional influence in Mahra, Muscat supports the movements of tribal sheikhs in Mahra and Socotra to limit the Saudi and Emirati presence on its borders, including the "Mahra sit-in committee," which demands the withdrawal of Saudi forces from the two Yemeni governorates.<sup>56</sup>

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**Muscat supports the movements of tribal sheikhs to limit the Saudi and Emirati presence on its borders, including the "Mahra Sit-in Committee" that rejects the Saudi presence**  
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The eastern province of Yemen has turned into a region of proxy conflict. Saudi Arabia - just as Oman did to consolidate its influence<sup>57</sup> - began to support a large number of Mahra tribes to gain their loyalty. This step led to major societal divisions within the local tribal community, for the first time in the history of this eastern governorate. This support is not limited to the financial field, but extends to the military field. The expansion of armed tribal groups has become a new feature in Mahrah, in light of indirect Saudi-Emirati-Omani competition for influence in this region.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Muscat confirms that it is still neutral in Yemen, and pushing the Sultanate of Oman to leave the supposed neutrality means adopting the support of a party to the war. This will change the approach of the Omani foreign policy, as it is considered a mediator in Yemen between the Houthis and the Yemeni government and the coalition, and a trusted mediator in the region among the Gulf states, Western countries and Iran, as Omani diplomacy played a role in reaching

the Joint Action Plan with Iran (JCPOA) "the Iranian nuclear agreement."<sup>59</sup> "It seems that Oman has really begun to adopt a policy of supporting the Houthis diplomatically and in the media. The Houthis have an official liaison office in Muscat, and Riyadh and other countries have repeatedly accused Muscat of condoning the smuggling of weapons to the Houthi armed group."<sup>60</sup>

For its part, Qatar is providing media and political support to the Sultanate in Mahra and Socotra. The pro-Doha media also supports local moves against the Saudi and Emirati presence in Yemen. Qatar is launching its policy from the mechanism to defend itself outside its borders in the hope of relieving the continuous pressure on it since the announcement of a blockade against it by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain in 2017. And recently, there was a coordination program to support and finance media institutions and lobbies between Doha and Muscat that aim to uncover the movements of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in Yemen, some of which indirectly support the Houthis.<sup>61</sup>

## Second: The International Influencers

The international influence in Yemen is mostly supported by a local or regional actor, or as a result of interests and ambitions that affect the policy of these countries towards the war in Yemen and towards the local or regional actors. The following can be referred to:

### A) United States of America:

Yemen is considered in US foreign policy as a part of its policy towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,<sup>62</sup> it was and will remain until other transformations happen. During the administration of Donald Trump, Yemen was also attached to the policy of Saudi Arabia and the United States towards Iran. Trump's administration witnessed the freezing of the Iranian "nuclear agreement", which renewed the sanctions, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard was classified as a "terrorist organization".<sup>63</sup> The Trump's administration made its effort

to pressure on Iran through groups that it supports in the region. <sup>64</sup> In contrast to the Barack Obama administration, whose foreign affairs continued to communicate with the Houthis, including a meeting between former Secretary of State John Kerry and the Houthis in Muscat, resulting in an initiative known as the "Kerry initiative", which was rejected by the Yemeni government, the Trump administration cut off diplomatic contact with the Houthis, and dealt with the group through European diplomats or through the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government, except in the case of a Saudi request, as happened in the second half of 2019. <sup>65</sup>

In January 20, 2021, the administration of the US President-elect Joe Biden begins its work in the White House. During the presidential campaign, and even in recent media interviews, Biden spoke of an entry into the JCPOA<sup>66</sup> on condition that Iran returns to full compliance with the agreement.

There were indications that Biden might join the agreement unconditionally to give some space for the current government of Hassan Rouhani ahead of the June 2021 elections in Iran, and the sanctions have affected the economy<sup>67</sup>(Foreign Minister Javad Zarif recently stated that the sanctions had cost \$ 250 billion)<sup>68</sup>, and hard-line voices in Iran are getting stronger, the last thing the United States would expect is that a hardliner seizes the power.<sup>69</sup>

The return of the United States to the nuclear agreement without major conditions that reassure Saudi Arabia will provoke Saudi anger, as happened during Barack Obama's term, which will affect relationship between Riyadh and Washington.<sup>70</sup> To ease Riyadh's anger, the Biden administration may go to support the Saudi view towards Yemen, but, in all cases, it will not be the same support as provided by the Trump administration.

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**To ease Riyadh's anger, from the return to the nuclear deal, the Biden’s administration may go to support the Saudi view on Yemen, but it will not be the same support provided by the Trump’s administration.**  
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As part of his election campaign, Biden has pledged to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah" country! The Biden administration’s behavior towards stirring up tensions with Saudi Arabia increases Saudi Arabia's fear of abandoning it, fears that have increased since Barack Obama's support for the Arab Spring (2011), and increased with his administration's signing of the nuclear agreement, as Saudi officials considered it a "betrayal against Saudi Arabia and establishing a friendship with Iran.”

At the same time, it is extremely rare that the policy of ostracizing the states can reform them, but, on the contrary, it pushes them to increase their rebellion. The recent pressure in the Congress to end arms sales to Saudi Arabia has reinforced Riyadh's fears of being abandoned. It is not a coincidence that the crown prince has launched a covert nuclear program, backed by China, and he looks at Iran's continued influence in Yemen as a threat against coexistence. He, along with many Saudi elites, increasingly feel that the relationship with China that allows Saudi Arabia to purchase its own nuclear weapons arsenal makes more sense than continued dependence on Washington.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the United States sees Yemen as a future threat due to the expansion of terrorist organizations' activities in Yemen and Somalia and the developing relationship between them.

In addition to its fears that Russia or China would gain a foothold in Socotra or on the Yemeni coasts.

The United States needs to reassure Saudi Arabia that it will not abandon it, and will not leave the region to other powers, and to conclude an alliance that includes Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region as a deterrent front against any potential threats to the Gulf allies and also to return to combating terrorism in Yemen. Thus, the United States needs a headquarters for the new military operations in Yemen. Some information says that the UAE has offered the Pentagon a presence in the military base it runs in Shabwa governorate. It appears that Saudi Arabia is offering Washington and London a joint military base in Mahra governorate, on border with Oman.<sup>72</sup>

## **B) United Kingdom:**

Southern Yemen is the former British colony, but at the same time, like the United States, Yemen is at the bottom of its foreign policy agenda, and it is usually attached to politics and security in the Gulf and Arabian Sea region, where its trade passes and its economy revives.

Britain has a strong relationship with the Sultanate of Oman. In November 2018, the two countries signed a "joint defense" agreement after the end of a massive military maneuver that had not been held for 17 years<sup>73</sup> in line with the Anglo-Omani protection agreement that was signed in 1891.

In 2019, Britain announced a military training base in the Sultanate of Oman, which was called the "Joint Logistic Support Base" on the southeast coast of the Sultanate in "Duqm", where the Omani authorities intend to invest the port of Duqm as a "safe,

stable and business-friendly destination for industrial and economic investment," reinforcing the country's reputation as a quiet place in a tense region.<sup>74</sup> Oman has an oil refinery that cost \$ 4.6 billion, with a capacity of 230,000 barrels per day, and it is now under construction.

Britain announced investment in the port of Duqm with a total cost 23.8 million pounds during the visit of British Defense Minister Ben Wallace to the Sultanate in September 2020. An official statement issued by Wallace said that "this investment will triple the size of the current British base. And it will contribute to facilitating the deployment of the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean."<sup>75</sup>

The BBC had speculated that the British army would transfer its training on live ammunition and tank maneuvers from Canada to Duqm,<sup>76</sup> using the "Ras Madrakah" training area, which covers an area of 4000 square kilometers.

The renewed partnership should be viewed in the context of repercussions of Brexit, Iran's continued efforts to create instability, and China's growing presence in the region. Duqm is ideally located to support allied operations in the Persian Gulf, complementing the recently augmented British Naval Support Facility in Bahrain.<sup>77</sup>

In the Wallace's meetings with the Omani Foreign Minister in Muscat, the former Omani ambassador to Yemen, Abdullah bin Hamad Al-Badi,<sup>78</sup> was attended. Al-Badi was assigned by Foreign Minister for the settlement efforts in Yemen, and Britain was keen to provide great support for Oman's mediation initiatives in the Yemeni conflict, and the Duqm logistical facilities may play a supportive humanitarian role there over time.

British forces are not present in the Sultanate of Oman and Bahrain only, but in other Gulf States as well, relying on the British expertise in trainings.

Some of the British forces participate in the Saudi war against the Houthis in Yemen. There are British employees in 15 different locations in Saudi Arabia. In the capital, Riyadh, alone, the British Armed Forces are deployed in more than six locations, including the Air Operations Centers where RAF officers monitor Saudi-led coalition air operations in Yemen.<sup>79</sup> After the Houthi attacks on the Saudi oil facilities "Abqaiq" and "Khurais", the British Defense Ministry sent military units to Saudi Arabia secretly to protect the oil fields.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to Britain's dependence on the Gulf oil, it wants to expand its trade dealings after its withdrawal from the European Union. Outside the European Union, the GCC countries are the UK's second largest export market, after the United States. According to British government figures, the total trade in goods and services last year was \$ 54.8 billion.<sup>81</sup>

The Gulf States are also the largest investor in Britain, as the total investments of individuals and Gulf sovereign funds range between \$ 200 billion and \$ 250 billion.<sup>82</sup>

In July 2019, Britain announced a plan to form a European-led force to protect shipping in the Gulf, after Iran seized one of its ships. The United Kingdom fears the suspension of shipping in the Bab al-Mandab strait, either for security reasons related to threats imposed by the Houthis - supported by Iran - or because of the Yemeni floating Safer oil tanker that carries 1.4 million barrels of oil that threaten navigation in the Red Sea in the event of Safer explosion or oil leak into waters.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, Britain needs a stable environment in Yemen in order to implement investment plans, secure its Gulf allies, and stop threats that armed groups transmit inside Yemen. It also needs a presence in Yemen to secure navigation and monitor Chinese economic activity. For that purpose, it might think of a military or intelligence presence in Mahra or Socotra.

The United Kingdom also wants to station in the region, with the US plans to retreat from the region, and its assertion that the security of the region is still its priority due to fears of Chinese and Russian access to it.

### **C) Israel:**

In August 2020, days after the UAE announced its normalization with "Israel", reports said that "the UAE and Israel" were intent on establishing military and intelligence facilities in Socotra. A joint delegation of Israeli intelligence officers arrived on the island of Socotra, accompanied by Emirati intelligence officers. They together examined the various locations of the intelligence bases to be set up there.<sup>84</sup>

The prevailing Israeli ideology divides countries and groups in the region into circles, and Iran falls in the third circle, meaning the most dangerous threat it faces, and Yemen is under the Iranian threat. For Israel, Yemen is linked to the extent of the Iranian presence in the region.<sup>85</sup>

Israeli officials have spoken more than once that Yemen might be a launching pad for Iranian missiles that can be launched by the Houthis targeting Israel.<sup>86</sup>

So, Israel may use these allegations to get intelligence and military facilities near Bab al-Mandab and in the archipelago of Socotra with support from the UAE and its allies in Yemen, the Southern Transitional Council and army forces affiliated to Tariq Saleh, under the pretext of monitoring Iranian and Chinese activity and even Pakistani in the Arabian Sea and the Bab al-Mandab strait. Israel does not want to engage in Yemen's war against the Houthis - as some Gulf States believe - but it seems that it wants to participate in the same way it is doing in Syria.<sup>87</sup>

Since the beginning of 2020, meetings between leaders of the Southern Transitional Council and Israeli officials have taken place.<sup>88</sup> The meetings increased after the UAE's normalization with "Israel".

"Israel" aims to secure the port of Eilat in southern Israel and a shipping corridor that provides access not only to the Suez Canal but also to the Red Sea and through Bab al-Mandab to the Indian Ocean and beyond, which is of vital importance to Tel Aviv, as a gateway to the Far East and China, which is already a major trading partner. The "Bab al-Mandeb" and its closure have always been a nightmare for "Israel" during its wars with the Arabs.<sup>89</sup>

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**"Israel" does not want to engage in Yemen's war against the Houthis, but rather, it seems that it wants to participate the same way it does in Syria**  
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## **D) Turkey:**

Turkey has an advanced military base in Somalia on the opposite side of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, but with sending its forces outside the borders to Libya and Azerbaijan as well as to Syria and Somalia, its military presence in Yemen makes it difficult in the sensitive economic, security, military and political conditions that the world is going through.

Turkey is moving with soft power in Yemen, as it relies on food aid. Despite the deep dispute with Abu Dhabi, Ankara does not antagonize Riyadh for reasons related to Saudi Arabia's role and its position in the Middle East<sup>90</sup>. Therefore, any gainful military presence for Turkey in Yemen does not come except through coordination with the legitimate government, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

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**Turkey is moving with soft power in Yemen, as it depends on food aid. Despite the deep dispute with Abu Dhabi, Ankara does not antagonize Riyadh for reasons related to Saudi Arabia's role and its position in the Middle East.**

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## **E) China and Russia:**

Yemen is an indispensable component of the Kremlin's growing ambitions across the coast, across the Red Sea. Its return to Socotra Island will be coupled with the possibility of establishing a separate naval base in Sudan. For its part, China has broad economic ambitions through the "Silk Road", through which the Arabian Sea represents one of the important points, and Socotra also represents the same importance as it represents the meeting point between the Indian Ocean and the Arab Sea.<sup>91</sup> China wants the island to become a place to manage the maritime trade operations in the region. It has a military base in Djibouti to protect this road, of which Yemen represents a large part.

However, these plans clash with the United States and Western powers, and will be more related to the extent of "Beijing" and "Moscow" rapprochement with the Arab Gulf states,

especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the size of the expected increase in trade exchange between them; It will also be linked to US policy in the region.

## **Conclusion:**

Most observers agree, after six years of war, that there is no viable military solution in Yemen and that any military solution could cause more havoc in the country. The United Nations estimates that 233,000 Yemenis have been killed during the war years.<sup>92</sup> The ongoing fighting has also caused the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with about 24 million people in need of humanitarian assistance or protection, including 13 million people who depend on food aid to survive. The country is very quickly drifting towards famine.<sup>93</sup> Reaching a political solution by restoring the state's powers and withdrawing weapons from all parties is the most important thing that can be done by local and regional actors, without repeating the experiences in Iraq and Lebanon,

as the two countries ended up to the militias' control as a result of a political sharing that let the militias keep their weapons and excluded the opinion of the street and ignored free, fair and democratic elections without the influence of weapons.

Yemen's transformation into a regional and international conflict arena, especially between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, and the funds and weapons they supply, is fueling intertwined and deep conflicts in the Yemeni society. At the same time, the rivalry of allies in Yemen such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE prolongs the war and increases the difficulty of finding a political solution in the country.

The disagreements between regional actors and international influencers, their ambitions in Yemen, their goals in the region, and their inter-problems increase the conflict by supporting local actors and create new local actors in the conflict across the country, every governorate and every citizen suffer from the war.

It is important that the tensions between the United States and Iran do not overshadow local conflict dynamics.

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**The rivalry of allies in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, prolongs the war and makes it more difficult to find a political solution in the country.**

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It is also important for Saudi Arabia and the UAE to stop their conflicts in Yemen, and to obtain their goals through direct cooperation with any Yemeni government within the framework of the state, dealing with Yemen as state-to-state in accordance with the international law, not to exploit Yemen's conditions due to the war and control its wealth or create influence and interests outside formal agreements. It is in Yemen's interest to make agreements that support the country economically and militarily.

The tension in the Arab Gulf caused an escalation of the conflict inside Yemen, and the internal Gulf disputes were transferred to Yemen, which contributed to complicating the war more than it is in terms of entanglement. Instead, it is necessary to de-escalate the situation in the region and in the Gulf and to continue efforts to find a political solution.

Despite disagreements between regional and international actors in Yemen, they affirm their support for keeping Yemen united. It is unlikely that secession will receive an international support, because it may leave the Houthis at the head of the authority in the north of the country, along the borders with Saudi Arabia and it may result in conflict between rival southern entities, supported by regional actors who look at the south as easy to control and gain influence.

The federal system is likely to be more reliable to get the country out of its crises in light of the increasing number of local actors, but that will need plans for distributing wealth, and strong and consensual political figures to lead the new phase that lift the country from the clutches of multiple challenges.

It is not true that if the regional actors cease their support the war will come to end, but it will continue, albeit at a lesser pace. Yemen has become a source of arms trade and sale, a transit area for weapons and terrorism. For example, the Houthis benefited from Iranian weapons. Even if Tehran halted shipments to the Houthis today, the conflict may continue in the foreseeable future with what the Houthis have in their large stockpiles. In addition, Iranian experts assist the Houthis in establishing ammunition factories. The same applies to the legitimate government and other parties

**In the event that the Yemen war ends, there are many security risks facing the country and the region due to the behavior of regional actors and international influencers. Weapons and equipment that have been provided to all parties to the conflict means fighting and small wars inside the country to obtain gains.**

**Weapons and ammunition in Yemen will continue to flow out of the country for years to come. If the trade in arms and illicit materials from Yemen is not stopped, it will increase instability in countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, and many other African countries.**

**Unfortunately, year after year, we see Yemen's hopes for a speedy settlement disappearing as if they were smashed against an invisible wall. Regional actors and international influencers are one of the reasons.**

**In the long term, these hopes turn repeatedly and increasingly into dangerous humanitarian, geopolitical, military and political situations, writing a bad future for this country, unless regional and international actors reach an agreement that ends considering Yemen as a proxy war zone.**

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<sup>17</sup> You can view the study of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research, "Iran's influence in Yemen after Soleimani ... the Houthis between containment and retaliation for the general" <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59830.html>

<sup>18</sup> Radio Farda, \$ 15 million prize for information about a commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Yemen, published date 6/12/2019, access date: 11/29/2020 at the link: <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/yemen-iran-irgc-qods-force-hook/30310456.html>

<sup>19</sup> Qasim, Nashwan, the Houthis, the war dealers ... millions of dollars, black markets and drugs, publication date 4/29/2018, access date: 11/29/2020 at the link: <https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-houthi-war-money>

<sup>20</sup> Leader, Edith, United Nations experts: Fuel from Iran funds the war of the Yemeni rebels, published date 01/19/2019 /, accessed date: 11/29/2020, at the link: <https://apnews.com/article/b406265e1c6642fd9a614416270263b6>

<sup>21</sup> Al-Araby Al-Jadeed newspaper, the Houthis appoint an ambassador to represent Yemen to Iran, publication date 8/17/2019, access date: 11/30/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/37MzeVW>

<sup>22</sup> Mashreq News, deciphering an important meeting of the «Ansar Allah» delegation with the Supreme Leader of the Revolution / What is the most important achievement of this meeting ?, Posted on 12/8/2019, Accessed Date: 11/30/2020 at the link: <https://bit.ly/3ppiFW0>

<sup>23</sup> Al-Thawra Net (a copy affiliated with the Houthis), Abdullah Sabri was appointed as Yemen's ambassador to Syria, published 11/12/2020, accessed 11/30/2020, at the link: <http://althawrah.ye/archives/645328>

<sup>24</sup> ISNA Agency, Iran's Ambassador in Sanaa: The enemy does not tolerate friendly relations between Iran and Yemen, publication date, 11/6/2020, accessed: 11/30/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/34ofPJ5>

<sup>25</sup> Middle East Monitor, Iran and Yemen discuss agricultural cooperation amid growing relations, 11/24/2020, access date: 11/30/202, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3aIaBvC>

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<sup>26</sup> Mashreq News, a special ceremony for the Iranian ambassador in Sanaa, published on 11/04/2020, accessed 11/30/202, at the link:

<https://bit.ly/2WaDA2w>

<sup>27</sup> American Enterprise, The Case of Yemen, Sanaa, publication date 11/2/2020, access date: 11/30/202, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2WHP42y>

<sup>28</sup> Mehr Agency, Iran's ambassador presents his credentials to the Supreme Political Council's President, Posted on 11/04/2020, Accessed Date: 11/30/202 at the link: <https://bit.ly/3nhIzuf>

<sup>29</sup> The US Treasury Department imposes sanctions on Iran's envoy in Yemen, Posted on 11/08/2020, Date: 11/30/202, at the link:

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1205>

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Landay and Hamira Pamuk, an American diplomat: three main factors pushing Washington to consider considering the Houthis a terrorist organization, Posted on 12/10/2020, Accessed: 10/12/2020, at the link: <https://reut.rs/34Jvv9O>

<sup>31</sup> The Islah party held three portfolios in the government out of 32 ministerial portfolios. It is the second party in the Yemeni parliament and the largest popular base.

<sup>32</sup> You can view the study of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research: Study "Emirati Influence in Yemen ... Pillars and Harvest" <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59783.html>

<sup>33</sup> You can read the study of the Aaa Center for Studies and Research: Yemeni Socotra ... Under Emirati Occupation

<https://abaadstudies.org/print.php?id=59768>

<sup>34</sup> David Hearst, exclusive: The Yemeni President says that the Emiratis are acting as occupiers, publication date 05/17/2017, accessed 05/12/2020. on the link:

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-yemen-president-says-uae-acting-occupiers>



<sup>35</sup> You can view two studies by the Abaad Center for Studies and Research: First, does the Gulf want to win over Iran or does it have ambitions in Yemen? <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59778.html>

The second: Yemeni Socotra .. The war of influence in the Indian Ocean

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59846.html>

<sup>36</sup> The study of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research: The study of “Emirati influence in Yemen ... the foundations and the harvest

<sup>37</sup> Yemen Monitor, Abaad Center .. Abu Dhabi aspires to transform southern Yemen into a major source of energy and regional power, published on 3/26/2018, accessed 05/12/2020. on the link:

<http://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/23819>

<sup>38</sup> A senior Houthi official familiar with those negotiations, which began early in 2016 with the arrival of a representative of those ports to the capital, Sanaa, adding that the Emiratis have resumed contact with the Houthis in order to reach an agreement between 2018 and the end of 2019, and the two parties are still studying this and postponing any agreement until the end of the war.

The responsible source spoke to the "Abaad Center for Studies and Research" on October 18, 2020, during a hearing in Sana'a on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation.

<sup>39</sup> A study by the Abaad Center for Studies and Research: A study of “Emirati influence in Yemen ... the pillars and the harvest”

<sup>40</sup> Al-Kamali, Farouk, Monopoly by Force ... Emirati practices to control vital sectors in Yemen, published date 9/13/2017, access date 10/12/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2WMkQqA>

<sup>41</sup> Al-Jazeera Net, Communications in Socotra ... one of the chapters of the Emirati domination, published date / 09/10/2017 / Date 10/12/2020, at the link:

<https://bit.ly/3mTalfR>

<sup>42</sup> Al-Aghbry, Ahmed, UAE flights to Socotra Island are causing widespread media controversy in Yemen, published date 04/07/2017 / Date 10/12/2020, at the link:

<http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=700378>

<sup>43</sup> You can look at the study of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research: Does the Gulf want victory over Iran or does it have ambitions in Yemen?

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59778.html>

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Proud and Tyler Jian: Why are China and Saudi Arabia building military bases in Djibouti? Publication date 9/26/2016, date: 12/12/2020 at the link: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-china-and-saudi-arabi\\_b\\_12194702](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-china-and-saudi-arabi_b_12194702)

<sup>45</sup> John Aglionby and Simon Kerr, Djibouti puts the final touches on the Saudi military base deal, Posted on 12/17/2017, Date: 12/12/2020, at the link: <https://www.ft.com/content/c8f63492-dc14-11e6-9d7c-be108f1c1dce>

<sup>46</sup> Al-Hurra, Saudi forces arrive at Socotra Island, publication date 5/13/2018, accessed 12/12/2020 at the link: <https://arbne.ws/2KhavQu>

<sup>47</sup> A local official affiliated with the legitimate government in Socotra spoke to a researcher at the Abaad Center for Studies and Research on November 15, 2020

<sup>48</sup> A navigation source at Socotra Airport spoke to "Abaad" on November 15, 2020

<sup>49</sup> Intelligence Online, Riyadh refuses to assign Socotra to Abu Dhabi, published date 11/14/2020, access date: 12/12/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2JOVyoV>

<sup>50</sup> Local officials spoke to Abaad in October and November 2020

<sup>51</sup> The length of the border strip between the Yemeni governorate of Mahra and the Omani governorate of Dhofar is 288 kilometers, and it starts from the coast of the Hawf district to reach the heart of the desert on the border triangle between Yemen, Oman and Saudi Arabia. An agreement on defining the borders between Yemen and the Sultanate was signed in 1992

<sup>52</sup> To look at the impact of the transformations in Socotra, please see the study of the Abaad Center: Yemeni Socotra ... the war of influence in the Indian Ocean

<https://abaadstudies.org/news.php?id=59846>

Yemen's Socotra ... War of Influence in the Indian Ocean

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59847.html>

<sup>53</sup> Horton, Michael, The Yemen War Tests Oman's Neutrality: Focusing on the Saudi Footprint in Al-Mahra, Publication Date 19/11/2020, Accessed Date: 12/12/2020 at the Link: <https://bit.ly/3oOyXaW>

<sup>54</sup> Naji, Ahmed: The Tribal Model of East Yemen for Containing Conflict, Posted on 3/31/2020, Access Date: 12/12/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3oMnxnX>

<sup>55</sup> Previous source

<sup>56</sup> Sources in the local authority in Al-Mahra governorate spoke to Abaad.

<sup>57</sup> But unlike Saudi Arabia, Oman has a strong relationship with the tribes, especially after the signing of the 1992 border demarcation agreement with Yemen, whereby it granted tribal sheikhs and their families Omani nationality, and granted them privileges amounting to direct contact with the Royal Court. As for Saudi Arabia, it has a very troubled and bad relationship with the Mahri tribal sheikhs on the border with it. In contrast to the Sultanate of Oman, which used the extended tribal relationship between Dhofar and Mahra to strengthen its relationship with the Mahra tribes, the Saudis continued to tear these tribal links between the border areas in Najran with Mahra.

<sup>58</sup> Naji, Ahmad, Al-Ghayan on the Yemeni-Omani border, published date: 22/3/2019, Date: 02/01/2021, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3gH10WF>

<sup>59</sup> Lounes, Camille, Oman's neutrality under pressure, publishing date 5/28/2018, access date: 12/05/2020 at the link: <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/la-neutralite-d-oman-sous-pression,2473>

<sup>60</sup> Saul, Jonathan, and others, Iran intensifies its support for the Houthis in the Yemen war, published date: 3/21/2017, 01/02/2021, at the link: <https://br.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-iran-houthis/exclusive-iran-steps-up-support-for-houthis-in-yemens-war-sources-idUSKBN16S22R>

<sup>61</sup> During the recent Gulf crisis (boycotting Qatar), new news websites and satellite channels appeared to be broadcast from Turkey, called Al-Mahra.

<sup>62</sup> For a broader understanding of Yemen's place in the US foreign policy agenda, read:

America's Dangerous Game between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia (3/10/2019)

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59820.html>

And a study: Will Yemen be the field of the American-Iranian war? (23/6/2019)

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59811.html>

<sup>62</sup> BBC, Donald Trump classifies the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a "terrorist organization", date, 4/8/2019, accessed: 11/12/2020, at the link: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-47857984>

<sup>64</sup> You can view the study of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research:

Hashem, Adnan, America seeks to defeat Iran in Yemen (2/13/2018)

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59754.html>

<sup>65</sup> An informed Yemeni diplomat spoke to Abaad over the phone on August 13, 2020

<sup>66</sup> Russian Sputnik Agency, Biden says that the United States will rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for further talks if Iran resumes compliance with the nuclear agreement, published date 12/02/2020, accessed 12/04/2020 at the link: <https://bit.ly/3a8JwRQ>

<sup>67</sup> Tuwark, Natasha, The Biden Administration's return to the Iranian nuclear deal will be much more difficult. Published 11/26/2020, access date: 12/4/2020, at the link: <https://cnb.cx/2Ln6RVw>

<sup>68</sup> John Folin, Gulnar Motivalio and Patrick Sykes, Zarif excludes renegotiation of the nuclear deal with Biden Posted Date 12/3/2020 Accessed Date: 12/26/2020 at the link: <https://bloom.bg/347gZZ2>

<sup>69</sup> Maini, Tredevsh Singh, Biden and Iran: The Saudi Worker, Posted on 12/13/2020, Accessed Date: 12/20/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3oPevGy>

<sup>70</sup> The American-Iranian conflict in Yemen can be found in the ABAAD Center study: America is looking for Iran's defeat in Yemen <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59754.html>

<sup>71</sup> Sabakian, John, Biden Cannot Discard Riyadh, Posted on 12/6/2020, Accessed 12/12/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3mfIUMJ>

<sup>72</sup> Two sources familiar with the Yemeni government spoke of this information on November 12, 2020. Saudi Arabia and the UAE did not discuss any of these offers with the legitimate government in Riyadh, and the government was informed of them by Western diplomats.

<sup>73</sup> The British government, the United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman sign a historic joint defense agreement, published on 02/21/2019, accessed 12/12/2020, at the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-oman-sign-historic-joint-defence-agreement>

<sup>74</sup> The "Maritime Executive" website, the United Kingdom secures a naval base in Oman, publication date 2/21/2019, access date 12/12/2020 at the link:

<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/uk-secures-naval-base-in-oman>

<sup>75</sup> The British government website, the Minister of Defense announces an investment in the strategic port of Oman, publication date 9/12/2020, accessed 12/12/2020 AD, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3oMnFUt>

<sup>76</sup> James, Jonathan, Minister of Defense denies any plan to tamper with British army tanks, Posted on 9/11/2020, Accessed 12/12/2020 at the link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54126146>

<sup>77</sup> James, Jonathan Campbell, Britain in Oman: The Strategic Partner of Washington, Posted on 9/18/2020, Accessed 12/12/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/37acsXR>

<sup>78</sup> Muscat, Daily, Foreign Minister receives a British official, Posted on 9/8/2020, Accessed Date: 12/21/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/3801h34>

<sup>79</sup> Miller, Phil, revealed: The network of British overseas military bases includes 145 locations in 42 countries, publication date 11/24/2020 Accessed: 12/21/2020 at the link:

<https://bit.ly/2KhrDp6>

<sup>80</sup> Stone, John, the government has secretly deployed British forces to defend Saudi oil fields, published date 11/27/2020, access date 12/22/2020 at the link:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-troops-saudi-arabia-arms-oil-fields-mod-parliament-secret-b1762474.html>

<sup>81</sup> Eurio News, Will Brexit boost trade ties between the UK and the GCC? Publication date 2/21/2020 Access date 12/22/2020

<https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/21/will-brexit-boost-uk-and-gcc-trade-relations>

<sup>82</sup> Middle East Online, Gulf Countries, Britain's Trade Bet After Brexit, Posted on 2/11/2020, Accessed Date 12/22/2020, at the link: <https://bit.ly/2JOCBTl>

<sup>83</sup> Yemen Monitor, Britain pledges (\$ 3.3 million) to assess the case of the Yemeni "Safer tanker", publication date 10/23/2020, access date 12/22/2020 at the link:

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<sup>84</sup> South Front, the UAE and Israel plan to establish intelligence bases on the Yemeni island of Socotra, published on 8/28/2020, accessed 12/22/2020, at the link:

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<sup>85</sup> Ahranum, Anna, Kochavi: Iran is the most dangerous country in the Middle East, published date 6/22/2020, accessed 12/22/2020 at the link: <https://bit.ly/2Khb2BY>

<sup>86</sup> Zlatika, Hook, Netanyahu accuses Iran of seeking means to strike Israel from Yemen, publication date 10/29/2019, accessed 12/22/2020 at the link: <http://www.voanews.com/middle-east/netn-accuses-iran-seeking-means-hit-israel-yemen>

<sup>87</sup> Bassist, Rania, the rapprochement between Israel and the Gulf may worry Yemen and Iran, published date 11/29/2020, accessed date, 12/23/2020 at the link:

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/11/israel-us-yemen-iran-united-arab-emirates-benjamin-net.net.html>

<sup>88</sup> The nature of these meetings can be found in the study of the Abaad Center: Yemeni Socotra ... the war of influence in the Indian Ocean

<https://abaadstudies.org/news-59846.html>

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<sup>91</sup> Previous source

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<sup>93</sup> Bashir, Margaret, United Nations: Time is running out to avoid famine in Yemen, Posted on 12/10/2020, Accessed Date: 12/23/2020

<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/un-time-running-out-avert-yemen-famine>