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Ansar Allah (Houthi): From Local Revolution to Yemeni Regional Influence

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The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, are a Zaidi Shiite rebel movement that began in northern Yemen. Inspired by Hezbollah and backed by Iran, the Houthis oppose foreign intervention, especially from Saudi Arabia and the United States. Since 2004, they have been involved in various conflicts with the Yemeni government, until finally seizing the capital Sana'a in 2014. Their command structure consists of military regional commands, elite forces, and parallel surveillance systems. The Houthis also have a growing military arsenal, including ballistic missiles, drones, and effective air defense systems. They are using advanced technology in asymmetric warfare to confront the Saudi Arabian coalition. In addition, the Houthis have a maritime force operating in the Red Sea. This article reviews the history, symbols, military strategy, as well as important figures that shape the Houthis' strength in Yemen's ongoing conflict.

Motto, Symbols, and History

They officially referred to themselves as Ansar Allah or Supporters of God after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Hezbollah, which successfully expelled Israeli forces from Lebanon, is an example for the Houthis in their struggle. In addition, Iran and the Houthis have a common enemy, namely Saudi Arabia, which has led to cooperation between the two sides continuing for many years. [1]

After the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Houthis adopted the slogan:

"God is great, death for the US, death for Israel, curse for the Jews, and victory for Islam."

Who are the houthis?

The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah (meaning "Supporters of Allah"), are a Shiite rebel group originating in northern Yemen. Originally led by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, the Houthis are not only political and militant movements, but also a family or clan that has great influence in the region. The emergence of the Houthis became famous in the early 2000s as a movement for the revival of the Zaidi Shia, one of the sects in Islam that has many followers in Yemen. They fought for the rights and empowerment of the Zaidi community and opposed foreign intervention, particularly from Saudi Arabia and the United States. Between 2004 and 2010, the Houthis were involved in several conflicts with the Yemeni government, especially in the Saada region, which is their center of influence. The conflict was marked by fierce fighting and several ceasefire agreements, strengthening the Houthis' political position in Yemen [2] ; [3] .

In 2014, the Houthis managed to seize Yemen's capital, Sana'a, triggering a military intervention from the Saudi-led coalition. This coalition supports the internationally recognized government of President Mansur Hadi. Despite facing strong military resistance, the Houthis still control large parts of Yemen, including Sana'a, and continue to play an important role in Yemeni politics and society. [4]

Structure of the Houthi Command

The organizational structure of the Houthi movement includes a military regional command (MRC), elite forces, and a parallel surveillance system. Within this structure, the Houthi leadership has established a Military Regional Command (MRC) to oversee specific geographical areas.

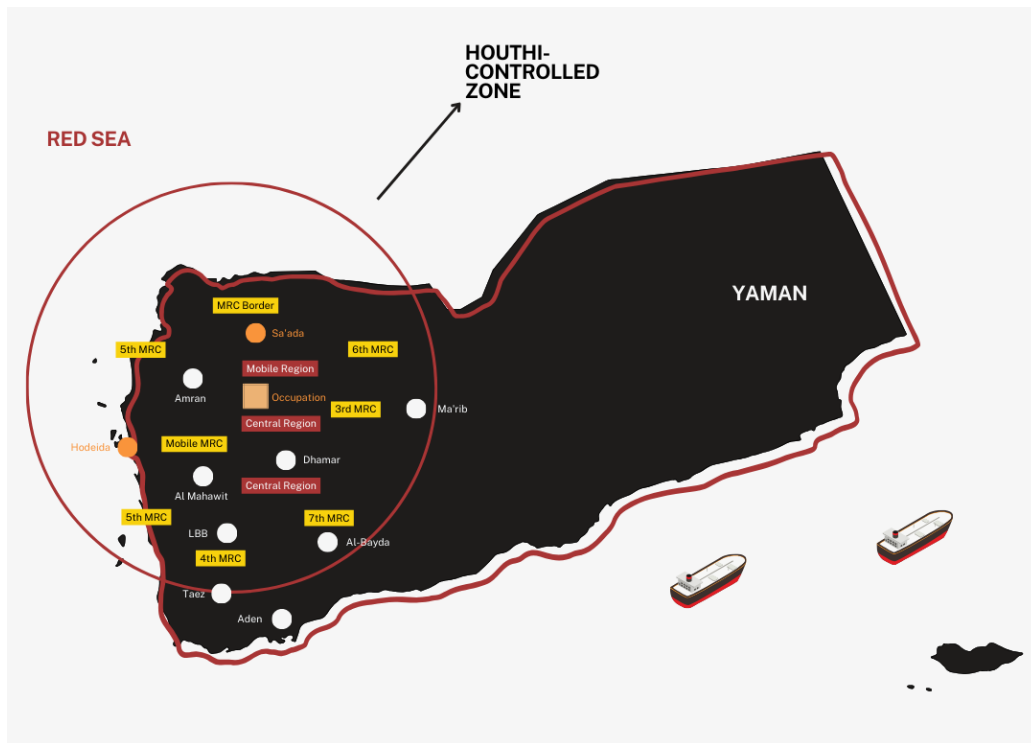


Figure 1. Houthi-controlled zones. Source : U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY, COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT, ARMED CONFLICT LOCATION & EVENT DATA PROJECT

Code

- white circle - City
- red square - Military area
- Yellow square - Military region command
- Orange Circle - Military Cities & Industries
- Cream Box - Capital

Structure of the Houthi Command

In the various geographical areas controlled, military operations were led by different commanders. Elite forces such as the Presidential Protection Brigade and Mobile Regions play an important role in dealing with critical areas. They are also supported by specialist units in the air and naval fields. [5]

In the 1990s, the children of Badreddine al-Houthi (the leader of the Houthi family) began to build social networks that influenced the Houthi power structure. Families that have marriage ties to the Houthi family, such as the Ijri, Mutawwakil, Mo'ayyed, Tawoos, and Mashat families, play an important oversight role in this movement. [6]

In addition to traditional military and social structures, the Houthi movement also established a parallel surveillance system that works alongside official state institutions. The system began in Sa'ada in March 2011

and expanded after the Houthis' takeover of the capital Sana'a in September 2014.

In this system, there are armed individuals known as "supervisors" (mushrif) who are stationed in various ministries. Their job is to fight corruption and ensure loyalty to the Houthi authorities. Each province has a general supervisor appointed directly by Abdelmalek al-Houthi, and they also coordinate with a revolutionary committee headed by Mohammed al-Houthi. [5]

Important Figures of Ansar Allah

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi

Abdul-Malik al-Houthi took over the leadership of the Houthi movement after the death of his brother, Hussein, in 2004. He has the title of "leader of the revolution" (qa'id al-thawra) in the Houthi media. Abdul-Malik is revered for his lineage as a Zaidi Hashemite. [7]

Abdelkhaleq al-Houthi

Abdul-Malik's younger brother, is the second person in command of this movement. He holds important military positions and plays a major role in strategic decision-making. [7]

Abdelkarim al-Houthi

Held important positions in the executive office and served as minister of the interior. He is responsible for key aspects of government and internal security.

Yahya al-Houthi

Minister of education in the Houthi movement. He played a role in directing the movement's ideological and educational agenda. [7]

Mujahideen

The inner circle of the Houthi movement is made up of people close to the Houthi family, especially from Sa'ada province. They played a key role in decision-making and had limited access to Abdul-Malik, making them the core of the movement's loyal supporters. [7]

Military Capabilities

Between 2004 and 2010, there were six wars between the Houthis (Ansar Allah) group and the Yemeni government under Ali Abdullah Saleh. This war was a turning point in the development of the Houthi military. During this period, the Houthis began to use the slogans "Allah Akbar, Death America, Death Israel, Curse for Jews, and Victory for Islam" as a symbol of resistance to external intervention. The slogan managed to attract the sympathy of some Yemeni people who feel pressured by foreign powers. Although the Houthis initially suffered defeat and many casualties, they continued to accumulate weapons through smuggling and illegal arms trafficking. In addition, they also began to develop guerrilla warfare tactics and ground combat strategies that were very useful in subsequent battles. The Houthi military arsenal includes a variety of weapons from various sources, including weapons supplied by Iran, Soviet-era weapons remains, and some weapons from the United States. They also produce weapons locally. One of the key developments is the increase in their missile stockpiles and military-engineering capabilities, especially with the use of unmanned

aerial vehicle (UAV) technology to carry out precision strikes against the enemy. [8]

Houthi Drone

Some of the UAV models used by the Houthis include the HudHed-1, Rival (RAGHIB), and Rased, along with short- to medium-range missile systems such as the Qasef-1 and SAQEB missiles. These UAVs are capable of carrying out precision strikes against enemy targets, thus strengthening the Houthi offensive capability [9] ; [10] ; [8] . In addition, the Houthis are also adept at using advanced defense systems such as the Sammad UAV, which is equipped with explosive warheads to destroy enemy installations with greater accuracy than traditional artillery. [8]

Houthi Remote Capabilities

The Houthis' long-range capabilities have evolved rapidly and played a major role in changing the balance of power in the conflict in Yemen. One of the most striking aspects of their military capabilities is the possession and use of ballistic missiles. For example, in 2018, Saudi Arabia successfully intercepted two missiles fired by the Houthis over the capital, Riyadh. Then, on March 25, 2022, the Houthis launched a massive attack on Saudi Arabia using ballistic missiles and cruise missiles, targeting the oil and energy industries in the region. [11] ; [12]

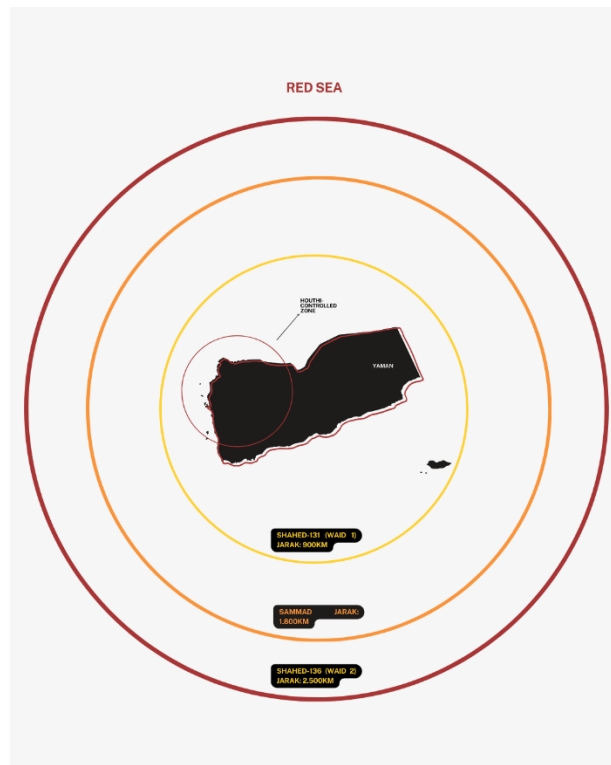


Figure 2. Houthi-controlled territory and long-range capabilities. Sources: U.S. DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY, ARMED CONFLICT LOCATION & EVENT DATA PROJECT (ACLED), CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT (CTP). THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR (ISW), AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE (AFP)

Houthi II Long-Range Capabilities

Remote Drones

The Houthis' capabilities also use long-range drones for reconnaissance and attack missions. During the conflict, they demonstrated increased capabilities in drone technology, which was adapted to their asymmetric warfare strategy. The drones are used to attack military bases, airports, and critical infrastructure in Yemen as well as in Saudi Arabia's border areas.

Air Defense Systems

The Houthis have used air defense systems, including shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles (MANPADS), to target coalition aircraft carrying out airstrikes in Yemen. On February 19, a US MQ-9 Reaper drone crashed in Hodeidah after being shot down by a Houthi surface-to-air missile. These defense systems have inflicted losses on coalition forces and limited their air operations in some areas. [13] ; [14]

Navy

The Houthis have a small naval force operating in the Red Sea. They have carried out maritime attacks on merchant ships and military vessels, including Saudi Arabian oil tankers. Although their naval capabilities are not as strong as those of other branches of the military, they remain a threat to maritime security in the region. [15]

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