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# **ANALYZING "YEMEN: AN EXPANDING SECURITY THREAT"**

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## Question 1

**Does the situation pose a serious threat to US interests as presented in the 2017 analysis? Does the situation continue to pose a serious threat to US interests? Have there been any recent developments which might change the assertions made within the analysis?**

This situation, as presented in the 2017 analysis, does pose a serious threat to US interests. While the report does little analysis on the effects of the Yemeni civil war on the United States war on terror and close relationship with Saudi Arabia, the contents of the article certainly have significant implications on US interests in the Middle East. Specifically, the Yemeni civil war (1) affects American oil, (2) hurts American influence in the Middle East, and (3) hurts American efforts in the war on terror.

Firstly, the Yemeni civil war has a strong impact on American oil imports and oil prices, as the article mentions that the Strait of Bab-el Mandeb is located on the Yemeni coast and is a critical location for Saudi oil exports. Because the aforementioned strait has so much commercial traffic, losing access to it would certainly hurt Saudi Arabia's ability to export oil as effectively. With the US importing approximately 5% of their total oil from Saudi Arabia (EIA 2019), a contentious Strait of Bab-el Mandeb likely has effects on American oil imports and domestic oil prices. Secondly (and arguably more importantly), American influence in the Middle East is largely affected by the outcome of the Yemeni civil war. Because Saudi Arabia is one of the only allies the United States has in the Middle East (Council on Foreign Relations 2020) any possible advantage they hold in Yemen will likely spill over in some capacity to the United States. The inverse also holds. Specifically, any loss that Saudi Arabia faces as a result of the Yemeni civil war will likely hurt the United States for two reasons. The first is diminished Saudi power. As aforementioned, Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest allies the United States has in the Middle East. A negative outcome for Saudi Arabia regarding the Yemeni civil war will therefore almost always equate a negative outcome for the United States. Compounding onto this, the Yemeni civil war can currently be understood in many respects as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thus, Iran benefits from any losses Saudi Arabia may suffer. This is especially problematic, as relations between the United States and Iran, especially after the Iranian nuclear agreement ordeal, are contentious at best. Finally, the outcome of the Yemeni civil war has direct impacts on the US war on terror. Because AQAP and other terrorist organizations are using the civil war in Yemen to recruit, set up training facilities, and incite violence, it is in the best interest of the United States to ensure that this conflict is resolved promptly in their own interests. Failure to do so may lead to more active terrorist recruitment, more attacks, and a regression in the leading effort the US has taken in the war on terror.

New developments in the Yemeni civil war include significant foreign aid (US AID 2021), a significant escalation in violence, and more human rights violations (Human Rights Watch 2020). The worsening state of the conflict make it important for the United States to present a strong stance on the international stage, determining whether they will stick simply to foreign aid or take a stronger stance on helping Saudi Arabia, which has already received limited help from the United States. These assertions change some of the details but don't change many of the overarching features of why the war is happening, and the fact that it does contribute significantly to the growing threat the war poses to both the region and the world.

## Question 2

**Who would you consider the key customer in preparing this report?**

The key customer for this report is not made clear by the author, nor are there significant clues that would help determine the key customer. It seems at first glance that the key customer here would be American decision-makers that may not have a very clear pre-existing understanding of the Yemeni civil war, as the report outlines many basic aspects of the civil war and Yemeni history. The indistinguishability of a clear key customer of this report is one of its shortcomings, as the report does not seem tailored to a very specific demographic. Rather, this report could have been created for anyone that needs a big-picture overview of the Yemeni civil war. Despite this vagueness, there are some factors that may help deduce the key customer. Most significantly, the title of this report is "Yemen: An Expanding Security Threat," which implies that it is focused on decision-makers that may be considered with security specifically. Furthermore, the title implies that the report is concerned largely with the contemporary state of Yemen, which further specifies that the key customer for this report would be someone concerned with decision-making and the present rather than a political scientist or historian that is analyzing the past.

**A. What would be the most important issues for the White House and the President's key counterterrorism advisors?**

The most important issues for the White House and the president's key counterterrorism advisors would likely be the potential for increased terrorist recruiting in Yemen and the steps the US could take to appear strong with regard to the conflict both domestically and internationally. Firstly, it stands to reason that the president's key counterterrorism advisors would be concerned primarily with counterterrorism. Given the report's mention of terrorist organizations and their role in the conflict, it seems clear that the effects of groups like AQAP and the Islamic State would be first and foremost concerns of counterterrorism advisors.

In the same vein, these are important questions for the White House to consider as they largely fall under the jurisdiction of the executive branch, and properly dealing with counterterrorism efforts is critical to a president's popularity. Because the White House and the president also tend to be the face of any foreign policy decision made, one critical issue for them with regard to the conflict would be determining the best policy to look protective of their allies, while also non-aggressive. Failure to do this would likely result in the sitting president and the US as a whole looking weaker both domestically and internationally, which hurts the US significantly.

**B. How would you define the key issue for the Secretary of State?**

The key issue for the Secretary of State in this matter would be the means by which the Yemeni civil war affects the ability for the United States to conduct its foreign policy overseas. Specifically, the ways in which the Yemeni civil war may strain relations with Iran further, and even potentially affect relations with Saudi Arabia given their significant role in this conflict. The Secretary of State would be further concerned with the foreign policy implications of each potential resolution to the Yemeni civil war. For this reason, the "potential resolutions" section of the report, along with the analysis of Iran and Saudi Arabia's role in this conflict are especially significant for the Secretary of State.

**C. How would you define the key issue for the Secretary of Defense?** The key issue for the Secretary of Defense would be understanding the potential for US involvement in the Yemeni civil war. This could be through a multitude of different routes, including US support for Saudi Arabia as they act as one proxy in this war, or through an analysis of the potential for spillover of conflict as tensions and violence rise. Because the Secretary of Defense is concerned primarily with the defense policy for the United States, the person in this role would not be quite as concerned with things like the economic impacts of the civil war through disruption of oil routes or foreign relations with Saudi Arabia as they might with tracking violence and determining the future threats of violence that may arise as the conflict continues.

## Question 3

**Should the issue be posed as a threat, an opportunity, a key decision point, or some combination of these?**

This issue should be posed primarily as a threat and a key decision point but may also be framed as an opportunity.

This issue is first and foremost a threat and a key decision point. As mentioned in (1), the Yemeni civil war has significant impacts on the United States with respect to its ability to maintain stable, low domestic oil prices, assert dominance in the Middle East, and continue its efforts in fighting the war on terror. Because the Yemeni civil war puts these three things in contention, the civil war is a threat to US interests and should accordingly be posed as such. The nature of the civil war in Yemen is such that there seems to be little the US can gain from it, and much that the US can lose. Because of this, posing the current civil war as a threat is the most appropriate classification. The Yemeni situation can also be seen as a key decision point with respect to the importance of US influence in the Middle East. To date, the US has had little success asserting influence in the Middle East, despite significant resources, time, and money being spent. Continuing to protect US interests in the Middle East is a costly endeavor which (arguably) yields little fruit. Because the Yemeni civil war compounds these costs while providing the US few benefits, this issue should also be posed as a key decision-making moment for the future of US efforts in the Middle East. It is entirely possible for decision-makers to see analysis on the intelligence collected regarding this scenario and decide that the harms of remaining involved in the Middle East outweigh the benefits. Prudent decision-making in this manner would involve an investigation of the Yemeni civil war not only as a threat that must be solved, but also as a critical point of decision regarding the benefits and harms of continuing to expend resources in an unstable region.

This issue may also be framed secondarily as an opportunity, as the analysis done in (1) explains potential benefits that may occur as a result of Saudi success in the Yemeni civil war. Specifically, because such success would hurt Iranian influence and increase the region over which Saudi Arabia has power, the United States would likely benefit as a Saudi ally. Again, there seems to be little to gain here with much to lose but benefits are nonetheless possible. Framing this as an opportunity would be flawed given the above analysis but one would be remiss not to acknowledge the potential for US benefit in the Yemeni civil war.

## Question 4

**Are there critical unknowns, uncertainties, or contradictory information that should be highlighted?**

There is a relatively significant amount of missing, uncertain, or contradictory information within this report.

Specifically, it seems as if a report such as this one would have significantly more information about US involvement in such a conflict. Surely, the United States has been monitoring the situation closely since it

began and likely has taken steps to demonstrate their position on it. These details are omitted from the report, which makes it significantly more difficult for the aforementioned customers to have some orientation with respect to the US stance on many of these issues. Furthermore, there are many general details not present in the report, which are of relative importance to understanding the Yemeni civil war in its entirety. Among these omitted details is the name of the party that bombed Saleh's palace mosque, the effects of US drone involvement in the Yemen, and Hadi's policies as leader of Yemen. Each of these pieces of information would be important to most decision-makers in at least some capacity, as they provide insight regarding the effectiveness of certain pre-existing policies, and the alignments of each major actor.

Other pieces of information are uncertain – most notably the role of Iran and Russia in the conflict. While Iran is mentioned a handful of times throughout the report, it seems unclear what Iran's motive is in entering the conflict, the resources they've devoted to the conflict, and how much importance they place on using the Yemeni civil war as a way of gaining influence. Russia is only mentioned once in passing, which seems odd given their military might and empirical relationship with the United States. Both these factors would be critical to understanding the war not only in terms of the military might of each side, but also the political reasons fueling the proxy war.

Finally, some pieces of information within the report seem contradictory. The report mentions that "Yemen is strategically important to Saudi Arabia in a way that it is not to Iran," but then follows that with explaining how if Iran controlled the Yemeni coast, they could block Saudi Arabia's oil trade. In this way, Yemen is strategically important to Saudi Arabia in a way very similar to how it is important to Iran. Another contradictory piece of information which is not clarified in the report is Saleh's relationship with the Houthis. Specifically, one piece of the report mentions that "The Saleh government [...] battled [...] a Houthi rebellion [...] for more than a decade." The report later goes on to explain how Saleh worked closely with the Houthis to help him ascertain his previous power. It seems rather contradictory that the same organization which Saleh fought for over a decade would help him rise back into power shortly after.

## Question 5

**What is the primary assertion made by the analyst in this case study? What key evidence and logic does the analyst provide to support this claim?**

The primary assertion made by the analyst in this case study is that Yemeni civil war is a growing threat with important implications for both the Middle East and the world, currently driven by Saudi Arabia,

Iran, and a variety of terrorist groups. To support this claim, the analyst uses a variety of warrants – both logical and evidence focused. Specifically, the analyst provides specific evidence of Saudi Arabia and Iran's involvement in the war, as well as solid quantitative evidence regarding the importance of Yemen's Strait of Bab-el Mandeb. Here, the author provides an explanation of the specific number of ships that pass through the strait, as well as the amount of Saudi oil that passes through the strait. The analyst also makes significant use of logical warrants to support his claims. This is done through the specific factors presented, which may change the outcome of the Yemeni civil war. The actual potential outcomes of the civil war presented can also be seen as logical extensions of the quantitative and qualitative evidence provided in the general analysis section of the paper.

## Question 6

**What are the key secondary assertions and the key evidence and logic used to support the claims?**

The secondary assertions made by the analyst include the nature of the Yemeni government and how empirical instability has contributed to the current civil war. The quantitative evidence used here is relatively plentiful, with specific sources being used to explain birth rates, death rates, and corruption rankings. There are also significant assertions made by the analyst regarding the role of tribalism and regional differences in Yemen contributing to the instability and civil war. Evidence here is more historical and qualitative, with a more comprehensive analysis being done regarding the relationship between tribalism and the emergence of a central government in Yemen. There is also significant use of logic throughout the paper. Specifically, the analyst is able to logically understand the role of empirical corruption and the effects of growing birth rates on the future economy of Yemen.

## Question 7

**Are any contrary views or evidence presented that would challenge the key assertion or the secondary assertions that you identified? If not, would introducing contrary views or evidence strengthen the analysis? What would be some examples of useful contrary views or evidence?**

There are few real contrary views or pieces of evidence presented throughout the entirety of the analysis. In fact, it seems as if the relatively simple narrative presented is a little too airtight, possibly implying that there was some bias in its compilation. Because the author never takes any concrete steps to providing



the reader with a different possible explanation for things such as the reason corruption is so widespread in Yemen or factors other than the Strait of Bab-el Mandeb that make Yemen so important to Saudi Arabia, the number of contrary views presented here are minimal, if at all existent.

Introducing contrary views would certainly strengthen the analysis. While providing the reader with a clear narrative is certainly good, it should not be a replacement for a correct, cohesive analysis. One example of a contrary explanation for the extent of the civil war is the historical divide between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and the fact that this divide is very prevalent in the ongoing conflict. While Saudi Arabia and Iran represent the proxies on opposite sides of this civil war, the reasons they are fighting may be more religious than political. This is a critical contrary analysis to present, as the policies a decision-maker may contemplate may be completely different for religious conflicts than political ones.

## Question 8

### **Can you find any examples of logical fallacies in the analysis?**

There are a few logical fallacies presented through the course of this analysis. Firstly, the author's assumption that an increasing birth rate combined with a low death rate will inevitably mean fewer natural resources for all is a hasty generalization. Like many other countries in the region, Yemen has a significant amount of natural resources and a population who's largest demographic is just reaching working age. This may very well mean that Yemen is not far off from industrialization and may be on the road to a better economy, not a worse one.

Secondly, the author's assertion that Yemen may soon become a Saudi protectorate can be seen as an example of a potential slippery slope. Specifically, there are many steps between Saudi Arabia having a limited military presence in Yemen during wartime and them completely occupying the region and establishing it as their own protectorate. Because the author jumps from one step to another, skipping all the ones in between, this is an example of a slippery slope.

Finally, there is a non-sequitur present in the author's argument. The analyst argues that one big reason for Yemen's current economic problems is its current reliance on oil as an export. The analyst then argues that this is a problem because, unlike Saudi Arabia, Yemen does not have enough oil to allow them to export the same amount for many more years. This does not follow. If Yemen currently has enough oil to export very significant amounts, that should be feeding into their economy in the status quo. The oil exports will only become a problem down the line when Yemen no longer has enough oil to export significant amounts.

## Question 9

**To which of the seven common analysis challenges is the author most susceptible? How can we ensure that these challenges are overcome?**

It seems as if the author is the most susceptible to satisficing. Specifically, the author seems to include information which makes it easy for the paper's narrative to be built. There is little regard for many other, alternative explanations that exist for the Yemeni civil war and the nature of the threat it poses. For this reason, it seems as if the author may have chosen to complete the analysis based upon the first viable theory. A stronger analysis of the evidence would likely have resulted in the emergence of at least one competing theory, which would have affected the extremely concise and cohesive narrative presented.

This challenge is relatively easy to overcome and requires a more thorough analysis on the part of the author. The author should be exploring alternate explanations for the causal relationships presented in the paper. Rather than focus on Saudi Arabia and Iran solely in a geopolitical context, the author may find it beneficial to analyze the religions of each state and the role religion plays in their foreign policy. In the same vein, it would be apt of the author to consider greater involvement from the United States and Russia as the proxy war continues, given that Russia already supports Iran to some extent and the United States is an ally of Saudi Arabia with interests in the outcome of the Yemeni civil war. In this manner, the author's satisficing in the current analysis can be solved through a closer look at more evidence and incorporating these competing theories within the article.

## Question 10

**Is the article organized according to the inverted pyramid model, which organizes the analysis from the most important concept, thought, or idea to the least critical information? If not, how could you reorganize the analysis to conform with the inverted pyramid model?**

This article is not organized according to the inverted pyramid model. This is clear, as the report ends with a list of possible outcomes of the Yemeni civil war and the factors driving these outcomes. An intelligence report that is geared towards providing decision-makers with an understanding of the Yemeni civil war is likely to have these sections significantly higher up in the article. Because the inverted pyramid model focuses on the key judgements followed by the analysis and this article seems to be doing the opposite, it certainly does not follow the inverted pyramid model. The inverted pyramid model also concludes with appendices.

Not only does this report not end with such appendices, it does not include any sort of citations at all, which is a significant drawback of this paper given the numerous statistics it uses.

In order to reorganize this analysis to conform to the inverted pyramid model, the paper should begin with its current title and introductory three paragraphs. Following this, key findings should be presented. Namely, the “Possible Outcomes of Instability in Yemen” section as this section uses the amalgam of the analysis to define a few key judgements. Following this, “The Growth of Unrest” should be the next included section as it provides a very direct analysis of the history of the Yemeni civil war and its effects. That section would be followed by “Yemen’s Position Within the Region and the World,” as this section provides a clear explanation of Iran and Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the civil war, as well as the reasons Yemen is an important battleground geographically. This should then be followed by “Yemen as an Emerging Nexus of Conflict ,” as this section is more abstract, includes more historical elements, and is overall the least important section for a complete understanding of the Yemeni conflict. The paper should then conclude with a works cited page including all necessary citations.

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