



Yemen Fact Sheet

Executive Summary

Yemen no longer has a unified government. The Zaidi Shia Muslim Al Houthi militia controls most of the Zaidi Shia areas, and other important cities in Yemen, totally about half of the population. The rest of the country is held by the official regime of President Hadi, a Sunni Arab Yemeni, and many other, sometimes independent, forces, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the Southern Movement militia, and ISIS. The various groups are all fighting (sometimes) each other and the official government to control Yemen. In response to the significant Houthi gains a few years ago, the Arab League Coalition (ALC) led by Saudi Arabia intervened and engaged in Operation Decisive Storm. The goal of this operation is to reinstall Yemeni President Hadi. U.S. involvement thus far has been limited to a supportive role.

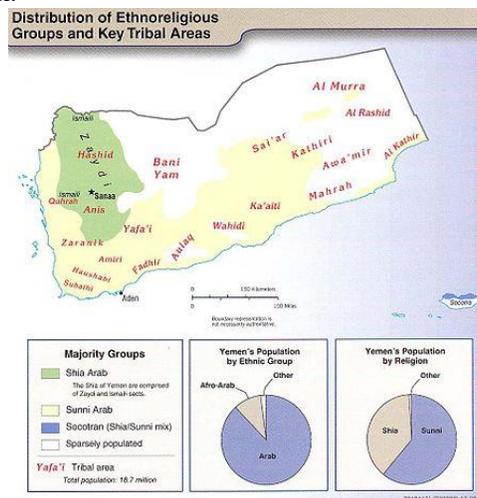
Historical Background

Yemen was originally two separate nations. The Zaidi Kingdom was established in the north after the war, later becoming the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962. South Yemen remained a British protectorate until 1967 when it became a Communist state. North and South were reunited in 1990, although in 1994 the South attempted to secede but was occupied by the North.

Yemen witnessed a revolution in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. It eventually culminated in the resignation of longtime President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the election of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in 2012. However, President Hadi was forced to flee to Aden in late January 2015 after the Houthis took control of the capital of Sana'a. In February, he [fled](#) again to Saudi Arabia after the Houthis captured Aden. In September of 2015, Aden was recaptured by the Hadi forces and the ALC, but the Hadi government has still [not yet achieved](#) stable control.

Religious Divide

Muslims [make up](#) over 99% of the 27 million people in Yemen. It is estimated that roughly 65% of Yemenis are Sunni and 35% are Zaidi Shia. The Shia tend to be concentrated in the North, while the Sunnis dominate in the South.



Bab al-Mandab strait

The Bab al-Mandab strait separates the Arabian Peninsula from east Africa and links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. About 4% of the global oil supply, much of it from Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, [passes](#) through the strait, which is 29km wide at its narrowest point. In 2013, more than 3.4 million barrels of oil a day [passed](#) through the 20-km (12-mile) wide Bab al-Mandab strait, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Houthi rebels and others are a threat to its operation. Also, anything going through the Suez Canal is feeding the Egyptian economy, which is fragile. Further, industries like liquid natural gas, [are also](#) affected.

Yemen's Military

Yemen had an [estimated](#) 66,000 regular army troops before the civil war. There [was also](#) elite military groups, numbering 80,000 to 95,000, which were originally sympathetic to Saleh. [About](#) 10,000 of the army have refused to fight, and another 10,000 have opposed the Houthis.

Factions in Yemen

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP): Also known as [Ansar-al-Sharia](#), AQAP at one point had secured about half of the Yemen coast and a quarter of the country's land, [controlling](#) more land than the Houthi rebels. AQAP has a war chest [swollen](#) by an estimated \$100 million in looted bank deposits. Until recently, when the ALC [conquered](#) it, AQAP's capitol was Mukalla, a large city in the south. When it held that city it earned up to \$2 million every day in taxes on goods and fuel coming into the port. AQAP [remains](#) in the top three threats to the U.S. and numbers [3000](#) to [7,000 fighters](#), but the group continues to grow, taking advantage of the chaos and lack of governance. AQAP generally cooperates with other Sunni groups in the conflict with the Houthi tribesmen. Al Qaeda has [compromised](#) with the pro-Hadi coalition in the past. Until recently, the ALC invasion did not target AQAP. Katherine Zimmerman, an al Qaeda expert, has written of its threat to the U.S. “[Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula] AQAP was behind at least four major attempted attacks on U.S. interests outside of Yemen, and all of those occurred when the group was weaker than it is today. AQAP is also still a key asset for the global al Qaeda network, providing overall leadership guidance, sharing expertise, and coordinating transnational attacks.” U.S. officials have [indicated](#) that American actions will remain limited to targeted airstrikes against AQAP until there is a legitimate government. The U.S. [launched](#) more than 120 strikes against AQAP and the Islamic State in Yemen in 2017, greater than the totals for 2014, 2015, and 2016 combined. The head of AQAP [is Qassim al-Rimi](#).

Al-Houthi: (AKA Ansarollah, or God's partisans) the Al-Houthi tribesmen of Yemen are a Zaidi Shia group who inhabit the northern mountains. While they do share some basic similarities to traditional Shiism, Zaidis have several distinct beliefs that set them apart. The group was started by the Al-Houthi brothers in 1992, then called the 'Believing Youth' party. Initially a group that focused on reinvigorating Zaidism, the group became militant and radicalized in the 2000s and were a major player in the 2011 revolution. It is estimated that the Houthis have a total of [over 100,000](#) armed fighters. Iran has been a strong supporter for the Houthis, providing them with arms, training and fighters, both [by land and sea](#). Iran has [delivered](#) about 5000 Iranian and Iraqi Shiite forces into Yemen, and an unknown number of Hezbollah. Forty-four IRGC and Hezbollah operatives [have been killed or captured](#). Iran has also established a significant naval [presence](#) along the coast of Yemen. Additionally, Iranian politicians have also been providing a significant amount of political [rhetoric](#) in Tehran denouncing Saudi-led operations in Yemen. However, while the Houthis [have expressed](#) support for Iran and gratitude for Iran's assistance, they remain [more ambivalent](#) in their attitudes to Tehran than loyal and obedient proxies such as Hezbollah; although Iran [is working](#) to change this. The Houthis [control](#) over half of the population through Sana. They have been [willing](#) to attack U.S. ships – [presumably](#) under Iranian orders – though. They are [increasingly developing](#) drone technology. Iran and the Houthis have implemented massive [forced recruitment of child](#)

[soldiers](#), now some [70% of their](#) forces. The Houthis [have also routinely](#) fired ballistic missiles provided by Iran against ships and into Saudi Arabia, and Iran [has admitted](#) it ordered some of these attacks.

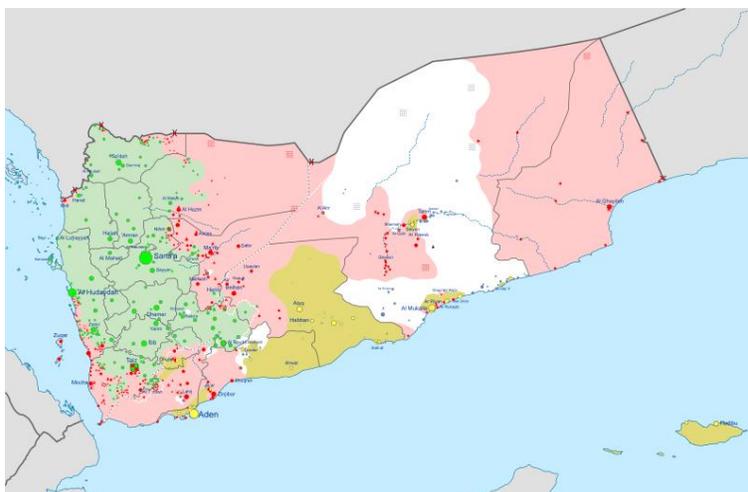
Saleh Loyalists: as former President Saleh [had used](#) prior U.S. training to cement loyalty to his regime in the armed forces, there was still a significant contingent of the Yemen army and elite forces that [stayed loyal](#) to Saleh. Saleh was a Zaidi Muslim. When Saleh aligned himself with the Houthis movement, he was instrumental in the group's gains in the South; things changed in December of 2017, when [their alliance ended](#) and [he was killed](#) in the fighting. Many of his fighters [were detained](#) by the Houthis. Control of his forces overall [may shift](#) to his son, Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh. His political party is called the General Peoples' Congress.

Southern Movement: formed in 2007, this group is a [hold-over](#) from the 1994 civil war. It aims to promote secession of the South. Although it originally opposed the Hadi government, the 5000 armed men of this Sunni group [helped oust](#) the Houthis from Aden. However, they have now [grabbed parts](#) of Aden for themselves from Hadi, who they accuse of corruption. The separatists are organized under a governing body called the Southern Transitional Council. They [are demanding](#) greater inclusion in [state welfare programs](#), object to the sale of land to government-linked northerners, and also accuse the north of hogging the profits from southern oil fields.

Hadi Loyalists: President Hadi is still considered the rightful leader of Yemen by a majority of the regional powers. He is a Sunni Muslim. He is being [backed](#) by Saudi Arabia. Hadi has at least [10,000 troops](#) loyal to him; however, a portion of these fighters are also part of other militias.

Arab League Coalition: a military coalition made up of the GCC, Egypt and select other Arab league members, which has agreed to the formulation of a military task force to help suppress the Houthis and reinstall President Hadi. The ALC is being supported by U.S. The ALC has committed [between](#) 2000 and 10,000 troops. The UAE [has provided](#) the most fighters so far – [several thousand fighters](#) – but there are also Saudis, Bahrainis, Egyptians, and Sudanese. The UAE has used American mercenaries for targeted assassinations. The UAE recently [declared](#) that hostilities for it were over. Many of the soldiers fighting in the Gulf armies are [originally](#) from Yemeni. To fight AQAP in Mukalla, the ALC [developed](#) a 10,000-strong force, including around 4,500 Yemeni troops, around 1,500 tribal fighters, and around 4,000 anti-AQAP rebels from Mukalla.

Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS): ISIS has [claimed](#) several attacks in Yemen. The group claims to have affiliates operating in the same areas in Yemen where Al Qaeda maintains presence. They are [believed](#) to have hundreds of fighters, many of whom once were part of AQAP. U.S. forces have [targeted](#) the Islamic State six times in 2017, the first of which [occurred](#) on Oct. 16, 2017.



Wiki Commons, September 2018
Green is controlled by the Houthis
Pink is controlled by the Hadi-led government
Yellow is controlled by the Southern Movement
White is controlled by AQAP forces

Operation Decisive Storm

- Started on March 25, 2015 as an attempt to repel the Houthis. Includes 9 Arab states, including 4 members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Sudan, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan.
- U.S. has provided logistical support including accelerated weapons sales, intelligence, and reconnaissance support to the Saudi-led coalition.
- Most operations thus far have consisted of Saudi-led air strikes on Houthi targets. Saudi Arabia has officially committed 150,000 troops and other members have also pledged ground [forces](#).
- Coalition forces have engaged in naval bombardments and a blockade of Yemen in an attempt to stop vessels from smuggling Iranian weapons to the Houthis. The U.S. Navy is providing support for this blockade. The Iranian navy has also [deployed](#) vessels.
- The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights office [has said](#) that coalition airstrikes remain “the leading cause of civilian casualties.”

U.S. Operations & Involvement

U.S. involvement has been limited, and focuses on giving foreign aid, drone and air strikes, special force attacks, enforcing the arms blockade, and providing surveillance and intelligence to Saudi efforts. After a U.S. attack that killed civilians and children in February of 2017, the Hadi government announced it would [reassess](#) its permission to the U.S. for airstrikes against al-Qaeda.

- 2014: U.S. anti-terror efforts in Yemen were increased. In addition to drone strikes, special operations forces [aided](#) Yemeni military in counter terror operations.
- 2015: U.S. [sends](#) USS Theodore Roosevelt carrier group and USS Normandy to Yemen to monitor Iranian vessels supplying Houthi militias.
- 2016: The Pentagon [admitted](#) that a small number of U.S. military personnel are on the ground in Yemen to root out AQAP.

Iranian Operations & Involvement

In 2018, Iran [acknowledged](#) being involved in the Yemen conflict when Mohammad Ali Jafari, the head of its elite Revolutionary Guards, said Iran “provided advisory assistances” to its allies in

Yemen. A February 2015 [report](#) by the CRS explains that Iran is directly supporting the Houthi movement. It is [likely that](#) Iran provides missiles. Here is some more evidence:

- In 2013: The Yemen military [intercepted](#) a weapons shipment sent by an IRGC source.
- In 2014: An Iranian official [claimed](#) that the IRGC had hundreds of trainers in Yemen.
- In 2015 and 2016, five Iranian weapons shipment [were intercepted](#).
- In 2017, Iran [boosted its](#) support.
- In 2018, after the Trump administration left the JCPOA, the Iranian support for the Houthis [decreased](#).

The Civil War

The continuing civil war in Yemen has resulted in [50,000 dead](#) and [almost](#) 30,00 injured. A significant portion of these [are from](#) the ALC air attacks. 22 million people in Yemen's population [are now](#) in need of humanitarian assistance. Half the population of Yemen - 14 million people - [are facing "pre-famine conditions"](#), the UN has warned. As of mid-July, [more than](#) 1,790 people have died from the cholera countrywide, and another 350,000 are infected. That is approximately 1 in every 90 Yemenis. More than 2.5 million have [been displaced](#). The country's electric grid, sewer system, and public services [are no longer operational](#). The cost from Yemen's civil war [is more than](#) \$14 billion. Many children have been [forced](#) into the war. More than 100,000 children [are estimated](#) to have died from preventable disease, and [over 2 million](#) are malnourished. All sides have committed human rights abuses. There have been periodic UN talks between the Houthis and GPC and Hadi and his allies, which have led to partial ceasefires. None have lasted. Most of the fighting in the south has ceased, with the Hadi forces officially in control – [although often in name only](#) – and the Hadi forces and their allies have [begun](#) to move north, [including to San'a](#). The Houthis have fired missiles against [U.S.](#) and [other](#) ships, as well as Saudi targets, [like Mecca](#). The Houthi government, which controls the capital San'a, [has](#) for more than a year been taking around \$100 million a month from the central bank there to pay their fighters' salaries. [Because](#) of the Saudi blockade, the Houthi-run administration is on the verge of running out of money. The Hadi led government [has attempted](#) to switch the treasury to Aden's central bank. In 2015, Yemen's economy [shrank](#) by about 28%. Currently, the Saudi-led coalition is attempting to [oust](#) the Houthis from the port city of Hodeidah, which is where desperately needed aid enters. It seems [more and more likely](#) that Yemen will eventually be partitioned into two nations (again).

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