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Yemen Crisis after 2015: The Attitudes of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

In this study, using the descriptive-analytical method, we discuss the main factors in the formation of the Yemen crisis, as well as the attitudes of the two Arab states and of the two neighboring countries, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in the Yemen crisis. It is concluded that this crisis stems not only from the role of local actors, but also from the role of regional and global actors, who played a decisive role in shaping and exacerbating the Yemen crisis. Regional players in the post-2015 crisis include the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which showed contradictory behavior. Saudi Arabia's targets in its attack on Yemen have a greater military and security dimension. The political and economic objectives of the United Arab Emirates, which is Riyadh's most important ally in this war, have been at a different level from those of Saudi Arabia. This can be seen in Abu Dubai Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed's aspirations to expand his country's influence, to become a major player in the region.

Keyword: conflicts in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates; crisis in Yemen; geopolitical analysis.

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Crisis de Yemen después de 2015: las actitudes de Arabia Saudita y los Emiratos Árabes Unidos

Resumen

En este estudio, utilizando el método descriptivo-analítico, se discuten los principales factores en la formación de la crisis de Yemen, así como las Actitudes de los dos estados árabes y también de los dos países vecinos, Arabia Saudita y Emiratos Árabes Unidos, en la crisis de Yemen. Se concluye que esta crisis se deriva no solo del papel de los actores locales, sino también del papel de actores regionales y globales, que jugaron un papel decisivo en la configuración y exacerbación de la crisis de Yemen. Entre los actores regionales de la crisis después de 2015 se encuentran los Emiratos Árabes Unidos y Arabia Saudita, que mostraron un comportamiento contradictorio. Los objetivos de Arabia Saudita en su ataque a Yemen tienen una mayor dimensión militar y de seguridad. Los objetivos políticos y económicos de los Emiratos Árabes Unidos, que es el aliado más importante de Riad en esta guerra, han estado a un nivel diferente de los de Arabia Saudita. Esto se puede ver en las aspiraciones del príncipe heredero de Abu Dubai, Mohammed bin Zayed, de expandir la influencia de su país, para convertirse en un actor importante en la región.

Palabras clave: conflictos en Medio Oriente; Arabia Saudita; Emiratos Árabes Unidos; crisis en Yemen; análisis geopolítico.

Introduction

The Republic of Yemen faces a variety of political challenges that consistently endanger unity and stability of the country. Its political landscape is deeply divided between tribal confederations, Islamist movements, and economic and military interest groups. Former President Ali Abdullah Salih skillfully applied a division and rule policy for most of his administration. This policy involved patronage to incite the well-being of individual tribes, or the effective manipulation of tribal traditions to turn them against each other if necessary. Salih once described his management style as: “dancing on the head of the snakes” (Berger *et al.*, 2012: 2).

The Yemeni regime ruled the country with an iron fist during its long years of power (1978-2011), but the country was not devoid of political opposition, which enjoyed a great reputation among the masses. This opposition was represented by political parties gathered under the name of “Joint Meeting Parties”. Although there were other opposition parties that came to the point of arming against the regime; their goals, orientations and visions were different. For example, it is seen that it is spread throughout the

country with the Houthis in the north and northwest, but in Al Qaeda, which is active in the south and southwest. This undoubtedly demonstrated the lack of affection for the southern opposition, the bloody events of 1994, the Yemeni regime that used various methods to stop the southern movement, as well as the southern opposition that aimed to revive the democratic and popular Yemeni state that disappeared with the declaration of union with the north in 1990. This incident had a negative effect on the relations of the southerners with the regime. The Southern Movement does not hide the opposition activities not only to the regime but also to the union (Nabeel, 2012).

Protests in Yemen began on January 15 2011, with a student demonstration marching towards the Tunisian embassy to support the Tunisian uprising. The demonstration called for cheers in support of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's departure from the government and the Tunisian uprising. The actions lasted five days, then stopped for two days, and people took to the streets again. It seems that the overthrow of the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali regime on January 14 encouraged the people of Yemen to protest and demand Saleh's departure. The measures taken by the Yemeni government did not prevent the protesters from demonstration on the streets, not even the government's condemnations. While Saudi Arabia and Iran are among the main foreign actors of the conflict, there are also Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Often they follow their own strategic and security agenda, independent of conflict. Each of these countries supports at least one faction.

Iranian Houthis sponsor the Yemen government of Saudi Arabia, Qatar Islah, and the UAE STC and Joint Forces. According to a 2018 report by the UN Panel of Experts, forces loyal to the STC are trained and funded by the UAE, but operating largely outside the Yemeni military command and control structure, "undermining the authority of the legitimate government." Oman supports local tribes on the western border, and since 2016 trying to be an important mediator in the conflict by bringing the Houthis together with the Saudis (Palik and Jalal, 2020). By far the most significant conflict area with Iran was in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates jointly intervened in the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels since March 2015. For the Emirates, however, the goal of pushing back Iran has always been secondary to the struggle. Islamists in the (Sunni) Arab World: The Yemen war has repeatedly highlighted differences of opinion between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, with the UAE finally breaking up and withdrawing from its union in July 2019 (Steinberg, 2020).

1. Yemen

Yemen is a country divided into north and south for centuries. The northern part has mountainous and impassable areas and the southern part has a flat area. This made northern Yemen less vulnerable from the start due to its mountainous and impenetrable terrain. Especially since the rule of the Zaydi Imams in this region was established in 818, its cultural and social context has been relatively stable and has been shaped differently from the rest of the country. Rather, it is a hilly area of the southern part and little natural because it faces the Strait of Bab al-Mendep on the shores of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

It has been influenced by different cultures and communications and has always been attacked by different governments. As example, before Islam, the Romans and later the Ismailis, the Ayyubids and finally England dominated the region, especially the port of Eden (Nourmohammadi *et al.*, 2013). While the coastal regions of the country, especially in the south, were under the rule of the British, the northern regions dominated by Zaydis remained under the control of Imam Yahya. Imam Yahya continued to manage the bureaucracy with them by not sending the Ottoman officials who stayed in Yemen.

In this period, although the principles of the Zeydi sect were the dominant in social life, the administrative mechanism operated in the way that the Turks established. The country, which was officially accepted as Ottoman land until 1923, continued to be dominated by Turkish bureaucrats until 1926 (Yıldırım, 2015). When Imam Yahya was assassinated in the uprising in 1948, his son Imam Ahmet took over. Ahmed suppressed the uprising in a very bloody way with the help of Saudi Arabia and ruled the country until 1962, neutralizing his rivals who announced that they would end the feudal regime in Northern Yemen (Arslan, 2015). The Arab Republic of Yemen, established after the overthrow of Ahmet in 1962, received a nationalist VIEW during successive civil and military regimes. There were social inequalities in the social and mostly tribal structure in Yemen and the expulsion of some groups.

The uneven distribution of government resources has corrupted the Yemeni government, known as the government of thieves, who had serious political and economic problems. The existence of different tribes and numerous denominational and religious divisions practically transformed Yemen into a fragmented society (Amiri and kyani, 2017). In the northern part of Yemen where Zaydi Imams were dominant, clashes took place between the supporters of the Republican Jamal Abdul Nasser and the supporters of the Imam government, known as the monarchists. Finally, in 1962, the Republicans triumphed and led to the formation of the Yemen Arab Republic in the north (Mokhtari and Shams, 2017).

Although the negotiations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia started as of 1964, the fact that they did not get any results before the 1967 War created a great weakness for the Arab states. Negotiations between the two states accelerated after the 1967 War and withdrew Egyptian troops, while Saudi Arabia agreed not to help the royalists. However, the real determinant was a development within Yemen. In Yemen, where there was a wide opposition in the society as well as the internal party opposition, Sallal was removed from power in a coup on 5 November 1967, less than a week after Egypt withdrew its troops (Ari, 2012).

At the same time, the predominantly Sunni southern region of Yemen gained its independence under the name of the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen, which was taken over by a Soviet-backed Marxist government. After this move in Yemen conflicts upraised from 1971 to 1972. With the passage of time and rapid political developments in both northern and southern Yemen, the first summit for the unification of the two countries was held in August 1983. In November 1988, the two countries signed an agreement to unite the two countries. Finally, on May 22, 1990, with the approval of the deputies, the two countries united to form the Republic of Yemen (Fozi, 2012).

The United Republic of Yemen, which was founded in 1990 with the unification of North and South Yemen, was ruled by Ali Abdullah Salih until 2011. In addition to the 2004 conflict, there were six wars between the Yemeni government and the Houthis between 2005 and 2009. One of the most important of these conflicts was the 2007 war, in which the government and the Houthi signed a ceasefire under the mediation of Qatar. This treaty was violated a few months later and led to the Fourth War. Another important war was the 2009 war in which the USA, Jordan and Saudi Arabia also intervened (Dehshiri and Hosseini, 2017).

In late 2010 and early 2011, President Salih was enjoying an overwhelming vision of political domination. He portrayed himself successfully while hosting the GCC Cup football tournament in Aden in December 2010 as proof that his control over the South was undisputable. In the Far North, Salih was convinced that he had overcome the Houthi threat and that the stagnation in the war would continue. However, Salih's sense of trust turned out to be unfounded. When the streets exploded in February 2011, the government was taken by surprise (Feierstein, 2019). The protests have been seen to be organized and led by a coalition of Yemeni opposition parties (Joint Meeting Parties or JMP). Salih was forced to make various economic concessions and political promises, but his moves failed to appease the protests. Numerous casualties were reported as the security forces' reaction to the protests was heavy (Arraf, 2017).

After the popular uprisings that swept the Arab world in 2011, including Yemen, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) mediated a transition plan for

Yemen. As part of Yemen's long-standing former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's transition to President Hadi, all of Yemen's various political groups (565 individual delegates) attended the National Dialogue Conference (NDC).) It was launched in 2013-2014. This conference aimed to resolve all of Yemen's prominent political issues, including addressing calls for greater autonomy in the south (Sharp, 2019).

Despite the differences, the NDC managed to agree on fundamental principles to continue the transition process, including extending Hadi's term for another year. The crucial point of contention in this context was the future federal structure of the state. A commission specifically tasked with finding a compromise suggested dividing Yemen into six main regions. However, both the Houthis and the southern separatist movement rejected this proposal. Military conflicts escalated some problems such as the future constitution and power-sharing arrangements remained unresolved. The Houthi movement, which previously operated only locally in the far north, managed to expand its area of control afterwards. In a tactical alliance between Saleh's supporters and the security forces, they managed to defeat their main rival in the north and in September 2014 became the de facto rulers of the capital Sana'a (Popp, 2015).

Four main streams in Yemen actively play a political role in the developments of Yemen;

1. Congress movement is attributed to former President Ali Abdullah Salih;
2. The Wahhabi-leaning Reform Party, also supported by Saudi Arabia;
3. South Stream covers most of Yemen. Which has three approaches of independence, pro-federalism and minimalism
4. The Zaydis and Houthis in various parts of the country, especially in the Saada region, are said to make up about 40 percent of the population of Yemen (Eltyaminia *et al.*, 2017).

2. Yemen: Saudi Arabia

The importance of Saudi Arabia in terms of Yemen policy stems from the different geopolitical situation which is beyond geography and neighborhood values. It is one of the most important vital and safe areas that cannot be ignored or neglected. Every time this country became an arena for regional competition, Saudi Arabia drew direct military intervention in Yemen with aim to prevent rival countries in the region from falling into the hands (Symposium Report, 2015).

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is particularly aware of Saudi Arabia's sensitivity towards its leadership role in the region with respect to Yemen, even one analyst observed that Saudi Arabia has not changed since the 1930s. This does not mean that the UAE is indifferent to its neighbor's problems. The UAE federal government has consistently pledged large amounts of development assistance to Yemen but acknowledged significant problems in paying such aid due to corruption and other issues (Burke, 2012).

"Keep Yemen weak" is a phrase that King Abdul-Aziz allegedly recommended to his sons on his deathbed in 1953 (Stenslie, 2013). Since the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932, it has clashed with Yemen on political, border and ideological issues, and this conflict led to the 1934 war and the victory of Ibn Saud. In the 23-point Taif Treaty, King Abdulaziz included the disputed territories (Najran, Jizan and Asar) in addition to bringing war compensation to Imam Yahya. However, there was an article in the agreement extending the agreement for twenty years. Successive Yemeni governments, after signing this treaty, did not formally see this as the basis for resolving territorial disputes with Saudi Arabia and insisted on the right of appeal. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has always tried to win the Yemen agreement to finalize this agreement and determine the borders of the two countries accordingly, but this agreement did not end the territorial dispute (Ahmadi and Khosravi, 2017).

In the 1970s, the Saudis used their economic strength and contacts with prominent Yemeni politicians to disband the Yemen Alliance and prevent the expansion of the former Soviet-backed South Yemen government. Part of this link was in the form of monthly salaries to statesmen and tribes. Indeed, during these two decades the biggest threat to the Saudis in general and to Yemen in particular has been leftist groups. Saudi Arabia has directly and simultaneously supported the Yemeni government and its military and political leaders to counter this threat (Sardar and Mousavi, 2015).

Conservative Saudi Arabia, fearing President Salih's support for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, reversed its historical support for the North and intervened on behalf of the secular socialist South. President Salih described the civil war as a struggle between Islam and atheist socialism, a measure aimed at reviving the Yemeni Islamists and recruiting veterans who recently returned from the Soviet-Afghan war. "The aim was to bring together Arab nationalist, Islamist and socialist actors, each with different ideologies, different goals, and different perspectives on the conflict in which they were involved" (Swift, 2012: 3).

With the signing of the Jeddah Border Agreement between the two countries in 2000, which was based on the acceptance of the Taif Agreement, the long-standing dispute and demarcation of the borders between the two parties on disputed areas came to an end. Relations between the two

countries have shifted from conflict to constructive engagement to improve the security situation in border areas (Hemati and Ebrahimi, 2018).

In early November 2009, Saudi Arabia entered into military operations against the Houthis. The action came after constant rumors about covert Saudi military operations at the border against Houthi rebels. The Saudi attack came after the Houthi attacks on Saudi soil that killed several Saudi border guards. In the days before the Saudi attack, the Yemeni army was allowed to cross Saudi territory to encircle the Houthi rebel positions (Boucek, 2010).

The Houthis' significant influence in Yemen has raised concerns in its northern neighbors, which share the 1,400-kilometer border. According to some experts, the Yemen issue is basically not a foreign issue for Saudi Arabia; this is a matter of national security for the Saudis. Therefore, on March 16, 2015, Saudi Arabia launched an air strike against Ansarullah in Yemen, claiming to support President Hadid. In the operation called "The Storm of Determination" and then "Return of Hope" in the first month, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE and Bahrain formed Saudi allies. Countries such as Sudan, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan cooperate with Riyadh on the delivery of military weapons (Shahgholian and Jamali, 2017).

Saudi Arabia and the UAE were key elements in the Arab League that intervened in 2015 to support the legitimate Yemeni government in Yemen. Their main goal is to prevent the complete fall of President Hadi's government while not allowing the Houthi group, which overthrew the government in September 2014, to expand its reach and consolidate its control throughout the country. From the beginning, intervention by Saudi Arabia and the UAE was considered necessary and not optional. In their view, they cannot allow an ideological group such as the Houthis to occupy Yemen where it could threaten the strategic interests of both countries (Blumberg, 2019). From their point of view, they could not allow an ideological group like the Houthis to take over Yemen, where it could threaten the strategic interests of both countries. In this case, the Saudis launched a comprehensive war against Yemen and announced the following three goals from this war:

1. To enable Hadid to return to that country legally.
2. Destruction of Houthi resources or facilities as rebel groups in Yemen.
3. Reducing Iran's influence (Amiri, 2019: 130).

In September 2016, the Houthi regime in Sana'a introduced a new 800 km ballistic missile called Burkan. Shortly after, such missiles were launched in Taif, the summer capital of Saudi Arabia, and in Jeddah, the kingdom's largest port, 680 km from the border with Yemen. In February 2017, the Houthis introduced a longer-range missile called the Burkan 2, which claimed to have a range of 1000 km (or 1400 km, according to one

source, but this seems highly unlikely). This newly acquired missile was used in three attacks against targets near the Saudi capital Riyadh (Rubin, 2017).

Saudi-led forces launched an operation called Operation Golden Victory against Houthi rebels for the liberation of Hudaydah in 2018. Due to its strategic and geographical importance, many groups were struggling to take control of the port city. The port city is of great importance in terms of food and commercial supply, especially for the Houthis, who control the northern parts. The port is also a sea control point for the Bab ul-Mendep strait. The port also provides income for the Houthis, who collect taxes on goods and import fuel from the port. In the given context, Operation Golden Victory was seen as the most harmonious opportunity to change the balance of power in Yemen (Al Dosari and George, 2020).

3. Yemen: UAE

The United Arab Emirates, which has political influence in South Yemen, imposes itself as one of the leading countries of the Arab coalition in Yemen and an important actor in the field. This issue has sparked a wide debate, especially after President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi declared the role of the UAE “stupid colonialism”. Between this statement and the role of the UAE in Yemen, questions arise about the goals of Abu Dhabi where wants to achieve through its military presence and political influence. The cities in Southern Yemen, which the UAE wants to control, contain natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals and fish wealth, and Aden is one of the most important Yemen coastal cities, containing important ports for the UAE and aiming to expand its influence over the strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait (Arabi21, 2021).

In addition to the goals of the joint intervention of the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE against Yemen, they have their own great goals. Common motives with the countries of the Saudi-led coalition are: to overthrow the coup, rebuild Yemen state institutions, fight the Houthis, secure international shipping lines, and encircle Iran’s influence. The specific goals of the UAE in Yemen include economic, political and security issues, each of which threatens its national security. Over the past three decades, the UAE has emerged as an international hub for shipping and has sought to maximize its economic relations with countries to stay at the forefront of the countries of the region.

The United Arab Emirates sees the Bab al-Mandab corridor as a natural extension of its national security that has developed at the expense of weakening other corridors in the region. As result, it tried more than once to get port management in Aden, but failed, except for a few rounds

in November 2008 when former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to sign what they called “port development”. With Saudi Arabia declaring the formation of a “Decisive Storm” as a military alliance with the participation of the UAE and other Gulf countries, the eyes of the UAE are on Aden, and especially on the ports, to expand its influence to restore and control it and restore the victory of the British occupation. Therefore, even after the US refused requested aid from American Special Forces, it was the first country to send military forces to Aden and to direct the amphibious attack in the summer of 2015 (Al-TaHER, 2017). Another economic goal is to find an alternative to the Strait of Hormuz by extending an oil pipeline to the shores of the El Mahra Governorate in the Arabian Sea that could export oil if the strait is closed by Iran. The UAE is working to consolidate and sustain its influence by influencing decision-makers in Yemen to ensure that its economic goals are achieved.

The leadership of the UAE regards what it sees as political, security and existential threats in the medium term. The Arab Spring sees the detachments as a threat to the regime. This is why the UAE tries to deal with these results according to its vision and foreign policy. The UAE aims to present its experience as a new model for the logistics state, whose role in the regional arena goes beyond its geographic boundaries and limited capabilities. To play a larger role, its economic partnership with international powers, the deployment of military forces at bases outside their borders, and the training and support of armed entities in these countries differ in politics and security. The UAE has increased its military weight and political cover with its air, naval and ground forces. Moreover, military leaders who JOINED to him after his defeat in the 1994 war (from the Southern Movement forces, some Salafi groups and supporters of former President Ali Abdullah Salih’s nephew Tarik Salih) He formed the 2nd major groups.

To facilitate his mission, he supported some groups of the Southern Movement (separatist) in regional formations in the southern provinces. He also supported the General People’s Congress Party, working for the rebuilding of military forces under their leadership, loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was not subjected to the authority of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi government. The UAE’s policy of expanding its influence in Yemen depends on Saudi Arabia’s status and employment of foreign affairs, as well as its relations with President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi government. Additionally, the UAE put political pressure on President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi during his acceptance and support of international plans to end the presidency as part of its political settlement efforts. On the other hand, the president of Yemen has managed many times to get rid of what made him a target and tried to curb the influence of the UAE by removing some of his allies in the government.

Before 2011, the UAE had a relatively traditional relationship with the Ali Abdullah Salih regime, which is seen as an ally, although it is not always reliable. One of Zayed's first overseas initiatives was his project to rebuild the Mareb dam in Yemen, which is said to be the ancestral home of the Al-Nahyan. Salih came to power with the acceleration of the project in 1978. South Yemeni merchants, especially those from the eastern province of Hadramawt, had long established business contacts in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and after the fall of the socialists in South Yemen in the 1960s, many more southerners, who went to the emirates, took part in the trade with the police and armies of the emirates. Since the early 2000s, the UAE has become more involved in the debates on security sector reform in Yemen, with the emergence of a new military and security elite gathered around members of Saleh's family (Salisbury, 2020).

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the two strongest countries of the GCC that feature the highest population numbers, the most extensive armies and political clouds. In the past decade, they have worked together frequently in political and military coalitions, especially since the Arab Spring protests began in 2011. The two "accomplices" have joined forces in, Syria, Libya, and Egypt, and the latest example is military cooperation against revolutionary Houthi forces in Yemen (Van Slooten, 2019).

Since the start of the intervention, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have agreed to share operational responsibilities. The Saudis would focus on the northern border and air campaign with Saudi Arabia, and the UAE would focus on land operations in the south. As the conflict unfolded, the two allies found themselves pursuing different strategies: Saudi Arabia prioritizes federal but united Yemen, with its support of the renowned government led by President Abdu Rabu Mansur Hadi and now moving from the capital Sana to Aden. The UAE supports the unnecessary aspirations of southerners.

Unlike the Saudi-backed Islah party, the UAE cooperates mainly with southern separatist groups (such as the STC) and pro-autonomous Salafists. The UAE, the backbone of Islah, the Muslim Brotherhood of Yemen (MB) is seen as a national threat to the UAE and is working to exclude them. Since its founding in May 2017, the UAE-backed STC has banned all MB-related movements and activities (Ardemagni, 2017). An important element of the Yemen crisis is the separatist movement trying to re-establish an independent regime in Aden. Since the reunification of Yemen in 1990, there is a common narrative in southern Yemen of indigenous people suffering under the rule of the authorities in Sanaa. Many southern Yemenis felt economically and politically marginalized by the northerners.

By 2007, the Southern Movement (al-Hirakal-Janoubi) was formed to represent the South Yemeni struggle. The Southern Transitional Council (STC) was formed 10 years later, at a time of civil war (Karasik and Cafiero,

2019). This divergence was seen in the Taizz war, which UAE troops avoided largely because of Islah's reputation. The tension between the two emerged when the UAE Foreign Minister, Anwar Gargash, tweeted in November that "Taizz would have already been saved had it not been for al-Islah and the Muslim Brotherhood not to act" (International Crisis Group, 2016).

In August 2019, the conflicting agendas and conflicting interests of the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and UAE-backed fighters loyal to the STC peaked. Violence between Hadi's supporters and the armed separatists broke out in Aden. The great tension between the Hadi-led government and the STC fighters increased on 1 August 2019, when a ballistic missile and drone targeted a parade in western Aden. The hit killed several people, including Munir al-Yafei, also known as Abu al-Yafei, who served as a commander of the Security Belt Force, a UAE-backed separatist and anti-Islamist paramilitary group that encompasses multiple factions in southern Yemen. This paramilitary faction received support from Abu Dhabi while fighting the loyalists of Hadi, and the group operates under the umbrella of STC (Karasik and Cafiero, 2019).

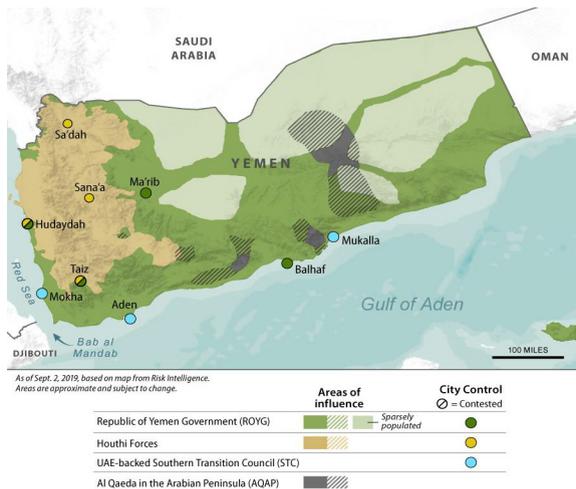
The UAE's rationale for building a political base in South Yemen is multifaceted. UAE's participation in the Saudi-led coalition allowed the Emirates to cooperate more openly with the United States in combating terrorist groups such as AQAP in southern Yemen. It also allowed Emirati forces to gain influence in various Yemeni port cities that could complement the UAE's commercial and energy interests in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. From 2015 to 2019, the UAE made an impact in Aden with its own troops or the presence of STC-affiliated tribal militias (known as the Southern Belt / Safety Belt or Al Hizam al Amni in Arabic). The only personally loyal military force of President Hadi in Aden was the Presidential Protection Force (under his son Nasser), which was relatively small compared to the UAE allied forces. Periodic clashes occurred between ROYG forces and the UAE-backed forces, and in January 2018 the STC took control of most of the ROYG troops Aden in just three days.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia intervened to keep the STC committed to the greater fight against the Houthis. After the conflict settled, the STC announced that it would continue to participate in the coalition's military operations against the Houthis and returned the military facilities to the ROYG forces. However, it turned out that Hadi only had an Aden-based government in name, and STC had power in the field (Sharp, 2019: 6-7).

Hani ibni Berik, vice president of the South Yemen Provisional Assembly, who is currently defending the separation, left Abdurabbu Mansur, while he was a minister in the government of Hadi, leaving him to the side of the separatists. It gained political and military ground by forming a militia unit of 12 thousand people acting outside the control of the government of Hadi in Eden. It was reflected in the media that there were conflicts and mutual

threats between the troops affiliated to Berik and the military institutions affiliated to Hadi (Kekilli, 2019). Even after most of the UAE troops withdrawal from Yemen in 2019, this situation remained unchanged, as the Emirate retained control of several ports and islands and left a small unit in Aden for now. Moreover, where the UAE troops withdrew, the militias allied with remained behind. These militias are heavily dependent on UAE support, so Abu Dhabi seems to assume the consistence of their loyalty in the future. The purpose of this Emirati expansion will likely be military and economic. The UAE, which maintains its presence in the ports around the Gulf of Aden, can intervene in Yemen at any time (Steinberg, 2020: 23).

One of the UAE’s most important strategic goals in Yemen is to strengthen its geopolitical influence beyond the Arabian Sea, including the Gulf of Aden and the West Indian Ocean. Furthermore it wants to strengthen its military and economic position in the region and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are competing with. It tries to strengthen its position in the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. It also aims to expand counter-terrorism cooperation to use it globally to remove charges of supporting terrorism (<https://www.irna.ir/news/83545138>). Due to these features, the city has become an armed struggle area for separatist groups al-Qaeda, pro-Hadi army units and UAE-backed groups. Since January 2018, violent conflicts have been taking place in many parts of Aden, especially at the airport (Domazeti, 2019). The divisive activities of the United Arab Emirates in South Yemen and Yemen’s efforts to dehumanize the islands suitable for tourism such as Socotra in the Arabian Sea have brought the Abu Dhabi administration and Riyadh administration against each other (Bursa, 2018).



Conclusions

The most important and influential issue regarding Yemen's strategic location is that it dominates the strategic and deep Babül-Mandeb Strait, which connects the three continents of Asia, Europe and Africa. Religiously speaking, Yemen is one of the Shia castles in Islamic history. Zaydi and Ismaili Shiites have a relatively large following in these lands. Although the Shiites are a minority in the country, they have many strategic areas.

Saudi Arabia, a powerful country in Western Asia, especially in the Persian Gulf region, is trying to increase its power to become a regional hegemonic power. The reason why Saudi Arabia attacks Yemen is to increase the power of Saudi Arabia by achieving some geopolitical goals in Yemen with ideological tools.

Unlike the Saudis, which limit Yemen's northern regions and border conflicts, ABE's presence and growing influence and role in South Yemen and the region are of great importance for the ABE. On this basis, some believe that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are dividing their sphere of influence in Yemen, and this division is based on the special interests and interests of each of these actors.

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