



Beyond Yemen's Borders: Internal Conflict Amid the Houthi-Israeli Confrontation

December 15, 2024



(Picture of damage in Israel caused by a recent Houthi airstrike)

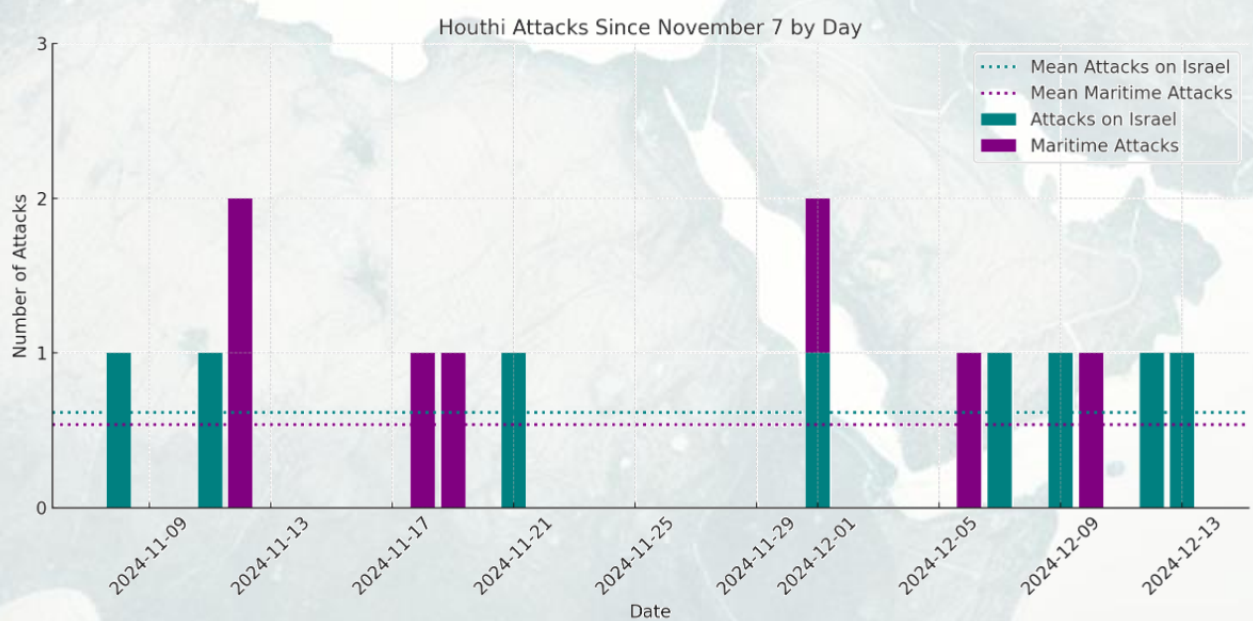
Over the past several weeks, the Houthi movement in Yemen has escalated its attacks on Israel, launching missile and drone strikes against Israeli territory and threatening global shipping lanes in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Despite initial measured responses, Israeli leadership and international coalitions are now considering more forceful and far-reaching actions. Israel's precedent of neutralizing Iranian proxies in Syria and Lebanon, combined with its advanced long-range strike capabilities and the recent degradation of Syrian air defenses, increases the likelihood of significant operations against the Houthis. Simultaneously, the Yemeni Armed Forces and regional and international partners are reportedly coordinating to restore Yemen's legitimate government, enhance maritime security, and contain Iranian influence. The evolving tactics of the Houthis, their unwavering attacks despite previous Israeli and coalition strikes, and shifting regional power dynamics all point to a potential strategic inflection point in Yemen and the broader Middle East.



Shift in Houthi Tactics and Targeting Patterns

Recent months have seen a discernible shift in Houthi tactics, evolving from a predominant focus on maritime harassment in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to an intensified campaign of missile and UAV strikes deep into Israeli territory. While the Houthis, backed by Iran, have previously demonstrated the capability and willingness to threaten global maritime commerce and U.S.-flagged vessels transiting critical waterways, their more recent operations suggest a strategic pivot. They are increasingly seeking to project force directly against Israel's mainland, synchronizing these strikes with broader Iranian objectives and regional solidarity efforts—particularly those related to Palestinian and Lebanese armed factions.

This development is significant as it indicates the Houthis are no longer satisfied with merely shaping the regional maritime security environment. Instead, they aim to achieve direct psychological and operational effects inside Israel. The result is two-fold: on one hand, a potential drawdown in high-profile maritime attacks (albeit not their complete cessation), and on the other, a bold venture into long-range power projection that leverages ballistic missiles and armed UAVs to strike at Israeli military bases, cities, and critical infrastructure.



Houthi Attacks on Israeli Territory (November–December 2024)

Throughout November and December 2024, Houthi forces dramatically increased their campaign of long-range assaults on Israel. These attacks, most of which were intercepted by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), nonetheless demonstrate the Houthis' enhanced targeting capabilities, extended reach, and resolve. Notably, many of these strikes have been framed by the Houthis as retaliatory



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measures in solidarity with Gaza and Lebanon and as part of a broader Iranian-backed axis of resistance.

November 8, 2024: The Houthis claimed to have targeted Nevatim Airbase in southern Israel with a ballistic missile. According to the IDF, the incoming projectile was intercepted before causing damage or casualties. Although the strike failed to hit its target, it signaled Houthi intent and ability to reach well inside Israeli territory.

November 11, 2024: Houthi forces announced a successful strike on the Nahal Sorek military base near Jaffa. The IDF, however, reported intercepting the projectile near Beit Shemesh. Debris from the interception sparked fires, but caused no casualties. This incident demonstrated the Houthis' willingness to strike near densely populated areas and key strategic sites.

November 21, 2024: The IDF intercepted another Yemen-launched missile. Despite the interception, Houthi forces declared that they had again targeted the Nevatim Airbase, this time using the "Palestine 2" missile. These repeated attempts underscore the Houthis' insistence on attacking high-value military installations.

December 1, 2024: The IDF successfully intercepted a ballistic missile before it crossed into Israeli airspace. The Houthis claimed this attempt was aimed at a "vital site" in central Israel, further indicating a broadening target set beyond solely military bases.

December 7, 2024: Another missile, launched from Yemen, was intercepted by Israeli air defenses. The Houthis stated that this strike targeted a vital facility in southern Israel, suggesting continued efforts to pressure Israel across various geographies.

December 9, 2024: A UAV launched from Yemen penetrated Israeli air defenses, damaging an apartment block in the city of Yavne. No casualties were reported, but this marked a notable incident in which physical damage occurred, highlighting the Houthis' capacity to slip through interception screens on occasion.

December 12, 2024: The IDF intercepted a UAV targeting Eilat over the Red Sea and a second UAV launched from the east before it could strike southern Israel. The Houthis claimed responsibility, stating the intended targets were military sites in Jaffa and Ashkelon. Although ultimately unsuccessful, these two-pronged attacks demonstrated greater complexity in Houthi operational planning.

December 13, 2024: The Houthis claimed to have conducted drone strikes on military sites in Ashkelon and Jaffa. They alleged these UAVs bypassed Israeli defensive systems and reached their targets—though the IDF has not confirmed successful impacts. This incident suggests that while many intercepts are effective, some attacks might involve advanced or stealthy technologies challenging Israeli air defenses.

Cumulatively, these repeated ballistic and UAV attacks on Israel are a clear indication of the Houthis' strategic willingness to escalate the conflict outside their immediate geographical arena, a tactic which might be used as a mobilization effort for their constituents amid increasing domestic tensions. They also illustrate a sophisticated capability, bolstered by Iranian support, to orchestrate complex long-range strikes and consequently continue to push Israel towards a possible retaliation.



Maritime Incidents in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

Although the Houthis have recently shifted more energy toward strikes on Israeli territory, they have not abandoned maritime operations entirely. Instead, their naval activity now functions as a secondary but persistent line of effort, aimed at international vessels, U.S.-flagged merchant ships, and U.S. Navy assets. These attacks threaten some of the world's most vital maritime trade routes, raising the stakes for global energy markets and international shipping security.

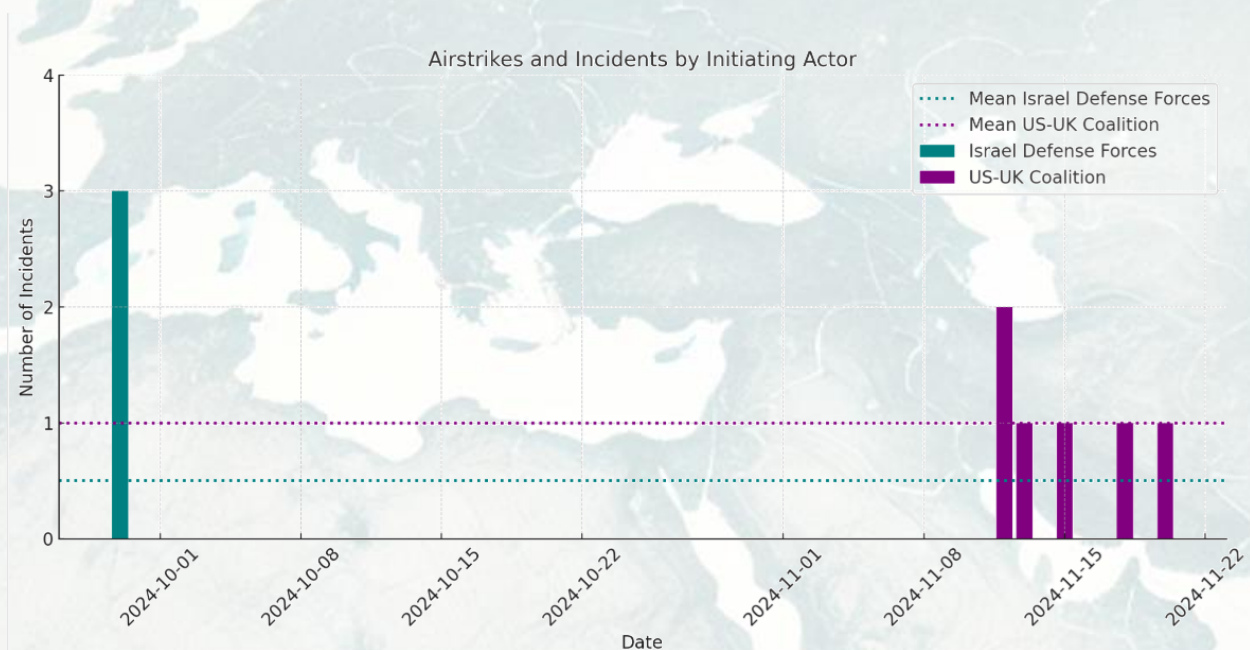
- **Attacks on U.S. Vessels Near Djibouti and in the Gulf of Aden:** The Houthis claimed to have attacked three U.S.-flagged merchant vessels near Djibouti port and launched assaults on U.S. Navy destroyers in the Gulf of Aden. Such operations challenge freedom of navigation and test U.S. resolve in protecting commercial shipping lanes.
- **Ballistic Missile Attack on a Vessel in the Gulf of Aden:** Reports emerged of a Houthi ballistic missile launch targeting a vessel in the Gulf of Aden. Although details are limited, this kind of incident underscores that the group's missile capabilities are not confined to land targets—they are equally aimed at vulnerable maritime arteries.
- **November 30–December 1, 2024: Multiple Maritime Attacks Thwarted:** The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported an attack 80 nautical miles south of Aden. Suspected Houthi forces were involved. Over the same period, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed that two U.S. destroyers, the USS *Stockdale* and USS *O'Kane*, repelled a series of Houthi attacks while escorting the Maersk *Saratoga*, *Liberty Grace*, and *Stena Impeccable* in the Gulf of Aden. During these engagements, the U.S. warships neutralized three anti-ship ballistic missiles, three unmanned aerial systems, and one cruise missile launched by the Houthis. No vessels were damaged and no personnel were injured. These coordinated attacks highlight the sophistication of Houthi capabilities at sea and the importance of maintaining a strong multinational naval presence to safeguard maritime traffic.
- **Attack on the Panama-Flagged *Anadolu S* Cargo Vessel:** The Houthis claimed responsibility for striking the *Anadolu S*, a Panama-flagged cargo ship in the Red Sea, using ballistic and naval missiles, alleging it violated their declared ban on vessels entering Israeli ports. The Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned the attack. The UKMTO confirmed the incident 25 nautical miles west of Mocha, Yemen, reinforcing how closely the Houthis watch vessel movements that they perceive as linked, even indirectly, to Israel.
- **Additional Missile Near-Miss Incidents:** On several occasions, including November 17, missiles reportedly splashed near vessels off the coast of Yemen..
- **U.S. Naval Assets Under Fire:** The Houthis also launched attacks on the USS *Stockdale* and USS *Spruance*, employing at least eight one-way attack drones, two unmanned aerial systems, five anti-ship ballistic missiles, and three anti-ship cruise missiles. U.S. forces



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reported successfully repelling these attempts, demonstrating both their defensive capabilities and the Houthis' unrelenting ambition to inflict damage on international military assets operating in the strategic Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

Israeli Retaliations, Potential Escalation, and U.S.-U.K. Coalition Efforts in Yemen



In recent months, Israel's pattern of engagement in Yemen has fluctuated—at times it has applied decisive airpower against Houthi assets, while at others it has taken a more cautious, back-footed posture. This pullback was largely influenced by competing strategic priorities, including the ongoing war in Gaza, substantial operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, and extensive campaigns against Iranian-backed forces within a weakened Syrian state following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime. However, as the Houthis intensify their strikes against Israel, there are indications that Israel is now reconsidering a more forceful return to large-scale operations in Yemen. Israel's approach forms part of its broader strategy of engaging each Iranian proxy in turn, systematically neutralizing threats to its security interests.



The September 29, 2024 Israeli Strikes:



On September 29, Israel launched attacks against Houthi-controlled ports at Al Hudaydah and Ras Isa in Yemen, using F-15I, F-35I Adir, and F-16I aircraft. Six people were killed and at least 57 were injured. Widespread power outages were caused in the city of Hodeidah itself. The attacks caused significant damage to Yemeni port facilities and power generating stations.

These Israeli attacks were in response to missile fire from the Houthis directed at Israel. The Houthis said their missile attacks are part of a broader campaign to express solidarity with the people of Gaza and Lebanon.

This was the second major Israeli retaliatory strike against the Houthis since Operation Outstretched Arm

on 20 July 2024, which saw Israeli aircraft attacking the Al Hudaydah port after a Houthi drone struck Tel Aviv, causing casualties.

Wider Israeli Strategy Against Iranian Proxies

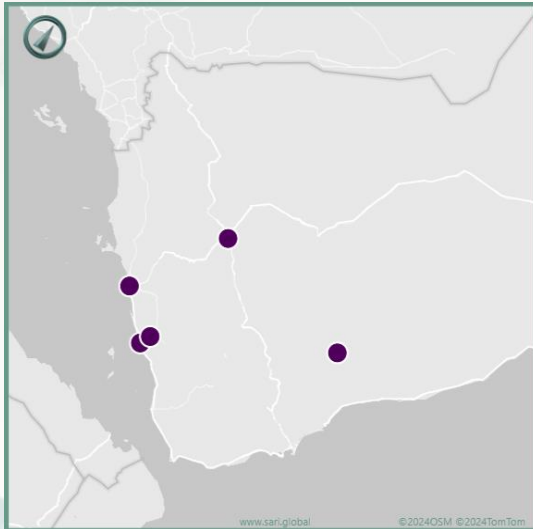
Israeli leaders have long emphasized their success in other theaters—most notably in Syria, where they reportedly destroyed 85% of the Syrian Arab Army's air defense systems. This achievement curtailed Iran's capacity to use Syria as a conduit for arms shipments and reduced the risk to Israeli pilots conducting cross-border missions. Additionally, Israel's extensive operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon reflect a consistent doctrine: Israel does not hesitate to strike preemptively or retaliatorily against Iranian proxies to maintain its regional deterrence posture.

With the experience of disabling much of Syria's air defense network and systematically targeting Hezbollah's assets, Israeli military planners are now considering a more comprehensive campaign against the Houthis. Although Israel previously took a more restrained approach to Yemen, possibly due to the complexity of intervening in an active civil war zone and focusing on other Iranian proxies closer to its borders, the growing Houthi threat appears to be pushing Israel toward a more decisive effort. If the Houthis persist in launching missiles and drones into Israeli territory, Israel may launch a sustained and "more painful" series of strikes on Houthi logistics hubs, command-and-control nodes, and weapons depots—similar to its methodical campaigns in Syria and Lebanon.



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U.S.-U.K. Coalition Operations and Maritime Security Efforts



Parallel to Israel's targeted actions, the United States and the United Kingdom have led a multinational coalition since January 2024 to secure maritime lanes in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and beyond, as well as to support Yemen's internationally recognized government against the Houthi insurgency. These coalition activities, involving air and missile strikes, drones, and naval patrols, complement Israeli efforts to weaken the Houthis and restore stability to crucial maritime chokepoints.

Key Coalition Strikes and Activities:

- Houthi claims suggest U.S.-U.K. airstrikes targeted Al-Tuhayta District in Al Hudaydah Governorate.
- A U.S. military aircraft reportedly landed at Mabad Airport in Shabwah Governorate, Yemen, indicating forward-deployed support or reconnaissance missions.
- The U.S.-U.K. coalition focused on dismantling Houthi weapons storage facilities, missile launch sites, and drone infrastructure. This included strikes on areas such as al-Nahdain, al-Hafaa, and Jarban in Sanaa, where U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) confirmed military aircraft and vessels struck Houthi targets in five locations. Some reports even suggest the possible death of Abdulkaleq al-Houthi, a high-profile figure.
- At least three U.S.-U.K. joint airstrikes targeted the Al Fazah area in the Al-Tuhayta district, south of Al-Hudaydah Governorate.
- The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) documented multiple explosions near a vessel 70 nautical miles southwest of Al-Hudaydah, though no damage or injuries resulted.
- Two U.S. coalition drone strikes were reported in Dhi Naim and al-Sawmaah districts in al-Bayda Governorate. These sustained, low-visibility operations aim to erode the Houthis' ability to strike maritime targets and hinder their capacity for long-range missile launches.



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Through these persistent efforts, the U.S.-U.K. coalition seeks not only to defend freedom of navigation in critical waterways but also to erode the Houthis' warfighting capabilities. While Israel's operations are often more overt and occasionally large-scale, the U.S.-U.K. approach focuses on ensuring maritime security and quietly degrading Houthi capabilities, thereby complementing Israeli strategic objectives.

Future Directions and Strategic Calculations

With the Houthis showing minimal restraint despite previous Israeli, U.S., and U.K. strikes, and given Israel's confidence gleaned from its successes against Iranian proxies in Lebanon and Syria, there is a growing likelihood of an expanded Israeli campaign in Yemen. Having effectively neutralized Syrian air defenses and significantly contained Hezbollah, Israeli military planners now have a model for dismantling another Iranian proxy's infrastructure: from selective precision strikes to comprehensive sustained operations.

If the Houthis continue to target Israeli territory, Tel Aviv may move beyond limited retaliatory raids and undertake a full-fledged, long-range operation—possibly rivalling the scale of its interventions in Lebanon and Syria. The idea that Israel has previously “taken a backpedal” in Yemen operations may soon be reversed, as it maintains its broader goal: taking on each Iranian proxy in turn, mitigating threats, and restoring deterrence in an increasingly interconnected and volatile Middle East.

In addition to its previous operations and strategic considerations, recent reports indicate that Israel is now more openly considering a significant offensive against the Houthis in Yemen. The IDF is reportedly weighing a more substantial strike inside Yemen to halt the ongoing missile launches.

A report by Haaretz highlights that Israel is seeking to establish a regional foothold to better monitor and confront threats emanating from Yemen. According to the report, Israel, with financial support and mediation from the UAE, is interested in setting up a military base in Somaliland—an area strategically located near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This potential base would enhance Israel's ability to track Houthi operations and Iranian supply lines and may be established in exchange for Israeli recognition of Somaliland's self-declared independence. The “Middle East Monitor” previously reported on similar Israeli intentions, noting that an Israeli base in northern Somalia would help oversee Yemen and the Red Sea maritime routes.

Meanwhile, international developments suggest a shifting geopolitical environment. Discussions regarding U.S. recognition of Somaliland have appeared in international reporting and analysis, with claims that such recognition could allow American intelligence and allies to closely monitor arms movements and Houthi activities in the region. The UAE's involvement—operating a base at Berbera Port in Somaliland since 2017—further indicates a growing network of international actors focused on countering Houthi influence and ensuring safe passage through the Red Sea.

These dynamics reflect Israel's increasingly direct approach to dealing with Houthi attacks. Israeli officials appear to be moving beyond limited retaliatory strikes and considering more



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extensive operations, supported by strengthened logistics and intelligence capabilities in the vicinity of Yemen. The combination of ongoing Houthi missile launches, evolving U.S. and Emirati engagement in Somaliland, and Israeli interest in securing forward bases are all factors contributing to Israel's potential shift toward larger, more decisive military actions in the near future.

Looming Government-Offensive Postures Against the Houthis

As of mid-December 2024, Yemeni government-affiliated officials and military leaders have increasingly voiced the need for a comprehensive offensive to reclaim Houthi-held territories. Statements emerging in December indicate that the internationally recognized Yemeni government, emboldened by shifting regional dynamics and backed by international partners, views a large-scale operation as essential for restoring state authority. These plans center on critical areas like Al-Hudaydah, a strategic coastal hub and a longstanding stronghold of Houthi power, arms smuggling, and maritime disruption.

Escalating Frontline Clashes and Tribal Unrest

Across multiple governorates—Taiz, Al-Dhale, Shabwah, Lahij, and beyond—localized battles illustrate the intensifying conflict and foreshadow a larger government-affiliated offensive against Houthi-held areas. In Al-Masharih (Al-Dhale), for example, Southern Transitional Council (STC) fighters recently repelled a Houthi advance, highlighting the armed group's inability to secure all fronts. Similar encounters have been reported in eastern Taiz, where the Yemeni Army dismantled Houthi infrastructure, including hangars and tunnels near the al-Tashrifat military camp.

These engagements are not isolated. In eastern al-Jawf, tribal forces—namely the Beni Nouf tribe—attacked a Houthi checkpoint, sparking fierce clashes in retaliation for the killing of a tribal member. Meanwhile, in areas like Radhum (Shabwah) and Wadi Ubaida (Marib), tribal grievances, local vendettas, and resource disputes further complicate the security landscape. Additionally, the Houthis have faced resistance in Lahij's al-Qurein area, where Yemeni Southern Armed Forces shot down a Houthi drone, and in Taiz's al-Bumiyah market, where a Houthi drone attack killed six people and injured eight more—an incident that has only hardened local resolve.

Al-Hudaydah as a Key Battleground

Al-Hudaydah remains a focal point of strategic importance. Forced displacement of over 600 families, the transformation of civilian homes into Houthi barracks, and widespread landmine deployment underscore the armed group's anticipation of a looming offensive. Along Al-Hudaydah's coastal zones and in adjacent districts like Al-Tuhayta, where Houthis claim U.S.-UK airstrikes have occurred, the entrenched presence of combatants and heavy fortifications reflect the gravity of the coming struggle. The Yemeni Army's reported destruction of Houthi hangars and tunnels in eastern Taiz—part of the broader frontlines that feed into the western coast—demonstrates a pattern of incremental gains designed to pave the way for a more decisive operation.



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Crackdowns, Human Rights Abuses, and Political Backdrop

The conflict's human dimension is visible in prisons run by Sana'a authorities, where detainees like Ahmed Taher Al-Sharabi died amid signs of torture. Allegations that engineer Adnan Al-Harazi was sentenced to death on politically motivated espionage charges further highlight systemic Houthi abuses. These incidents, along with arrests of kidnapping suspects in Sana'a and the torture-related deaths of prisoners, provide the Yemeni government with ammunition to galvanize public and international support. The Houthis' crackdown in places like Al-Salih City prison, and their deadly raids and arbitrary detentions in Taiz, Aden, and Lahij, fuel growing demands for a decisive military response.

Tribal demonstrations—such as those involving the Bani Matar tribe near Sanaa—demand accountability for Houthi killings of tribesmen. These protests parallel tensions in other regions, including Ibb and Marib, where armed altercations claim lives and injure innocent bystanders. With each passing incident—be it a suspected Houthi IED injuring a thirteen-year-old in Bani Hassan (Hajjah), a ballistic missile exploding over Abyan, or AQAP targeting STC fighters in Mudiya—the call for a strategic realignment grows louder.

Toward a More Comprehensive Offensive

Government officials interpret these cumulative pressures—frontline clashes, forced displacement in Al-Hudaydah, human rights violations, and tribal unrest—as signals that incremental tactics are no longer sufficient. Calls for a U.S.-backed strategy to designate the Houthis as a terrorist organization and to sever their supply lines reflect a broader consensus within the internationally recognized Yemeni government. The aim is to break the stalemate: retake strategic nodes like Al-Hudaydah's port, neutralize Houthi strongholds in Taiz, Al-Dhale, and Shabwah, and leverage tribal opposition to undermine Houthi influence in places like eastern al-Jawf and Sanaa's outskirts.

In sum, the presence of multiple flashpoints—Al-Mashari in Al-Dhale, al-Tashrifat in Taiz, Al-Qurein in Lahij, Radhum in Shabwah, and the increasingly tense Al-Hudaydah coast—amplifies the sense of a nearing tipping point. Government officials are channeling growing discontent from tribes, local communities, and international backers into a narrative that only a coordinated and forceful campaign can dismantle Houthi entrenchments, restore legitimate state functions, and alleviate the humanitarian crisis. With frontlines shifting and government forces gaining confidence, these conflict-ridden locations serve as the stage for a transformative offensive that may reshape Yemen's internal power balance.

A Strategic Turning Point in Yemen's Internal Conflict

Yemeni government officials have consistently framed the upcoming offensive not merely as a tactical necessity, but as a cornerstone in a broader strategic plan aimed at exploiting Iran's weakening regional posture and the Houthis' refusal to commit to a genuine peace process. Diplomatic avenues have long stalled amidst Houthi intransigence, prompting Yemeni diplomats



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and senior policymakers to more vigorously advocate for a U.S.-backed strategy that tackles the crisis at its roots. This proposed strategy, as recently articulated by Yemen's ambassador to the United States, Mohammed Al-Hadhrami, centers around three critical measures: designating the Houthis as a terrorist organization on par with groups like Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, supporting the Yemeni government and army in liberating the strategic port of Al-Hudaydah, and targeting the Houthi leadership hierarchy to disrupt their command structure.

According to Al-Hadhrami, such a shift in U.S. policy would send a potent signal to the region and the international community that acts of terror, maritime insecurity, and regional destabilization by the Houthis are categorically unacceptable. By restricting the Houthis' access to financial and material support from Iran, this approach aims to neutralize the armed group's comparative advantage, which stems primarily from Tehran's arms pipelines and strategic backing. The liberation of Al-Hudaydah's port, a vital node for receiving and distributing resources, would simultaneously help restore the Yemeni government's economic footing—crucial for paying salaries and delivering public services—and deny the Houthis a key conduit for Iranian smuggled weaponry. Moreover, breaking the Houthi leadership's chain of command through targeted measures would undermine their operational cohesion, compelling them to consider political solutions rather than relying on force.

These policy prescriptions emerge against a backdrop of forced displacements, heavy Houthi fortifications in coastal regions, persistent human rights abuses, and intensifying tribal opposition. Tribes and communities that have historically kept a wary distance from the conflict are now increasingly engaged in direct confrontations or protests, such as those in the Bani Matar area near Sanaa, demanding accountability for alleged Houthi atrocities. This groundswell of anti-Houthi sentiment provides the Yemeni government a strategic opportunity to align these internal pressures with the goals of an internationally supported offensive.

The urgency of this moment is further underscored by high-level consultations and planning sessions between senior Yemeni and Saudi military officials. In an example reported by Yemen's official news agency, the member of the Presidential Leadership Council and Governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Aradah, met with leaders of the Saudi-led coalition's Joint Forces in Riyadh. Their discussions focused on reinforcing strategic cooperation, enhancing readiness levels, and ensuring that all military and security efforts are aligned toward retaking crucial territory—up to and potentially including the capital, Sanaa—and dismantling the Iranian-backed insurgency. Such meetings highlight the close coordination between Yemen's Internationally-recognized Government and its key regional allies, reflecting a shared recognition that the time may be ripe for a decisive campaign.

Taken together, these developments convey a heightened sense of resolve within the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Officials argue that incremental gains and piecemeal negotiations have failed to change the fundamental dynamics of the conflict. Instead, they are now calling for an



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assertive, multifaceted approach—military, diplomatic, and economic—that can fundamentally alter the balance of power. By doing so, they hope to break the longstanding stalemate, eliminate the Houthis' capacity to threaten maritime lanes and neighboring countries, and lay the groundwork for enduring peace. With Iran's regional influence in question, U.S. and Saudi support at hand, and mounting internal pressures compelling action, Yemeni leaders contend that a decisive turning point is not only possible but imperative for the nation's future stability and sovereignty.

Scenario Planning Exercise

Mapping Yemen's Evolving Conflict Dynamics Using the STAKE Framework

To anticipate the trajectory of Yemen's conflict, we apply SARI Global's STAKE (Stakeholder Threat Assessment & Knowledge Evaluation) framework, incorporating analysis of offensive capabilities, behavioral trends, and evolving tribal loyalties. This structured approach offers insights into how key actors—the Houthis, the internationally recognized government (IRG), external coalitions, and influential tribes—may interact under varying degrees of external pressure, particularly Israeli intervention and an expanding IRG campaign. Special attention is paid to frontline priorities, such as Al-Hudaydah and Taiz, while situating them within broader tribal and socio-political landscapes.

Scenario 1: "Coastal Pivot and Tribal Realignment"

Key Drivers:

- Israel initiates a sustained precision air campaign against strategic Houthi depots and missile launch sites in Al-Hudaydah, aiming to neutralize maritime and ballistic threats.
- The IRG, bolstered by possible U.S.-U.K. support, capitalizes on Houthi distraction to advance along the coastal corridor.
- Historically adversarial tribes—such as the Bani Nawf in Al-Jawf and the Murad in Marib—escalate anti-Houthi activities, emboldened by perceived IRG momentum and external strikes.

In this scenario, Israeli strikes degrade the Houthis' ability to control major ports and disrupt Red Sea shipping routes. As IRG forces push inland from Al-Hudaydah and possible areas such as Taiz and Marib, they engage in active outreach to local tribes, promising enhanced governance and resource-sharing arrangements. For example, the Murad tribe, previously locked in defensive operations to shield Marib from Houthi incursions, now moves from a purely defensive posture to participating in coordinated operations that isolate Houthi supply lines.



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Simultaneously, the Hashid and Bakil confederations—long fragmented by sub-tribal allegiances—begin to align more openly against the Houthis. Early warning indicators, such as an uptick in tribal assemblies condemning Houthi taxation and landmine usage, accompany growing anti-Houthi rhetoric. Tribal elders respond positively to IRG overtures, provided their autonomy and interests are safeguarded. This shifting constellation of alliances feeds a feedback loop: as tribes disrupt Houthi logistics, the IRG gains further ground, encouraging more tribal defections and reducing Houthi legitimacy in contested areas.

Outcome:

Al-Hudaydah is partially secured by the IRG, though humanitarian operations remain challenged by residual landmines and intermittent Houthi artillery fire. Improved IRG-tribal relations stabilize local governance structures, facilitating limited but meaningful restoration of basic services. While the Houthis remain active elsewhere—particularly in Taiz—both the IRG and its external partners see the coastal pivot as a strategic breakthrough. This scenario offers a glimmer of longer-term stabilization if carefully managed, though the risk of renewed tribal volatility remains if promised IRG governance reforms fall short.

Scenario 2: “Stalemate Among Fragmented Stakeholders”

Key Drivers:

- Israel’s intervention is intermittent, aimed at deterring specific missile launches rather than mounting a full-scale campaign.
- The IRG offensive into Al-Hudaydah is stalled by entrenched Houthi defenses and complex tribal landscapes that fail to coalesce into a decisive anti-Houthi bloc.
- Tribes exhibit highly variable loyalties: while the Murad and Al-Awadh tribes remain hostile to the Houthis, some segments of the Bakil and Al-Hada tribes may remain ambivalent.

Here, the conflict settles into a tenuous equilibrium. The IRG struggles to secure cohesive tribal support beyond its Marib stronghold and selective alliances. The Houthis, though under sporadic Israeli pressure and subject to pipeline disruptions by anti-Houthi tribes, continue to wield enough local leverage—through selective service provision and intimidation—to keep critical sub-tribes neutral or quietly cooperative. Early warning indicators of shifting tribal sentiment—such as sudden fluctuations in tribal checkpoint activities, resource disputes among Bakil sub-tribes, or kidnappings of tribal elders—do not translate into decisive realignments against the Houthis.

Without a clear shift in the balance of power, humanitarian aid remains sporadic and heavily negotiated on a district-by-district basis. Meanwhile, the IRG’s inability to secure a strategic port such as Al-Hudaydah limits its capacity to deliver on promises made to tribal allies. As a result, local



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communities grow frustrated, and some tribes revert to transactional alliances, extracting concessions from whichever side can meet their immediate needs.

Outcome:

A prolonged stalemate emerges, featuring multiple low-intensity flashpoints. Tribes function as power brokers rather than steadfast allies, and both the Houthis and IRG must continually expend diplomatic and material capital to maintain tribal acquiescence. This scenario yields a drawn-out conflict, sustained humanitarian distress, and diminished prospects for a decisive political settlement.

Scenario 3: “Fractured Autonomy and Southern Recalibration”

Key Drivers:

- Mounting international criticism tempers Israel’s willingness to engage fully, resulting in limited precision strikes that neither decisively weaken the Houthis nor embolden the IRG.
- The IRG launches a modest campaign in Al-Hudaydah but soon finds the cost too high and shifts attention to consolidating control in Taiz and southern governorates.
- Tribal identities and alliances fragment further as southern tribes like the Yafa, aligned with the Southern Transitional Council, increasingly prioritize their own autonomy. Meanwhile, northern tribes—such as Bani Harith near Sanaa—hesitate to openly join the IRG, fearing retribution and loss of local resource flows from Houthi intermediaries.

In this future, limited external pressure fails to produce a strategic opening for the IRG. The Houthis adapt by dispersing their assets, avoiding large-scale confrontations, and using tribal co-optation to sustain their presence. Early warning indicators, such as a rise in STC-aligned armed groups establishing checkpoints in Lahij or the Al-Mahra tribes protesting against external interference, reflect a reorientation of power centers. Instead of a unified anti-Houthi front, the IRG faces a patchwork of tribal and localized interests. Some local leaders leverage the IRG’s distraction in Taiz to extract concessions, while others hedge by maintaining token relations with the Houthis to secure scarce resources.

As a result, IRG advances falter. Attempts to secure stable governance and service delivery are complicated by overlapping claims and mistrust. In areas like Shabwah, Al-Sadah sub-tribes periodically clash with IRG forces or the Houthis, guided less by loyalty to a central authority and more by immediate tactical considerations—access to grazing lands, control over smuggling routes, or retribution for past grievances. The resulting environment is one of chronic low-level conflict and decentralized power, impeding humanitarian actors and discouraging significant investment in reconstruction.



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Outcome:

Local communities remain caught in a cycle of insecurity, where no single authority can guarantee their welfare. Over time, the conflict morphs into a series of negotiated truces and local arrangements that are fluid and contingent. This scenario leaves Yemen fragmented, with Al-Hudaydah partially contested, Taiz partially pacified but unrest simmering beneath the surface, and tribes throughout the country leveraging their strategic positions for immediate gain, often at the expense of long-term stability.

Comparative Insights and Early Warning Indicators

Across all scenarios, the STAKE framework underscores the crucial role of tribal actors as both disruptors and potential stabilizers. Whether tribes coalesce around the IRG in response to Israeli intervention (Scenario 1), remain fluid and transactional (Scenario 2), or pivot toward greater regional autonomy and fractured loyalties (Scenario 3), their behavior is a reliable bellwether of the conflict's direction.

Humanitarian and Access Implications

Integrating insights from stakeholder analyses and tribal dynamics into policy and operational planning can significantly enhance the ability of international actors to anticipate changes in the humanitarian landscape. Tribal alliances and their relationships with both the Houthis and the IRG directly influence the security of supply routes, access to ports, and the predictability of logistical corridors. In periods of increasing tribal hostility or shifting allegiance, humanitarian convoys may face restricted movement, higher security risks, or demands for informal tolls. Conversely, constructive engagement with influential tribal leaders can result in improved community acceptance and safer conditions for aid delivery.

A deterioration in tribal relations—such as when once-neutral tribes turn hostile or previously supportive groups withdraw cooperation—can lead to sudden disruptions in humanitarian operations. This may manifest in overland blockades, heightened scrutiny of aid personnel at checkpoints, or the closure of previously accessible corridors such as *the north-south arteries connecting Sana'a and Taiz to the southern governorates, the transport links through Marib and Shabwah, the coastal access roads in Al-Hudaydah, the northern routes near Sa'ada and border crossings, such as the Al-Wadeeah Customs corridor to Saudi Arabia*. Delays or suspension of essential aid shipments—including food, medical supplies, and shelter materials—inevitably exacerbate humanitarian needs and contribute to deteriorating public health conditions.

Early Warning Indicators for Humanitarian Actors

Several early warning indicators can help humanitarian, diplomatic, and development entities anticipate and adapt to these evolving conditions:

Public Tribal Assemblies and Pronouncements: Increased frequency of tribal meetings, public statements criticizing external parties, or declarations supporting or opposing one of



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the main conflict actors can indicate imminent shifts in community acceptance and security conditions along key routes.

Fluctuations in Checkpoint Patterns: Sudden establishment or dismantling of checkpoints by tribal armed groups, introduction of unofficial “tolls,” or more stringent inspections at existing security points suggest changing political and security dynamics that may limit humanitarian access.

Localized Protests and Resource Disputes: Intensified demonstrations, disputes over resource allocation, or reported tensions between tribes and central authorities can foreshadow reduced willingness to cooperate with humanitarian organizations. These developments may pressure international actors to adjust operational plans or seek alternative supply lines.

Alterations in Social Media and Community Discourse: Increased anti-foreigner or anti-establishment rhetoric on local communication platforms and social media channels can signal deteriorating perceptions of external actors, including aid agencies. This may necessitate recalibrating engagement strategies, strengthening community outreach, and reinforcing staff security protocols.

Strategic Adjustments for International Stakeholders:

By monitoring these indicators, humanitarian agencies and other international stakeholders can:

- **Adapt Operational Footprints:** Reroute convoys, pre-position essential supplies in safer areas, or temporarily suspend operations when indicators suggest heightened risks.
- **Engage Credible Local Intermediaries:** Identify neutral community leaders or tribal elders trusted by various factions to negotiate safe passage, de-escalate tensions, and facilitate rapid response measures, thereby minimizing interruptions in critical aid delivery.
- **Strengthen Localized Solutions:** Integrate community-driven projects and inclusive governance mechanisms into development plans to reduce tribal grievances and strengthen local support for aid activities.
- **Enhance Diplomatic and Security Liaison:** Utilize diplomatic channels and security forums to communicate early warning signs promptly, coordinate with coalition partners, and encourage confidence-building measures that mitigate risks to humanitarian operations.



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