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UAE says it will withdraw its remaining forces in Yemen after Saudi Arabia struck port city

UPDATED 5 HR AGO

By Mostafa Salem



This photograph shows damaged military vehicles, reportedly sent by the United Arab Emirates ...



The United Arab Emirates said Tuesday that it was pulling out its remaining forces in Yemen, after Saudi Arabia bombed the war-torn country's port city of Mukalla following accusations that two ships from the UAE had delivered weapons and

combat vehicles to separatist forces.

Saudi Arabia accused the UAE, its close ally, of “highly dangerous” actions in Yemen that threatened its national security. It said it had launched “limited” airstrikes on Mukalla on Tuesday morning and backed a call for UAE forces to leave Yemen within 24 hours.

The UAE initially rejected the accusations and expressed surprise at the strikes, but the country’s defense ministry later announced that, “in view of recent developments,” it would voluntarily withdraw the remaining “counterterrorism” units it had in Yemen.

Saudi authorities did not immediately comment on the UAE’s decision, but the

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relationship between the region’s tightest partners grows increasingly strained.

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The Saudi statement announcing its military action was issued moments after a speech by the head of Yemen’s Presidential Council Rashad Al Olimi, a body backed by Saudi Arabia, who accused the UAE of “directing” forces to “rebel against the state authority” and “escalating militarily” in the country.

“The Kingdom stresses that any threat to its national security is a red line, and the Kingdom will not hesitate to take all necessary steps and measures to confront and neutralize any such threat,” the statement by the Saudi Foreign Ministry said.

A video released by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen shows a single strike hitting dozens of vehicles lined up at a base within the port. The video, shared by the coalition's spokesperson, said the strike targeted vehicles and weapons from earlier unauthorized shipments by the UAE.

Saudi Arabia said the UAE was “pressuring” the Southern Transitional Council, a military force backed by the Emiratis, to conduct operations on the border of the kingdom, an allegation that Abu Dhabi “condemns.”

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Earlier this month, UAE-backed STC launched an offensive taking control of key provinces in Yemen – a move that infuriated the Saudi-backed government, who say the military action fragmented a battle with the Iran-backed Houthi forces in the north.



This video screenshot shows militants affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) near the site of airstrikes in Hadramout, Yemen, December 26, 2025. (*Xinhua/Shutterstock*)

Groups allied to the STC had pushed into the oil-rich province of Hadramout, claiming a total of eight governorates and renewing calls for southern Yemen to

secede as an independent state.

Earlier, Saudi-backed groups in Yemen called on all Emirati forces to leave Yemeni territory within 24 hours and ended a defense pact with the UAE. By Tuesday evening, the UAE announced that it would withdraw its remaining troops in Yemen “of its own volition, in a manner that ensures the safety of its personnel.”

Saudi Arabia and the UAE – both neighboring oil giants – are two close allies and are key United States partners controlling trillions in global assets.

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US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke on Tuesday with Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister, Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, “about the ongoing tensions in Yemen and discussed issues impacting regional security and stability,” the US State Department said in a statement.

Before the escalation, Rubio last week called for diplomacy and restraint.

“The United States is concerned by recent events in southeastern Yemen. We urge restraint and continued diplomacy, with a view to reaching a lasting solution. We are grateful for the diplomatic leadership of our partners, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and remain supportive of all efforts to advance our shared security interests,” he said on X.

The two countries were united, along with Bahrain and Egypt, in imposing blockade on fellow Gulf nation Qatar that lasted over three years, marking the most

severe recent crisis within the Arab bloc. The UAE had also supported Saudi Arabia in the war in Yemen, before withdrawing in 2019.

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More than a decade of war in Yemen has turned the country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The years of fighting have compounded the country's economic crisis and shattered social services.

This story has been updated with additional developments.

CNN's Nadeen Ebrahim, Eyad Kourdi and Mohammed Tawfeeq contributed to this report.



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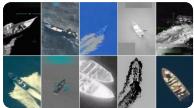
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