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# Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention

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## Summary

This report provides material on the ongoing crisis in Yemen and the U.S. policy response.

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia and members of a coalition it established (hereinafter referred to as the Saudi-led coalition) launched a military operation aimed at restoring the rule of Yemen's internationally recognized President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi. Prior to the start of hostilities, Hadi's government had been gradually supplanted by an alliance comprised of the Iran-supported Houthi movement and loyalists of the previous President, Ali Abdullah Saleh (hereinafter referred to as Houthi-Saleh forces).

Despite multiple attempts by U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed to broker a peace agreement, the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi-Saleh forces continue to disagree on the fundamentals of a political settlement. After two years of war, the Saudi-led coalition would most likely resume negotiations from a position of strength. The coalition's current offensive along the Red Sea coast seeks to cut maritime access off to Houthi-Saleh forces in the hopes that their isolation will force them back to the table.

In January 2017, the United Nations estimated that the civilian death toll in the nearly two-year conflict had reached 10,000. In March 2017, the World Food Program reported that while Yemen is not yet in a full-blown famine, 60% of Yemenis, or 17 million people, are in "crisis" or "emergency" food situations.

During the last year of the Obama Administration, U.S. policy toward the conflict in Yemen shifted toward a more nuanced approach after having initially emphasized strong support for the Saudi-led coalition's campaign and the restoration of Hadi's presidency. The Obama Administration called upon the parties to negotiate a political settlement directly, emphasizing that "we're on the side squarely of the Yemeni people," while also stressing that Saudi Arabia itself is under daily attack and has a right to defend itself. The Administration sought to work multilaterally through the United Nations to pursue a cease-fire that would—in the expressed hopes of the Administration—ultimately jumpstart negotiations toward a comprehensive political settlement to the conflict.

As those peace efforts did not succeed, some observers expect the Trump Administration to take a different approach toward the conflict by more openly trying to deter Iranian support for Houthi-Saleh forces and refraining from openly criticizing the Saudi-led coalition's conduct of the war.

In 2017, President Trump reportedly authorized an increase in U.S. airstrikes against AQAP. In early March 2017, the United States reportedly conducted over 40 airstrikes against AQAP inside Yemen, which U.S. officials said were coordinated with the Hadi government. A recent counterterrorism raid in Yemen generated debate following the death of Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens. The raid also claimed the lives of between four and twelve Yemeni civilians, including several children, one of whom was a U.S. citizen. The raid was the Trump Administration's first acknowledged counterterror operation.

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## Conflict Overview

Saudi Arabia established a coalition (hereinafter referred to as the Saudi-led coalition) in March, 2015, and launched a military operation aimed at restoring the rule of Yemen's internationally-recognized President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi.<sup>1</sup> Hadi's government was being gradually supplanted by an alliance comprised of the Iran-supported<sup>2</sup> Houthi movement<sup>3</sup> and loyalists of the previous President, Ali Abdullah Saleh (hereinafter referred to as Houthi-Saleh forces).

As Houthi forces advanced on the southern city of Aden, the Saudi-led coalition launched air strikes in response to a specific request from President Hadi "to provide instant support by all necessary means, including military intervention to protect Yemen and its people from continuous Houthi aggression and deter the expected attack to occur at any hour on the city of Aden and the rest of the southern regions, and to help Yemen in the face of Al Qaeda and ISIL."<sup>4</sup>

With Houthi-Saleh forces poised to seize control of Yemen's government, Saudi Arabia may have acceded to Hadi's request and launched military operations out of fear that Yemen, under Houthi-Saleh rule, would fall under Iranian influence.<sup>5</sup> Some reports suggest that the Saudis also viewed this military campaign as an opportunity to burnish the credentials of the young and newly appointed Defense Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman.<sup>6</sup>

On April 14, 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2216, which imposed sanctions on individuals undermining the stability of Yemen, and authorized an arms embargo against the Houthi-Saleh forces. It also demanded that the Houthis withdraw from all areas seized during the current conflict, relinquish arms seized from military and security institutions, cease all actions falling exclusively within the authority of the legitimate Government of Yemen, and fully implement previous Council resolutions. Russia abstained on resolution 2216; it had proposed an alternative resolution calling for an arms embargo on all sides and an immediate cease-fire without the precondition of a Houthi-Saleh withdrawal from areas it seized.

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<sup>1</sup> The coalition includes Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, and Senegal. The Saudi-led coalition also relies on local Yemeni forces to carry out most ground operations. These allied units comprise a mix of Yemeni army units, tribal forces, Islamist militias, and southern separatists opposed to Houthi rule.

<sup>2</sup> The degree of Iran's military role in Yemen is a subject of much debate. Iran has been caught on multiple occasions attempting to smuggle weapons to the Houthis (see below). In repeated public statements by high level Saudi officials, Saudi Arabia has cited Iran's illicit support for the Houthis as proof that Iran is to blame for the Yemen conflict. Iranian support to the Houthis provides the clerical regime with a relatively low cost way of countering Saudi influence in Yemen. Saudi officials frequently justify their intervention in Yemen as a defensive action in order to prevent "the country [Yemen] being taken over by a radical militia [Houthis] allied with Iran and Hezbollah." However, many Western observers generally agree that Iranian aid to the Houthis does not match the scale of its commitments to proxies in other parts of the Middle East, such as in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

<sup>3</sup> The Houthi movement (also known as *Ansar Allah* or Partisans of God) is a predominantly Zaydi Shiite revivalist political and insurgent movement that formed in the northern province of Sa'da in 2004 under the leadership of members of the Houthi family. It originally sought an end to what it viewed as efforts to marginalize Zaydi communities and beliefs, but its goals grew in scope and ambition in the wake of the 2011 uprising and government collapse to embrace a broader populist, anti-establishment message. Skeptics highlight the movement's ideological roots, its alleged cooperation with Iran, and the slogans prominently displayed on its banners: "God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse the Jews! Victory to Islam!"

<sup>4</sup> Text of Hadi request letter in "GCC statement: Gulf countries respond to Yemen developments," *The National* (UAE), March 26, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "Yemen War Turns Two," *Al Monitor*, March 12, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> "Rise of Saudi Prince Shatters Decades of Royal Tradition," *New York Times*, October 15, 2016.

After two years of war, battle lines in Yemen have hardened. The Saudi-led coalition has retaken the port city of Aden and the lowland areas of southern Yemen (traditionally Sunni). Houthi-Saleh forces remain ensconced in the capital Sana'a and the mountainous highlands of northern Yemen (traditionally Zaydi<sup>7</sup>). The lines of control now somewhat resemble the division of Yemen into two separate countries from 1918 to 1990. Since the start of 2017, Saudi-led coalition-backed Yemeni forces have been fighting to retake coastal areas in far southwestern Yemen near the Bab al Mandab strait, capturing the city of Mokha in February.

### Prelude to the War

Central governance in Yemen, embodied by the decades-long rule of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, began to unravel in 2011, when political unrest broke out throughout the Arab world. Popular youth protests in Yemen were gradually supplanted by political elites jockeying to replace then-President Saleh. Ultimately, infighting among various centers of Yemeni political power broke out in the capital, and government authority throughout the country eroded. Soon, militias associated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula seized territory in one southern province.

Concerned that the political unrest and resulting security vacuum were strengthening terrorist elements, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other members of the international community attempted to broker a political compromise. A transition plan was brokered, and in 2012 former Vice President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi became president.

With the support of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Nations Security Council, President Hadi attempted to reform Yemen's political system. Throughout 2013, key players convened a National Dialogue Conference aimed at reaching broad national consensus on a new political order. However, in January 2014 it ended without agreement.

One anti-government group in particular, the northern Yemeni Houthi movement, sought to use military force to reshape the political order. Within weeks of the National Dialogue Conference concluding, it launched a military offensive against various tribal allies of President Hadi. The Houthi were joined by the forces still loyal to former President Saleh, creating an alliance of convenience that was a formidable opponent to President Hadi and his allies.

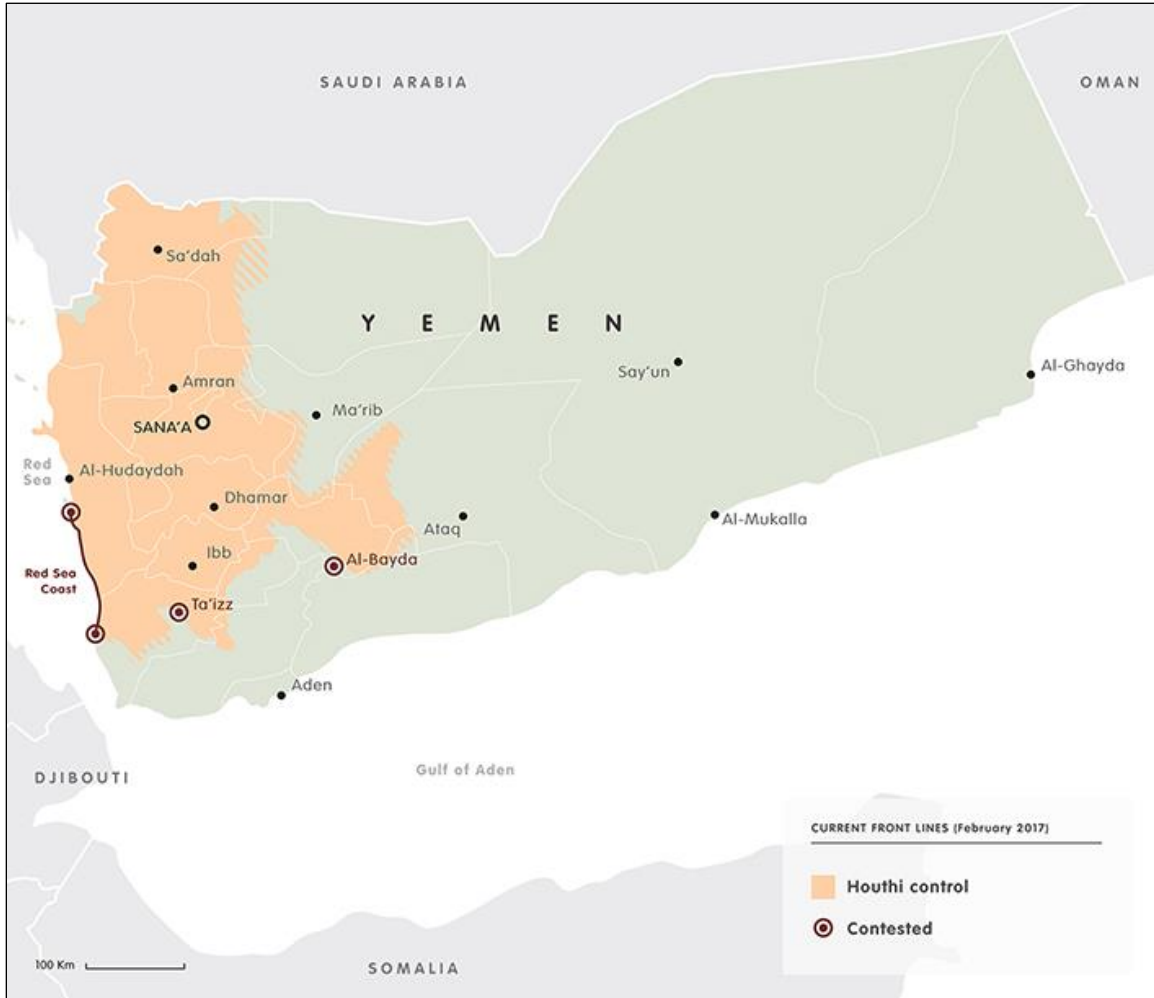
In 2014, Houthi militants took over the capital and violated several power-sharing arrangements. In 2015, Houthi militants placed President Hadi under house arrest. Although he was able to escape to Aden in southern Yemen, his position became untenable, as Houthi forces advanced from the capital all the way to Aden. In March 2015, after President Hadi, who had fled to Saudi Arabia, appealed for international intervention, Saudi Arabia and a hastily assembled international coalition launched a military offensive aimed at restoring Hadi's rule and evicting Houthi fighters from the capital and other major cities.

In January 2017, the United Nations estimated that the civilian death toll in the nearly two-year conflict had reached 10,000.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Yemen's Zaydis take their name from their fifth Imam, Zayd ibn Ali, grandson of Husayn. Zayd revolted against the Umayyad Caliphate in 740, believing it to be corrupt, and to this day, Zaydis believe that their imam (ruler of the community) should be both a descendent of Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad) and one who makes it his religious duty to rebel against unjust rulers and corruption. A Zaydi state (or Imamate) was founded in northern Yemen in 893 and lasted in various forms until the republican revolution of 1962. Yemen's modern imams kept their state in the Yemeni highlands in extreme isolation, as foreign visitors required the ruler's permission to enter the kingdom. Although Zaydism is an offshoot of Shia Islam, its legal traditions and religious practices are similar to Sunni Islam. Moreover, it is doctrinally distinct from "Twelver Shiism," the dominant branch of Shi'a Islam in Iran and Lebanon.

<sup>8</sup> Top UN Official: 10,000 Civilians Killed in Yemen Conflict, *Associated Press*, January 16, 2017.

Figure I. Yemen: Current Lines of Control



**Source:** Mapping the Yemen Conflict, European Council on Foreign Relations

As of March 2017, fighting continues throughout the country, most notably in and around the following.

- **Taiz.** Yemen's third largest city, Taiz (pre-war population of 300,000), continues to witness fierce fighting. Forces aligned with the coalition control most of Taiz city, but its environs are largely sealed off by Houthi-Saleh forces that surround the city on three sides. Houthi-Saleh forces only periodically permit humanitarian aid to reach city residents, and 37 of the city's 40 hospitals and medical institutions are closed. The city has been under siege since April 2015, and the humanitarian situation is dire, with reports of skyrocketing food prices and starvation.<sup>9</sup>
- **Saudi-Yemeni Border.** In the far north along the Yemeni-Saudi border, Houthi-Saleh forces continue to target the kingdom. In the Saudi provinces of Najran and Jizan, Houthi-Saleh forces have launched offensives into Saudi territory and

<sup>9</sup> "Yemen: 'Some people are living on one piece of bread a day,'" *The Guardian*, June 8, 2016.

and other ballistic missiles/rockets into Saudi territory and at coalition forces inside Yemen. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates each have multiple U.S.-supplied Patriot missile batteries protecting their respective forces. Thousands of Saudi residents along the border with Yemen have been evacuated from populated areas in order to create a military buffer zone.<sup>10</sup>

- **West of Marib Province toward the capital.** Bordering the capital province of Sana'a to the east, Marib governorate and city are strategically important areas that the Saudi-led coalition seeks to control. Marib province is where the country's main refinery is located, along with one of its two main oil pipelines. Houthi-Saleh forces have been attacking the Marib tribes and coalition forces and are now pushing west toward Sana'a.
- **Sana'a (Yemen's capital).** From April 2016 to August 2016, the Saudi-led coalition had largely spared Sana'a from aerial strikes as part of its commitment to the cessation of hostilities. When U.N.-mediated peace talks collapsed in August 2016, the Saudi-led coalition resumed bombing.

## Prospects for a Political Solution

Despite multiple attempts by U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed to broker a peace agreement, the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi-Saleh forces continue to disagree on the fundamentals of a political settlement. In late October 2016, the U.N. Envoy presented another peace plan to both sides. According to various reports, the Envoy's road map to peace included the following:<sup>11</sup>

- gradually transferring presidential power to either a new prime minister and/or vice president (the presidency would then become mostly a ceremonial position),
- the formation of a national unity government,
- gradually removing Houthi-Saleh forces from cities seized between 2014 and 2015,
- the formation of an international observation mission to verify Houthi withdrawal, and
- gradually transitioning toward presidential and parliamentary elections.

President Hadi rejected this plan. He claims that his abdication would legitimize Houthi-Saleh forces' capture of the capital, which Hadi calls a coup. Hadi also calls for Houthi-Saleh forces to relinquish their heavy weaponry (including ballistic missiles and launchers). Saudi Arabia demands that the Houthi-Saleh forces relinquish these weapons to a third party, and insists on a guarantee that a new unity government would prohibit the deployment of weapons that can threaten international waterways or Saudi territory. For their part, Houthi-Saleh forces seek Hadi's resignation and require an immediate formation of a unity government in which they play a significant role. They also seek to integrate their militiamen into the nation's armed forces.

Reports indicate that U.N. Special Envoy Ahmed may have recently altered the road map for peace to allow for President Hadi to remain in office until elections, rather than transferring

<sup>10</sup> "Border Fight could shift Saudi Arabia's Yemen War Calculus," *PolicyWatch* # 2736, Washington Institute, December 6, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> "UN Envoy to Yemen hands peace plan outline to rival parties," *Associated Press*, October 25, 2016.

power to an interim prime minister or vice president.<sup>12</sup> Houthi-Saleh forces reject such a change and have demanded that the United Nations appoint a new special envoy.

**Table I. Yemen Profiles**



**President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi**

President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi – Originally a major general in the South Yemeni military, Hadi fled to North Yemen in 1986, where he became a close ally of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Hadi was eventually appointed Defense Minister and then Vice President of a unified Yemen. He served as Saleh’s vice president for 18 years, and became acting president following Saleh’s downfall in an Arab Spring-inspired uprising. The 69-year old President is supported by Saudi Arabia but rules mostly outside the country due to the security situation.



**Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh**

Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh governed the unified Republic of Yemen from 1990 to 2012; prior to this, he had headed the former state of North Yemen from 1978 to 1990. Under Saleh’s rule, political power gradually coalesced around his immediate family, whose members filled key posts in various security services. Corruption was rampant, and the country remained the poorest in the Arab world and one of the most destitute nations on earth. After stepping down from the presidency in 2012, Saleh remained ensconced as president of the General People’s Congress party, the former ruling party. Since 2014, Saleh has been widely seen as aiding the Houthis in their struggle against Hadi’s government, and in 2015 he publicly announced his support for the Houthis against the Saudi-led coalition. The alliance between the Houthis and Saleh, against whom they fought a bitter war for nearly a decade, is usually seen as one of convenience and thus fundamentally unstable.



**Abdul Malik al Houthi**

Abdul Malik became leader of the Houthi movement after the death of his brother, parliamentarian and Zaydi sheikh Hussein al Houthi, in 2004, shortly after Hussein began assembling forces against Saleh’s government in what eventually became the Houthi insurgency. That insurgency culminated in the 2014 Houthi takeover of Sana’a, and Abdul Malik and his brother Yahia are generally recognized as leaders of the Houthi movement (officially known as Ansar Allah). Abdul Malik al Houthi comes from a prominent Zaydi family that seeks to restore the Zaydi Imamate, which ended in 1962.



**Vice President Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar**

Mohsen has been on nearly every side of Yemeni politics during his five decades of military service. He was an early ally of President Saleh, and played a central role in combating the nascent Houthi insurgency that began in 2004. In the 2011 uprising against Saleh’s rule, Mohsen defected and publicly declared his support for protestors, but in 2012 President Hadi removed him from his military command as part of an effort to restructure the military. Mohsen fled the country after the Houthi takeover, returning in late 2015 to lead military operations against the Houthis as part of the Saudi-led coalition. As one of the founding members of the Islah party, Mohsen reportedly has strong Salafist leanings and close relations with Saudi Arabia, and is a member of one of the nation’s largest tribal confederations, the Hashid.



**U.N. Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed**

Mauritanian diplomat Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed was appointed Special Envoy for Yemen in 2015 after the resignation of Jamal Benomar. Ould Cheikh Ahmed is a longtime UN official with previous experience in Yemen and Syria.

<sup>12</sup> “Houthis Criticise Special Envoy as UN looks to Restart Talks,” *Economist Intelligence Unit*, February 14, 2017.



### Will the Conflict End in 2017?

As the war in Yemen enters its third year, many observers are concerned that the prospects for a political settlement remain elusive. At the heart of the conflict is the question of how much political power Houthi-Saleh forces will ultimately wield in Yemen. President Hadi has been willing to share power with the Houthis, but only within the context of a national unity government in which their role is not preeminent. President Hadi and his Saudi backers may distrust the Houthis, who, they say, have already violated previous United Nations-brokered power-sharing agreements, such as the 2014 peace and national partnership agreement (it granted the Houthis greater representation in a new government). In July 2016, Houthi-Saleh forces formed the High Political Council to govern areas under their control, and their opponents may suspect that Houthi-Saleh forces seek to govern all of north Yemen, from where they can militarily threaten Saudi Arabia using long-range missiles and rockets supplied by Iran.<sup>13</sup> From the Houthi-Saleh perspective, while this coalition may be a marriage of convenience, both parties seek to maximize their influence, particularly in the north. The Houthis have used military force to change the terms for negotiations with President Hadi, by repeatedly rejecting attempts to limit its influence to its home governorate of Sa'dah.<sup>14</sup> Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthis main partner, seeks to restore his influence (and his family's) over the central government after losing the presidency in a U.S.-backed, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered transition plan which led to the February 2012 election of President Hadi. Many analysts argue that if Houthi-Saleh forces were left to govern north Yemen, their alliance would eventually crumble, as both sides would vie for political supremacy.

After two years of war, the Saudi-led coalition would to negotiate with their opponents from a position of strength. The coalition's current offensive along the Red Sea coast seeks to cut maritime access off to Houthi-Saleh forces in the hopes that their isolation will force them back to the table. President Hadi also has moved the Central Bank to Aden, and payments to thousands of civil servants in Houthi-Saleh controlled territory have been cut off. If the coalition's latest strategy succeeds, then perhaps later in 2017, U.N.-brokered peace negotiations could resume. However, if Houthi-Saleh forces militarily endure, then the Saudi-led coalition may have limited options. Militarily, the Saudi-led coalition has primarily relied on air power and local tribal militias as its ground force. It has not committed significant numbers of ground troops to fight Houthi-Saleh forces in the Yemeni highlands, a strategy that most likely would incur heavy casualties and risk losing public support for the war effort. The status quo of a divided Yemen leaves the Saudi-led coalition responsible for propping up a weak internationally-recognized Yemeni government based out of Aden. If the status quo continues indefinitely, many analysts believe that both Yemeni governments would be in a constant state of conflict with each other, while transnational terrorist groups like AQAP would take advantage of a more permissive atmosphere given the absence of a unified Yemeni government and military. According to former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Gerald Feierstein, "With little prospect of an immediate resolution of the conflict and in the face of increasing complexity, as tribal, sectarian and counterterrorism issues are introduced, Yemen's ultimate survival as a unified country hangs in the balance."<sup>15</sup>

## The Battle for Hodeida

With U.N.-sponsored peace talks stalled in early 2017, the Saudi-led coalition altered its military strategy in an attempt to politically pressure and militarily isolate Houthi-Saleh forces. On January 9, 2017, the coalition launched a new offensive (dubbed Golden Spear/Arrow) along Yemen's 280-mile western coastal plain ultimately aimed at taking the strategic port city of Hodeida, a maneuver which would essentially sever Northern Yemen's access to the Red Sea. According to Yemen's Foreign Minister Abdel Malek al-Mekhlafi, the latest offensive "is important to reignite the political process....The Houthis will not accept dialogue [unless they are

<sup>13</sup> In July 2016, Houthi-Saleh forces formed the High Political Council to govern areas under their control.

<sup>14</sup> Three years ago, the Houthi movement rejected the final outcome of the 2014 National Dialogue, which sought to reconfigure Yemen's governance in a more equitable fashion by bringing all parties to a months-long conference. The conference ended when President Hadi proposed to divide Yemen into six federal regions that would leave the traditional Houthi territorial base as one land-locked province without access to a seaport or oil resources.

<sup>15</sup> Testimony of Gerald Feierstein, Director, Center for Gulf Affairs, Middle East Institute, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, "Resolving the Conflict in Yemen: U.S. Interests, Risks, and Policy," March 9, 2017.

forced into talks by] a change on the ground.”<sup>16</sup> The Saudi-led coalition scored some early successes in this front at considerable humanitarian cost. It seized the smaller port town of Mokha in early February. With the Saudi-led coalition’s naval forces positioned along the coast, its ground forces controlling the highway into Hodeida city, and its air forces striking targets inside the port city, it would appear that the coalition is preparing for a final assault on Hodeida.<sup>17</sup>

Many international relief agencies and humanitarian organizations are concerned that if the port of Hodeida is irreparably damaged (it has been previously targeted as well), it would exacerbate an already dire shortage of food and medical supplies in war-torn areas of northern Yemen, which is largely controlled by Houthi-Saleh forces. Jamie McGoldrick, the United Nations Resident Humanitarian Coordinator and Representative for Yemen, said “I am deeply concerned with the escalation of conflict and militarization of Yemen's western coast. It is coming at a great cost to civilians...Given that the country is 80%-90% dependent on imported food staples, I am compelled to raise the alarm...If left unabated, these factors combined could accelerate the onset of famine.”<sup>18</sup> One recent report noted that international aid agencies, such as the Red Cross, have already stopped using Hodeida’s port, while in Mokha, Houthi-Saleh forces may have laid mines in the harbor before it was seized by the Saudi-led coalition.<sup>19</sup>

### **March 2017 Strike on Migrant Boat off the Coast of Hodeida**

In late March 2017, a military helicopter fired at a boat of Somali migrants 30 miles off the coast of Hodeida killing 42 people. The refugees were leaving Yemen for Sudan and had departed from Hodeida port. The United Nations has called for an inquiry into the attack. The Saudi-led coalition has denied responsibility and has stated that Hodeida port should be placed under United Nations supervision to “facilitate the flow of humanitarian supplies to the Yemeni people, while at the same time ending the use of the port for weapons smuggling and people trafficking.” Somalia’s foreign minister, Abdisalam Omer, has accused the Saudi-led coalition of carrying out the strike.

In 2016, the United States took steps to repair the port of Hodeida by providing the World Food Program with funds to purchase four replacement cranes which had been damaged in previous Saudi-led coalition airstrikes. However, the cranes have not been delivered to Yemen and are being stored in Dubai. According to one account, the World Food Program received permission from the Saudi-led coalition to deliver the cranes to Hodeida in early 2017, but permission was eventually revoked due to concern over ongoing military operations in the area.<sup>20</sup>

In March 2017, several House members wrote a letter to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urging him to “use all U.S. diplomatic tools to help open the Yemeni port of Hodeida to international humanitarian aid organizations to allow them to import food, fuel and medicine into northern Yemen and save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Yemeni children who face starvation.”

## **Iranian Arms Shipments to the Houthi-Saleh Forces**

Recent statements by U.S. officials indicate that Iran has increased weapons shipments to Houthi-Saleh forces in Yemen. In February 2017, Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Qods Force, reportedly pledged to increase Iran’s

<sup>16</sup> “New Yemen offensive looks to Break Deadlock,” *Agence France Presse*, January 9, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> “Government Advance adds to Famine Concerns,” *Economist Intelligence Unit*, March 2, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> “UN says Seven Million Yemenis on Brink of Starvation,” *Middle East Online*, February 21, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> “Escalation in Ship Attacks Pushes Yemen towards Starvation,” *Reuters*, March 6, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “U.S. Plan to help Yemenis obtain Humanitarian Aid Falter, amid Growing Food Crisis,” *Washington Post*, March 15, 2017.

assistance to Houthi-Saleh forces.<sup>21</sup> In late October 2016, after Houthi-Saleh forces targeted U.S. warships in the Bab Al Mandab, Vice Admiral Kevin Donegan, the head of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, said “We believe that Iran is connected to this.”<sup>22</sup> The vice admiral also noted that since April 2015, U.S. warships have intercepted five Iranian shipments of weaponry to Houthi-Saleh forces.<sup>23</sup> In September 2015, coalition naval forces, which have blockaded Yemen’s ports, seized an Iranian fishing boat carrying, according to a coalition spokesperson, taking “18 anti-armored concourse shells, 54 anti-tank shells, shell-battery kits, firing guidance systems, launchers and binoculars’ batteries.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to maritime smuggling, Iran reportedly also has used overland routes through Oman to ship arms to Houthi-Saleh forces. According to one unnamed U.S. official, “We have been concerned about the recent flow of weapons from Iran into Yemen and have conveyed those concerns to those who maintain relations with the Houthis, including the Omani government.”<sup>25</sup>

Other recent reports surrounding Iranian support for Houthi-Saleh forces include<sup>26</sup>:

- On February 5, 2017, Houthi-Saleh forces declared that an extended long-range Scud missile (“Burkan-2”) they had developed had struck deep into Saudi Arabian territory, landing near a military base near Al Muzahimiyah, southwest of the capital Riyadh. According to one report, “the unveiling of the Burkan-2 is likely to heighten suspicions that Iran is helping Yemen’s rebel forces to develop their ballistic missile capabilities.”<sup>27</sup>
- In late January 2017, the UAE claimed that it had destroyed an “Iranian military drone” stationed in the port of Mokha.<sup>28</sup>
- On January 30, 2017, a Houthi-Saleh unmanned, remote-controlled craft filled with explosives attacked a Saudi frigate (Al Madinah). Some observers have charged that Iran may have played a role in supplying the equipment used to create what some sources have referred to as a “drone boat.”<sup>29</sup>
- In January 2017, the United Nations UNSCR 2140 Committee Meeting on Panel of Experts’ issued its final report, concluding, among other things, that although there had possibly been small-scale shipments of weapons, it had not seen sufficient evidence to confirm any direct large-scale supply from Iran.<sup>30</sup> The Panel noted that “there are indicators that anti-tank guided weapons being supplied to the Houthi or Saleh forces are of Iranian manufacture.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “Iran Steps up Support for Houthis in Yemen’s War – Sources,” *Reuters*, March 21, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> “U.S. Officials: Iran Supplying Weapons to Yemen’s Houthi Rebels,” *NBC News*, October 27, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> “US intercepts Multiple Shipments of Iranian Weapons going to Houthis in Yemen,” *CNN*, October 28, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> “Weapons Bound for Yemen Seized on Iran Boat: Coalition,” *Reuters*, September 30, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> “Exclusive: Iran steps up Weapons Supply to Yemen’s Houthis via Oman—Officials,” *Reuters*, October 20, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> See, “Maritime Interdictions of Weapon Supplies to Somalia and Yemen: Deciphering a Link to Iran,” *Conflict Armament Research*, November 2016.

<sup>27</sup> “Analysis: New Yemeni ballistic Missile hints at Iranian Assistance,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 8, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> “UAE Airstrike reportedly Destroyed Iranian UAV in Yemen,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, February 3, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “New Houthi Weapon Emerges: A Drone Boat,” *Defense News*, February 19, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> “Yemen: Political and Humanitarian Briefing and Sanctions Committee Meeting,” *What’s in Blue*, January 25, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Letter dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council, January 31, 2017.

- In early January 2017, the Australian government released photographs of anti-armored weapons seized from a smuggling vessel off of Yemen's coast. The rocket propelled grenades displayed in the pictures are believed to have been manufactured in Iran.<sup>32</sup>

## The Coalition's Maritime Blockade and Delivery of Emergency Aid

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216 authorizes member states to prevent the transfer or sale of arms to the Houthis or to former President Saleh and also allows Yemen's neighbors to inspect cargo suspected of carrying arms to Houthi fighters. Iran reportedly continues to support Houthi militias with weapons shipments, fueling the resolve of the Saudi-led coalition to thwart Iranian weapons smuggling by sea. However, while the coalition's naval blockade has periodically intercepted Iranian arms shipments, it also has slowed the delivery of humanitarian aid. Near the Red Sea port city of Hodeida, which is controlled by Houthi-Saleh forces, ships filled with food and fuel routinely sit off-shore, as Arab coalition vessels search them for illicit arms.<sup>33</sup>

The UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) is a UN-led operation designed to inspect incoming sea cargo to Yemen for illicit weapons. UNVIM can inspect cargo, while also ensuring that humanitarian aid is delivered in a timely manner. Its participants are the European Union, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

**Figure 2. Houthi-Saleh Forces Display the "Burkan-2" Missile**



**Source:** An image released by the pro Houthi-Saleh SABA News Agency on February 6, 2017, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, February 8, 2017

<sup>32</sup> "Arms Seized Off Coast of Yemen Appear to Have Been Made in Iran," *New York Times*, January 10, 2017

<sup>33</sup> "Arab Coalition Navy Inspections Paralyze Yemen Food Shipments," *Reuters*, September 10, 2015. Reportedly, the United States has said that commercial vessels off the coast of Yemen should only be inspected when there are "reasonable grounds" to suspect illicit arms shipments. See, "U.S. tells U.N. it Wants to See Boost in Shipping into War-Torn Yemen," *Reuters*, September 30, 2015.

## Humanitarian Situation

In a country of approximately 27.4 million people with chronic natural resource and food shortfalls, Yemen is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Public health figures and statistics below indicate the degree of human suffering.

- According to the World Food Program, an estimated 7.3 million Yemenis are in need of immediate food aid. According to UNICEF, as many as 462,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.
- According to the World Health Organization, 14.8 million people lack access to basic health care.
- There are over 2 million internally displaced persons in Yemen.<sup>34</sup>
- Since March 2015, 10,000 children under the age of five have perished from preventable diseases such as diarrhea and pneumonia.

Aid agencies consider Yemen as one of the current “four famines” (in or near-famine - the others being South Sudan, Somalia, and northeastern Nigeria). In March 2017, the World Food Program reported that while Yemen is not yet a full-blown famine, 60% of Yemenis, or 17 million people, are in “crisis” or “emergency” food situations.

## Yemen’s Banking Crisis

Approximately a quarter of all Yemenis’ livelihoods depend on the salary of a public sector employee. Government salaries are paid by the Central Bank, which, throughout the current conflict, had managed to stay relatively apolitical. However, after the August 2016 breakdown in peace talks, President Hadi moved the Central Bank’s operations to Aden, accusing Houthi-Saleh forces of adding thousands of militiamen to the Ministry of Defense’s payroll, which had been drawing down \$100 million a month in foreign reserves.<sup>35</sup> With total reserves dwindling, President Hadi announced in late February 2017 that Saudi Arabia would provide a two billion dollar deposit in the Central Bank in Aden to shore up the [Yemeni] riyal.

## Transnational Terrorist Groups Operating in Yemen

### Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has been described by U.S. officials as “the most active and dangerous affiliate of al-Qa’ida today,”<sup>36</sup> with “several thousand adherents and fighters” inside of Yemen.<sup>37</sup> The group has operated in Yemen since 2009, and its chief area of activity has been in the southern provinces that were formerly part of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, which reunited with northern Yemen in 1990. After unification, political and economic power became concentrated in the hands of northern leaders and tribes, and AQAP has benefitted from southern resentment directed against the government.

<sup>34</sup> USAID, Yemen Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #6, Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, February 17, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> “Central Bank Crisis Risks Famine in Yemen,” *International Crisis Group*, September 29, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> The White House, *Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the War Powers Resolution*, June 13, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Transcript, CIA Director John Brennan before the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, June 16, 2016.

In 2010, the United States designated AQAP as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). On October 4, 2012, the State Department designated Ansar al Sharia (AAS), AQAP's local militia, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

According to the State Department's 2015 Country Reports on Terrorism, AQAP has continued to take advantage of the political and security vacuum created by the ongoing fighting between the Saudi-led coalition and Houthi-Saleh forces. The conflict between these forces has contributed to AQAP's attempted expansion in the southern and eastern parts of Yemen since 2015. According to the International Crisis Group:

AQAP is stronger than it has ever been. While Islamic State has dominated headlines in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, in Yemen, al Qaeda has been the success story. Over the course of the country's failed political transition and civil war, it has exploited state collapse, shifting alliances, a burgeoning war economy and growing sectarianism to expand its support base, challenge state authority and even govern territory at times.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps more than any other AQ affiliate, AQAP has attempted to carry out attacks in the United States and Europe. Between 2009 and 2012, AQAP was behind three attempts to down U.S.-bound commercial airliners, and officials note that the group likely "still harbors this intent and substantial capability to carry out such a plot."<sup>39</sup> In early 2015, AQAP claimed to have directed and funded the attack against the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine in Paris.<sup>40</sup>

In December 2016, the outgoing Administration outlined what had been the contours of U.S. counterterrorism policy toward AQAP under President Obama. According to a White House report:

The U.S. military continues to work closely with the Government of Yemen to dismantle operationally and ultimately eliminate the threat posed by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). U.S. joint efforts have resulted in direct action, including airstrikes, against a limited number of AQAP operatives and senior leaders who posed a terrorist threat to the United States. The United States has also deployed small numbers of U.S. military personnel to Yemen to support operations against AQAP, including support for operations to capture AQAP leaders and key personnel. Additionally, on October 12, 2016, the United States conducted military strikes on radar facilities in Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen in response to anti-ship cruise missile launches that threatened U.S. Navy warships in the international waters of the Red Sea on October 9 and October 12, 2016. The targeted radar facilities were involved in the October 9, 2016 launches and other recent attacks.<sup>41</sup>

After taking office, President Trump reportedly authorized an increase in U.S. airstrikes against AQAP.<sup>42</sup> In early March 2017, the United States reportedly conducted over 40 airstrikes against

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<sup>38</sup> "Military Strikes Are No Simple Answer to al-Qaeda's Rise in Yemen," *International Crisis Group*, February 1, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Testimony of former NCTC Director Matthew Olsen before the House Homeland Security Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee, Joint Hearing on Terrorism Outlook, November 18, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> "Al Qaeda in Yemen Claims Responsibility for Charlie Hebdo Attack," *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States' Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations, White House, December 2016.

<sup>42</sup> "U.S. Air Campaign in Yemen Killed Guantánamo Ex-Prisoner," *New York Times*, March 6, 2017.

AQAP inside Yemen, which U.S. officials said were coordinated with the Hadi government and were concentrated in the governorates of Abyan, Al Bayda and Shabwah.<sup>43</sup>

### **AQAP Attacks against Americans in Yemen**

The following is a list of AQAP attacks against Americans and U.S. government personnel in Yemen. It does not include U.S. combat deaths in military operations inside Yemen. Since Yemeni and Saudi militants merged to form AQAP in 2009, no U.S. civilians have been killed by a direct AQAP terrorist attack in the continental United States. However, the late Yemeni-American cleric and AQAP terrorist Anwar al Awlaki either directly motivated or indirectly inspired others to commit terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, such as the mass killing at Ford Hood, Texas, in November 2009. The most lethal Al Qaeda attack against the United States inside Yemen was the bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000, when an explosives-laden motorboat detonated alongside the U.S. Navy destroyer while it was docked at the Yemeni port of Aden, killing 17 U.S. servicemen and wounding 39 others.

- On December 6, 2014, AQAP militants shot and killed American journalist Luke Somers, who had been held hostage since 2013, during a joint U.S.-Yemeni rescue attempt.
- On March 11, 2012, AQAP gunmen on motorcycles shot to death a 29-year-old American teacher working in Taiz, Yemen named Joel Wesley Shrum. He had been an employee of the non-governmental organization International Training Development. The FBI and the U.S. Department of State have offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the arrest of any individual who committed, conspired to commit, or aided or abetted in the murder of U.S. citizen Joel Wesley Shrum.
- Months before the official formation of AQAP, in September 2008, Yemeni militants attacked the entrance of the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a, killing 17 people including six of the attackers. One American, Susan Elbaneh, was killed.

To date, reported U.S. strikes against AQAP have led to the killings of several high value AQAP targets, including:

- AQAP leader and deputy leader of AQ central Nasser al Wuhayshi (June 2015).
- Nasser bin Ali al Ansi, AQAP leader who claimed responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris (April 2015).
- Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaysh, AQAP's theological guide and a former detainee at Guantanamo Naval Station, Cuba (April 2015).
- Fahd al Quso, a longtime Yemeni militant wanted by the F.B.I. for his role in the 2000 bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole* (May 2012).
- extremist cleric/U.S.-citizen Anwar al Awlaki (September 2011).

<sup>43</sup> "Yemen Airstrikes Not Guided By Intel from SEAL Raid: Senior Official," *Military.com*, March 3, 2017.

### January 2017 Counterterrorism Raid Inside Yemen

A recent counterterrorism raid in Yemen generated debate regarding the operation's success following the death of Navy SEAL William "Ryan" Owens. The raid also cost the United States a \$75 million aircraft and potentially claimed the lives of between four and twelve Yemeni civilians, including several children, one of whom was a U.S. citizen. The raid was the Trump Administration's first acknowledged counterterror operation.

On January 29, a team of Emirati and U.S. Special Forces entered the remote Yemeni village of Yaklaa at approximately 1:00 a.m. to target AQAP-sympathizer and local tribal leader Abdul Raouf al Dhahab.<sup>44</sup> Despite his status as a counterterrorism target, Al Dhahab had recently agreed to fight the Houthi rebels in support of the U.S.-backed Hadi government. Yemeni officials report that U.S. forces used nonlethal grenades and suppressed rifles as they approached the residences of al Dhahab and another target. In a surprise counterattack, AQAP fighters responded with gunfire and grenades as they retreated to nearby buildings with women and children. Unable to disengage, American forces retreated under the cover of air support. A Marine Quick Reaction Force aircraft heading to assist the raid had to be scuttled after losing power and landing in enemy territory. The counterattack wounded Navy SEAL Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens, who later died of his wounds. Al Dhahab was also killed. Yemeni officials claim at least eight women and seven children, ages 3-13, died in the attack, including the daughter of the late American-born AQAP leader Anwar al Awlaki. The Defense Department has since confirmed that children were among the casualties.

## The Islamic State

The Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIL, ISIS, or the Arabic acronym Da'esh) claims to have several provinces operating in Yemen, where it has targeted Zaydi Shi'a, including their mosques. These types of attacks may increase sectarian tension in Yemen, which, though wracked by war, has not traditionally had the kind of sectarian animosity that has plagued states such as Iraq and Lebanon. Leadership and tactical disputes appear to have limited the Yemen-based IS affiliates' success to date, as has competition from rivals in the larger and more deeply rooted AQAP organization.

## U.S. Policy

During the last year of the Obama Administration, U.S. policy toward the conflict in Yemen shifted toward a more nuanced approach after initially emphasizing strong support for the Saudi-led coalition's campaign and the restoration of Hadi's presidency. The Obama Administration called for a political settlement that the parties themselves negotiate, emphasizing that "we're on the side squarely of the Yemeni people,"<sup>45</sup> while also stressing that Saudi Arabia itself is under daily attack and has a right to defend itself. The Administration sought to work multilaterally through the United Nations to pursue a cease-fire that would—in the expressed hopes of the Administration—ultimately jumpstart negotiations toward a comprehensive political settlement to the conflict.

Given that those efforts did not succeed, some observers expect the Trump Administration to take a different approach toward the conflict by more openly trying to deter Iranian support for Houthi-Saleh forces and refraining from openly criticizing the Saudi-led coalition's conduct of the war.<sup>46</sup> In mid-February 2017, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson held a meeting on Yemen with counterparts from the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Nations to see how the international community can work together to strengthen

<sup>44</sup>"A Raid in Remote Yemen and a SEAL's Death still Reverberate for Trump," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> John Kirby, Spokesperson, U.S. State Department, Daily Press Briefing, Washington, DC, November 1, 2016.

<sup>46</sup>"Washington Turns Its Focus to Yemen, Pleasing Saudis," *Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 2017.



cooperation to resolve the conflict. Afterward, Secretary Tillerson noted “the urgent need for the unfettered delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Yemen.”

In early February 2017, the United States sent the guided missile destroyer *USS Cole* to position itself off the coast of Yemen on a presence operation following a Houthi-Saleh “drone boat” attack on a Saudi frigate. In 2000, 17 American sailors were killed by an Al Qaeda (AQ) attack against the *USS Cole* while it docked in the port of Aden. Two other U.S. naval vessels, the *USS Makin Island*, an amphibious assault ship, and the *USS Comstock*, a dock landing ship, are operating near the Bab al Mandab strait.<sup>47</sup>

## Debating U.S. Military Support for the Saudi-led Coalition<sup>48</sup>

As the Saudi-led coalition’s military campaign has continued, repeated reports of Yemeni civilian casualties resulting from air strikes has fueled intensifying international criticism of Saudi policy. Congress has debated the provision of U.S. military assistance to Saudi Arabia in the context of the conflict, and the Senate in September 2016 rejected a proposal (S.J.Res. 39) that would have blocked a proposed sale of tanks to the kingdom.

In the wake of an October 2016 Saudi airstrike on a funeral hall in Sanaa that killed 140 people, the Obama Administration announced that it was initiating a review of U.S. security assistance to Saudi Arabia. In December 2016, press reports cited Obama Administration officials as stating that a planned direct commercial sale (DCS) of 16,000 Raytheon-manufactured precision guided munitions (or PGMSs), worth approximately \$350-\$390 million, would not proceed and that U.S. intelligence sharing would be further limited in favor of enhanced training for the Saudi Air Force.<sup>49</sup> The Obama Administration noted that U.S.-Saudi intelligence cooperation against AQAP would continue, as well as U.S. support for the defense of Saudi Arabia’s border with Yemen. The United States also said that it would continue to refuel Saudi aircraft. A U.S. Central Command Air Force spokesperson reported in February 2017 that U.S. military refueling missions for Saudi-coalition operations over Yemen increased by 50% in 2016 relative to 2015 and are ongoing.<sup>50</sup>

Press reporting in March, 2017 has suggested that the Trump Administration may consider moving forward with the sale of the munitions kits, but as of March 21, the Administration had not moved to formally notify Congress of its intent to do so. One report suggests that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson approved an unspecified “resumption of weapons sales” to Saudi Arabia.<sup>51</sup> The last major U.S. defense sale of PGMs to Saudi Arabia was in November 2015, when the Obama Administration notified Congress of a proposed sale, and Members did not introduce joint resolutions of disapproval during the 30-calendar-day consideration period.<sup>52</sup> In March 2017

<sup>47</sup> “Pentagon: USS Cole off Yemen Coast to Respond to Threats,” *Stars and Stripes*, February 3, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> For additional background, see: CRS Insight IN10557, *Saudi Military Campaign in Yemen Draws Congressional Attention to U.S. Arms Sales*, by Christopher M. Blanchard, Jeremy M. Sharp, and Paul K. Kerr, and CRS Report RL33533, *Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Christopher M. Blanchard

<sup>49</sup> “U.S. Blocks Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia amid Concerns Over Yemen War,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2016.

<sup>50</sup> “2 Years Into Yemen War, US Ramps Up Refueling of Saudi Jets,” *Military Times*, February 15, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> “Trump administration looks to resume Saudi Arms sale criticized as Endangering Civilians in Yemen,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> After the formal notification in November 2015, Senate Foreign Relations Committee leaders jointly requested that the Administration notify Congress 30 days prior to associated shipments. The pre-shipment notification would inform Congress that a shipment was about to occur, but would not require or preclude Congress from taking further action to modify or block the shipment.

testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Dafna Rand, former deputy assistant secretary of state at the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, testified that:

The precision-guided munitions were transferred in 2015 on the hopes that indeed, as you were saying Senator, they would enable better and more precise targeting by the Collation of the target itself. That was the argument....What we've seen since is not an improvement in the targeting and the issue itself is the target selection. It's not the precision of the target itself, but it's the choice of targets and adherence to the no strike list.<sup>53</sup>

Pursuant to Section 36(c) of the Arms Export Control Act, the executive branch may proceed with a proposed direct commercial sale (DCS) case 30 days after formally notifying Congress. If the Trump Administration were to decide to proceed with this specific DCS case or to generate a new Foreign Military Sale (FMS) or DCS case, it would have to formally notify Congress pursuant either Section 36 (b) or 36(c) and then wait at least 30 days before taking action on the proposed sale.

## **Attacks Against U.S. Naval Vessels in the Red Sea**

In October 2016, Houthi-Saleh forces reportedly launched anti-ship missiles at U.S. Navy vessels on patrol off the coast of Yemen. While no U.S. warship was damaged, a similar attack earlier in October damaged a U.S. transport ship leased by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The attacks against the U.S. ships marked the first time U.S. forces had come under direct fire in the near 20-month war.

The attacks may have been triggered by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes on October 8 that struck a funeral gathering of Houthi leaders in the capital Sana'a. Those strikes, which the coalition later described as having been mistakenly authorized, killed many civilians and prominent Houthi political and military leaders. Included among the casualties was the mayor of Sana'a, two Yemeni members of the U.N. cease-fire monitoring team, and several Houthi-Saleh high-ranking officers.

Such events in Yemen elicited a multi-pronged Obama Administration response. On the military front, the Obama Administration responded to the attacks against U.S. naval vessels by firing cruise missiles against Houthi-Saleh radar installations. The Obama Administration claimed that those attacks were conducted in self-defense and indicated that it did not want to deepen its direct involvement in the conflict. The October 8 Saudi airstrikes drew immediate condemnation and prompted the Obama Administration to initiate an "immediate review" of U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition's military campaign. U.S. support had already been reduced in the preceding months amid concern that the coalition's repeated targeting of civilians was a violation of international law. From a diplomatic angle, the Obama Administration accelerated its efforts to broker a ceasefire in the hopes of deescalating the situation.

## **U.S. Foreign Assistance to Yemen**

Since the current conflict began in March 2015, the United States has increased its humanitarian assistance to Yemen while suspending nearly all other programming. On February 11, 2015, due

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<sup>53</sup> Testimony of Dr. Dafna Rand, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, National Defense University, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, "Resolving the Conflict in Yemen: U.S. Interests, Risks, and Policy," March 9, 2017.

to the deteriorating security situation in Sana'a, the Department of State suspended embassy operations and U.S. Embassy staff was relocated out of the country.

Since March 2015, the United States has been the largest contributor of humanitarian aid to Yemen. Funds were provided to international aid organizations from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), USAID's Food for Peace (FFP), and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM).

**Table 2. Yemen Humanitarian Response**  
(in millions of dollars)

Account	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016/FY2017
IDA (USAID/OFDA)	14.974	29.574	36.987	34.858	62.029	107.588
FFP (USAID/FFP)	20.200	67.856	75.046	70.000	71.486	264.988
MRA (State/PRM)	22.500	19.738	18.885	8.900	45.300	55.050
<b>Total</b>	<b>58.346</b> (includes .672 from OTI)	<b>117.168</b>	<b>130.919</b>	<b>113.758</b>	<b>178.816</b>	<b>427.626</b>

**Source:** Yemen, Complex Emergency—USAID Factsheets.

U.S. bilateral economic funding supports basic education, maternal health, and agricultural assistance programs. Given the breakdown of Yemen's military, security assistance channeled through the State and Defense Departments has been suspended. In June 2015, the Department of Defense notified Congress that it was redirecting \$45.04 million worth of military equipment (obligated in FY2012, FY2013, and FY2014) to Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon.

**Table 3. U.S. Bilateral Assistance to Yemen: FY2014-2016**  
(in millions of dollars)

Account	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
ESF	13.000	19.200 (OCO)	29.300 (OCO)
Global Health	9.000	9.000	5.000
FMF	20.0	—	—
IMET	1.109	0.127	—
INCLE	3.000	1.000	1.000 (OCO)
NADR	3.920	3.150	6.000
DoD (1206/2282)	64.000	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>114.029</b>	<b>32.477</b>	<b>41.300</b>

**Source:** USAID Country Narrative

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