

U.S. Military Operation against Houthis in Yemen: Objectives and Challenges

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Executive Summary:

The present paper evaluates the airstrikes campaign launched by President Donald Trump's administration against Houthis in Yemen, beginning on March 15, 2025. The operation aims to restore freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and to undermine the Houthis' military capabilities, following their designation as a terrorist organization. Compared to the previous campaign under President Joe Biden, the current operation is marked by a broader scope, including an expanded range of targets, continued airstrikes, and broader operational authority granted to the Commander of United States Central Command.

The study outlines several key objectives of the military operation:

- Degrading the Houthis' military capabilities by targeting weapon depots and command centers, coupled with the imposition of stringent sanctions on the movement.
- Halting Houthi attacks to secure international shipping lanes and global trade routes, despite the high operational cost, which has reached \$1 billion during the first three weeks.
- Reasserting American deterrence against both the Houthis and Iran, sending implicit warnings of potential military action against Tehran if a nuclear negotiation is not reached.
- Applying pressure on Iran and the "Axis of Resistance," recognizing that continued support for the Houthis bolsters Iranian influence across the region.
- In addition, pursuing broader strategic objectives beyond the Houthis and Iran, with the campaign fitting into Washington's wider economic confrontation with China, aiming to thwart Beijing's strategy in the so-called Silk Road.

The paper examines the impact of approximately 731 United States airstrikes on the Houthis' decision-making processes. While the campaign has weakened their capabilities to a degree, it has not fully succeeded in halting maritime attacks or neutralizing the threat they pose.

The ongoing military actions have also raised the question of a possible U.S.-backed ground offensive against the Houthis. However, divisions persist within the Saudi- and Emirati-backed Yemeni government coalition, with both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi distancing themselves from allegations of direct involvement in Washington's ongoing military strikes against the Houthis and encouraging a political reconciliation approach.

Future Challenges:

The paper argues that while continued military pressure is necessary, it remains insufficient on its own to eliminate the Houthi threat. A dual-track approach, blending military actions with diplomatic efforts, is required, including:

1. Maintaining military pressure despite its limited success in halting Houthi attacks.
2. Forming a regional and international coalition to enhance Red Sea security and prevent the smuggling of weapons to the Houthis.
3. Cutting off external military supplies through maritime surveillance and diplomatic pressure on Houthis' backers.
4. Countering Houthi propaganda, which uses civilian casualties to strengthen its discourse and gain internal and international support.
5. Empowering tribal communities under Houthi control to resist the group's authority.
6. Encourage the legitimate Yemeni government forces to expel Houthi forces from key governorates, particularly those along strategic coastal areas.

The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for a new, integrated approach that combines both military and political strategies to end the Houthi threat. This approach should consider re-evaluating the current U.S. strategy in Yemen and promoting renewed negotiations concerning the country's political and military future.

The study outlines several potential scenarios, favoring the prospect of a ground operation over a peace settlement that would allow the Houthis to retain their weapons. It rules out the possibility of Washington ending its operations without having curtailed the Houthis' military capabilities.

Introduction

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is conducting a military operation in Yemen aimed at degrading the Houthis' capabilities or forcing them to cease attacks threatening American vessels and the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. The campaign began in mid-March 2025 when President Donald Trump ordered the U.S. military to restore freedom of navigation and prevent attacks on American ships in the Red Sea region. This move came just weeks after the Trump administration designated the Houthi group as a fully-fledged Foreign Terrorist Organization.

The strategic importance of this waterway in global trade is widely recognized, facilitating the transport of goods valued at over one trillion dollars annually and accounting for approximately 30% of global container traffic [1]. At the outset of Trump's second term, his administration adopted a more hard-line approach toward the Houthis, contrasting sharply with the inconsistent policies under his predecessor, Joe Biden, who had conducted a year-long military campaign against the group.

Now, more than a month into the operation, questions are being raised regarding its success in achieving its military and political objectives, as well as its broader impact on the regional and international landscape.

This paper aims to evaluate the United States' operation against the Houthis by analyzing the stated objectives, the resulting outcomes, and the challenges encountered. It will also explore the political and military context of the campaign and offer a comprehensive evaluation of its effects on the balance of power within Yemen.

The American Vision

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth called the campaign against the Houthis "Operation Rough Rider," [2] referring to the forces led by President Theodore Roosevelt in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. According to US officials, the operation is expected to last approximately six months.

Unlike the operations conducted under the Biden administration from January 2024 until early 2025—when Houthi attacks ceased following a ceasefire agreement between Palestinian resistance forces and Israeli forces in Gaza—this new campaign under Trump has a distinctly different character.

Washington grew increasingly concerned that the Houthis' threats to international shipping lanes could become a blackmail card against the global economy amid regional and international crises. This concern intensified when the Houthis resumed strikes on vessels in the Red Sea, allegedly in retaliation for Israel's renewed blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza on March 11. Four days later, the Trump administration launched its new, more aggressive operation.

This campaign distinguishes its predecessor in three main ways:

1. The expansion of the geographical scope of the targets: The operation now targets areas far from military camps, including underground factories and facilities that were previously not on the target list.
2. Operational Continuity: The strikes are not merely reactive responses to Houthi missile and drone attacks on commercial ships or to the targeting of their launchers. Rather, they form part of an ongoing, proactive effort to systematically weaken the group's capabilities.
3. Delegated Authority: The commander of CENTCOM has been granted the authority to determine both the timing and nature of the strikes without requiring prior approval from the White House.^[3] This authority extends to targeting Houthi leadership, financial resources, and military infrastructure. The United States chose to launch the operation swiftly—without waiting several days or weeks—for two main reasons, according to a confidential communication sent to the U.S. Secretary of Defense.^[4]

1. A delay would not fundamentally change the strategic calculations.
2. Waiting risked two major dangers: (a) the operation could leak, projecting indecision, or (b) Israel could take action first, or the ceasefire in Gaza could collapse, undermining United States control over the timing and framing of the campaign.

Secretary Hegseth reportedly views the strikes in Yemen not merely as a response to the Houthis but as part of a broader strategy focused on two objectives:

- 1- Restoring Freedom of Navigation, which is considered a core United States national interest.
- 2- Re-establishing Deterrence, which he argues was eroded under the Biden administration. Leaked discussions in *The Atlantic* suggest that part of the deterrence message is directed at Iran, implying that failure to reach a new nuclear agreement could result in direct United States military action.

Publicly, however, the U.S. has outlined several goals for the operation: Degrading

(A) the Houthis' Military Capabilities: The U.S. campaign aims to severely weaken the Houthis' ability to launch missile and drone attacks against ships and regional interests. These actions include strikes on the Houthis' weapons storage sites, command and control centers, and a broader strategy involving strict sanctions targeting the movement's leaders, weapons procurement networks, and the access to financial revenues. Strengthening maritime security by increasing naval patrols in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to curb the flow of weapons to the Houthis and further disrupt their military resupply lines.

(B) Beyond Halting Houthi Attacks: One of the primary objectives of the United States campaign is to secure maritime trade routes in the Red Sea. Houthi attacks have disrupted commercial shipping, forcing vessels onto longer, more costly routes. However, the staggering cost of the operation—amounting to nearly one billion dollars in just the first three weeks [5]—suggests a broader strategic vision beyond simply countering the Houthis. The disruption of shipping routes threatens not only global trade but also the United States' ability to rapidly deploy and resupply its forces across the Middle East and beyond during times of crisis [6].

The Red Sea is a crucial artery for both military and commercial logistics, enabling the rapid and efficient deployment of U.S. forces and resources across multiple theatres of military operation. Any disruption to this corridor directly challenges what the United States defines as a “vital national interest.” The continued Houthi maritime threats could therefore have serious implications for emergency operations where logistical supplies are critical.

(C) Strengthening Deterrence: The Trump administration adopted an approach that relies on the use of military force as a means of deterrence, reflecting a broader effort to assert American dominance over strategic maritime trade routes. While the strikes themselves may not yield long-term results in Yemen, they are intended to send a strong deterrence message from the United States to the Houthi leadership and America's adversaries and allies alike.

Nonetheless, the Houthis have demonstrated significant resistance, repeating a pattern of approach that has characterized their behavior over the past decade. This suggests that the United States strategy of deterrence will require time to yield results. If the campaign fails to compel the Houthis to retreat, the credibility of America's deterrence efforts could be undermined.

(D) Pressure on Iran and the Axis of Resistance: President Trump publicly declared that any attacks carried out by the Houthis would be treated as direct acts of aggression by Iran, warning that Tehran would be held accountable and face severe consequences. Among the Iranian-aligned “Axis of Resistance,” the Houthis remain the only faction that has not suffered a loss of influence over the past year[7]. In fact, they have strengthened their position, evolving from a local insurgent group into a regional actor.

In contrast, Iran’s other major allies in the region experienced significant setbacks last year: Bashar al-Assad’s government in Syria was overthrown Hezbollah in Lebanon was significantly weakened by Israeli intelligence operations, which remotely disrupted thousands of the group’s encrypted pagers, and by Israeli airstrikes that destroyed large portions of Hezbollah’s weapons stockpiles. Shiite militias in Iraq have also seen their influence wane. Meanwhile, Iran has done little to help any of these allies, leaving them to contend with their crises largely on their own.

President Trump gave Iran a two-month deadline to reach a settlement on its nuclear program—a timeline that has already prompted negotiations in Muscat and Rome. Against this backdrop, the U.S. operation against the Houthis continues more forcefully and destructively as a model of what will befall the Iranians if they fail to sign a deal that satisfies Washington.

Although officially presented as a response to Houthi threats, the U.S. military build-up in the Middle East suggests a broader strategic objective: preparing for a potential direct confrontation with Iran. By framing Houthi attacks as assaults on American military vessels and threats to maritime freedom, the administration appears to be conditioning public opinion for a possible war while bypassing Congress in declaring a formal state of war. This framing is used to justify potential military action against Iran, including support for Israeli strikes targeting Iran’s nuclear program.

At the same time, the United States lacks effective regional integration in its operations against the Houthis. Its previous approach has led countries bordering the Red Sea—particularly Gulf states and Egypt—to perceive Washington as not fully committed to countering the Houthi threat. As a result, these nations have declined to participate directly in U.S. operations against the group, despite the Houthis posing a clear risk to their security and economic interests. Nonetheless, some level of coordination and logistical support continues, primarily through intelligence-sharing mechanisms.

(E) A Broader Strategy to Contain China: Tracking Washington's strategic patterns in its conflicts reveals that even when a mission's initial objectives are clear and measurable, they often expand. In the case of the campaign against the Houthis, the goal of securing shipping lanes could well evolve into a broader conflict encompassing Iran—and even China.

In mid-April, the U.S. State Department disclosed that a Chinese satellite company was allegedly assisting Houthi attacks on American interests in Yemen. This accusation suggests that Washington is framing its campaign not solely against the Houthis or Iran, but also as part of a larger confrontation involving China's growing influence.

On the opposite coast from Yemen, where American operations are concentrated, lies a Chinese military base in Djibouti—one of the Horn of Africa's most strategically significant countries. With the geostrategic importance that the Horn of Africa represents for the major powers, in terms of its control of the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Gulf of Aden, crucial maritime chokepoints for global trade. For China, the region holds even greater significance as part of its ambitious plans in Africa to secure the Silk Road, or what is known as the "Belt and Road Initiative," serving as a vital gateway for Chinese trade moving toward Europe.

In line with Trump's broader efforts to economically contain China, the campaign against the Houthis—under the pretext of protecting international maritime routes—may serve a deeper strategic purpose, aligning with a broader American objective to disrupt China's Silk Road Initiative and limit Beijing's growing economic and geopolitical influence.

Evaluation of American Operation (March 15 – April 21, 2025)

President Donald Trump has stated that his administration will ensure the complete elimination of the Houthis, reinforcing this pledge by escalating American military power in the region [8]. Trump has spent the early months of his second term escalating military strikes against the Iran-backed Houthi forces, deploying two aircraft carriers along with several warships to support the offensive.

The renewed military campaign has inflicted significant losses on Houthis. The operation targeted arms depots, drone facilities, and missile storage sites, all aimed at systematically degrading the group's military capabilities.

Under "Operation Rough Rider," between March 15 and April 21, 2025, the United States launched over 731 airstrikes across 11 governorates—most of the areas under the control of the Houthis. Houthi sources claim the number of strikes has reached as high as 1,000 [9]. The attacks were heavily concentrated in the governorates of Sa'ada, Hodeida, and Sana'a, as shown in the map.[10]



United States Airstrikes on Houthi-Controlled Areas (March 15 – April 21, 2025)

Researchers at the Aba'ad Studies and Research Center currently cannot fully assess the overall impact of the airstrikes on Houthi decision-making process. It is likely that the extensive United States air campaign was made possible by months of painstaking intelligence work conducted during the Biden administration.

Nevertheless, these strikes are likely to have degraded the Houthis' ability to target shipping by disrupting their targeting processes and command networks. The main targets can be summarized as follows:

A) Military Infrastructure: United States strikes heavily concentrated on the governorates of Sa'ada and Sana'a, aiming to dismantle the Houthis' military infrastructure. A total of 183 airstrikes were launched against Sa'ada and 191 against Sana'a and its surrounding areas. Sa'ada, known as the stronghold of the Houthi movement, has over the years developed an extensive network of underground facilities and military complexes. Meanwhile, Sana'a has been historically the center for missile brigades during the era of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Since the 2022 ceasefire, the Houthis have expanded and refurbished many of these facilities, particularly in areas like Attan, Noqum, and Bani Hashish.

B) Targeting Houthi leaders: The United States announced the killing of several senior Houthi military commanders, including the top official responsible for the group's missile program, according to leaked remarks by the United States National Security Advisor on Signal [11]. The Houthis have not publicly revealed the extent of their losses, claiming that the damage to their military strength is less than 1%.

The US Central Command also has not disclosed detailed information about human targets struck during the operation. However, President Trump released a video purportedly showing airstrikes that killed senior Houthi leaders during a meeting to plan maritime attacks [12]. The footage shows 74 individuals and appears to document an April 2 strike in the Tuhayta District, south of Al-Hodeida Governorate, according to the Yemeni government. The Houthis confirmed the strike but claimed it targeted a “social gathering” during Eid al-Fitr celebrations.

Despite the Houthis' tight control over information, reports from Houthi-affiliated families on social media indicate casualties among their ranks [13]. Sources indicate that those killed included key figures responsible for drone and ballistic missile programs. Among them were: Abdo al-Hilali, Mohammed Showqi Jayash, Abdo Mohammed al-Hamran, Hussein al-Khatib, Yahya Radwan al-Hamzi, Abdulraouf al-Arabji, and Turki al-Tahiri.

The United States reportedly targeted four mobile objectives in Sana'a and Sa'ada, and carried out strikes against six residences believed to have hosted meetings of Houthi leaders. These raids resulted in deaths and injuries, including among civilians.

Most of those eliminated were mid-level or field commanders, rather than top-tier leadership figures, with the notable exception of Abdo al-Hilali, a senior official involved in Houthi missile production.

c) Frontline Positions: Since early April, United States airstrikes have also begun focusing on frontline positions between the Houthis and the internationally recognized Yemeni government forces and their allies. For example, in Tuhayta, Hodeida, the United States conducted at least 35 strikes, including 25 strikes on April 21 alone, targeting frontlines where Houthi forces confronted the “National Resistance” led by Presidential Leadership Council member Tariq Saleh. Additionally, 109 airstrikes hit Houthi positions and camps along the active fronts in the neighboring governorates of Marib and Al-Jawf, where the Yemeni National Army is stationed.

Targeting key Houthi group leaders, particularly those who are responsible for enforcing local control, could eventually undermine the group's internal security apparatus. United States officials currently estimate that initial strikes have disrupted the Houthis' command and control network and reduced their ability to target international shipping. This indicates that the air campaign has achieved some immediate tactical effects—although these gains may prove temporary without sustained pressure.

While the United States campaign has achieved certain military objectives, it has not completely neutralized the Houthis' maritime and cross-border attack capabilities. Despite halting attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since the announcement of their renewed campaign, the Houthis have claimed responsibility for targeting United States naval vessels on 20 occasions since March 15.

Based on current estimates, the United States military campaign could continue for up to six months[14]. However, the lack of reliable field intelligence in Yemen is likely to hinder the United States' ability to track Houthi leaders effectively. This challenge mirrors the difficulties faced early last year when the United States struggled to assess the full extent of its operational success and the Houthis' arsenal due to a lack of intelligence [15].

Houthis are aware of these operational challenges and appear confident that the United States campaign will ultimately fail. Nonetheless, they are increasingly concerned about the potential for popular unrest in their controlled territories, where they govern with an iron fist and label even mild criticism as “treason.” They are also apprehensive about the prospect of a foreign-backed ground assault led by their rivals from the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

The Complex Yemeni Landscape: Is a Ground Offensive Likely to Succeed?

It is highly unlikely that the United States air campaign alone will dismantle the Houthis' military capabilities, given the difficulty of destroying all their weapons stockpiles and missile launchers. United States commanders have privately acknowledged this limitation [16]. The Houthis' top priority remains maintaining their territorial control.

The Houthi attacks in the Red Sea effectively stalled the UN-sponsored roadmap toward a peace agreement to end the Yemeni civil war. This roadmap was structured in three phases: confidence-building measures, political negotiations, and agreement on the future form of the Yemeni state.

Given the current conditions, government forces and their allies may seek to capitalize on the rare opportunity of United States air support to launch a rapid ground offensive, reclaim territory from the Houthis, and strengthen their hand in any future peace talks—thus bringing an end to the fragile ceasefire established in April 2022.

This opportunity is further bolstered by the reported deaths of several mid-level Houthi military and intelligence figures in United States airstrikes. Additionally, American strikes have increasingly targeted Houthi positions along frontline battlefields, potentially killing mid-level commanders whose absence could weaken the Houthis' hold on contested areas. If well-coordinated with United States Central Command, pro-government forces could exploit this opportunity.

Previous American reports indicated that Yemeni government forces were preparing for a ground offensive on multiple fronts: from the south (al-Dhale and al-Bayda), the east (Marib and al-Jawf), and the west (Al-Hodeida and Taiz) [17]. The United States was reportedly considering leveraging Yemeni factions for the ground campaign and offering military advisory support, with the United Arab Emirates potentially backing the operation if Saudi Arabia hesitated [18].

However, both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have publicly denied reports suggesting consultations to launch a ground offensive against the Houthis [19]. United States officials, meanwhile, maintain that they are not pursuing regime change in Sana'a and insist they are not involved in Yemen's internal civil conflict [20].

Among the available options, a ground operation in Hodeida appears to be the most feasible. Such an operation would aim to halt Houthi maritime attacks by retaking critical coastal territory. Since the air campaign began on March 15, the U. S. Central Command has conducted at least 167 airstrikes targeting Houthi infrastructure and command networks along Hodeida's Red Sea coast.

Hodeida is strategically significant, hosting Yemen's largest port and the ports of Ra'as Isa and Al-Salif. However, it is important to note that the Houthis also launch maritime and cross-border operations from mountainous inland governorates such as Sana'a, Sa'ada, Amran, Dhamar, Ibb, and Al-Bayda.

Despite these efforts, several challenges threaten the continuity of the air campaign: the readiness of American forces, the strain on munitions stockpiles, and the need for closer coordination with regional partners to enhance naval interdiction operations against weapons smuggling to the Houthis. Furthermore, building regional consensus among Red Sea coastal states is crucial to ensure lasting maritime security.

Potential ground operations also face significant obstacles, foremost among them divisions within Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council. Although discussions about a ground offensive have circulated since late last year—drawing parallels with the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria—no formal decision has been made [21].

Internal differences among United States regional allies supporting the legitimate government complicate the situation further. Saudi Arabia appears reluctant to reengage militarily in Yemen, while the UAE seems more willing, favoring the use of semi-military forces it finances and supports in western and southern Yemen [22]. Some reports suggest Abu Dhabi is already providing intelligence and logistical support to the United States air campaign [23].

There is common concern that any UAE-backed dominance over Hodeida could replicate previous scenarios seen in Aden and Hadramout, where UAE-affiliated forces gained disproportionate influence. Supporting one or two government-aligned factions could risk fragmenting the conflict further, leading to localized wars within government-controlled areas and potentially accelerating the division of the country.

This reality underscores the urgent need for a clear strategy outlining the scope and objectives of any ground operation, as well as a comprehensive post-conflict plan. Such a strategy must address future peace negotiations—whether or not the Houthis are involved—reconstruction efforts, stabilization initiatives, and transitional justice to ensure sustainable peace within Yemen.

Recommendations for Next Steps:

If the United States operation fails to achieve its objective of preventing Houthi maritime attacks against American military vessels, the United States Central Command may need to explore new options.

At this juncture, multiple questions arise for Washington—questions that demand clear answers, such as: When should the air campaign end? And what strategy should follow its conclusion?

Washington needs a dual-track approach: First, maintaining military pressure on the Houthis; second, seeking long-term solutions through a broader strategy aimed at neutralizing the threat to international maritime navigation. Achieving this would require several coordinated measures:

First: Continued Pressure on Houthis:

Although the air campaign has produced only temporary effects so far, it still holds potential as a deterrent, particularly if Americans commit to maintaining consistent military pressure.

Continued strikes could push the Houthis to scale back their attacks. However, eliminating the Houthis' ability to use Hodeida Governorate as a base for targeting international shipping would ultimately require a ground operation to establish direct control over the area.

It is worth noting that in 2018, the United States and Western powers prevented Yemeni government forces from capturing the key coastal city, pressuring them instead into signing the Stockholm Agreement—an agreement, on which the Houthis have reneged

Second: Forming a Regional and International Coalition:

Historical experience in the region suggests that airstrikes alone will not be sufficient to expel the Houthis from Yemen or restore stability to one of the world's most vital maritime corridors. Therefore, Washington must accelerate diplomatic efforts to build a coalition of willing states that have a vested interest in Red Sea security. This would include regional partners such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, alongside the European Union's naval task force, ASPIDES. Although ASPIDES faces resource constraints, it offers a starting point for broader burden-sharing efforts alongside United States forces.

Moreover, regional states must lead the development of a maritime security strategy, ensuring that leadership rests with Red Sea littoral states, while carefully excluding Israel, whose involvement could raise concerns among Arab partners.

Without a strong regional and international coalition—particularly one led by regional actors—and without a locally-driven ground operation under this coalition's umbrella, achieving the United States goal of ending Houthi maritime threats will likely prove far more complex than American military strategists anticipate.

Success will require unifying the various factions within Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council under the authority of the Ministry of Defense, ensuring the preservation of Yemen's territorial integrity.

Third: Cutting off Houthi Supply Lines:

To prevent future resurgences of Houthi threats, the United States must focus on cutting off the group's sources of supply, especially from international partners.

This entails tightening maritime surveillance to intercept arms shipments from Tehran—the Houthis' principal backer—and employing robust diplomacy to pressure external actors, particularly Russia and China, to refrain from bolstering the Houthis' military capabilities. A combination of economic incentives and targeted sanctions will be essential tools in this effort.

Fourth: Countering Houthi Propaganda:

Countering Houthi propaganda surrounding the military campaign requires a comprehensive strategy that combines political communication with community outreach. The Houthis have leveraged the damage to vital infrastructure and civilian casualties from airstrikes to bolster their narrative and rally internal and external support.

For example, on April 17, during United States operations targeting Ra'as Isa Port in Hodeida—where Houthi fuel stockpiles and oil export-import facilities are located—dozens of workers and truck drivers present at the port were killed.

While CENTCOM stated that the airstrikes aimed to “eliminate” the Houthis’ fuel resources and economically isolate the group, the Houthis exploited the incident to stir public outrage and mobilize support.

Fifth: Supporting Tribal Communities:

Particular attention must be given to encouraging tribal communities—especially those within Houthi-controlled areas—to resist Houthi rule [24]. The Houthis have traditionally relied on tribal structures for recruitment and mobilization. Weakening this relationship could significantly impede any Houthi resistance to a ground offensive.

Sixth: Encouraging Pro-Government Forces to Reclaim Strategic Areas

Efforts should focus on supporting pro-government forces to reclaim strategic territory from the Houthis, particularly key coastal areas. Incremental territorial gains could pressure the Houthis both militarily and politically.

Scenarios and Conclusion

The most likely scenario remains the launch of a ground operation, especially with clear indications of the Houthis’ declining capabilities. However, alternative scenarios cannot be ruled out.

Iran, for example, may seek to leverage its ongoing dialogue with Saudi Arabia to broker a peace process that includes the Houthis as part of a political settlement. Although unlikely, such an outcome would not guarantee stability in Yemen or the wider region as long as the Houthis retain their weapons.

The worst-case scenario—although considered unlikely—would be the failure or premature termination of the United States military campaign without achieving its objectives of weakening the Houthis and eliminating their threat. In such a case, a political settlement that merely neutralizes the Houthis without disarming them would leave international maritime routes exposed to future threats.

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- abaadstudies@gmail.com
info@abaadstudies.org
www.abaadstudies.org

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