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Abstract: *Maritime transport through the Suez Canal currently accounts for over 7.5% of the world's ocean trade. Although the U.S. Navy maintains a presence in the region, that presence has come under threat as a result of Yemen's ongoing civil war; the Houthi movement in Yemen has targeted U.S. and partner maritime traffic off the coast of Yemen. If the Houthis expand their hostilities toward maritime activity in the Red Sea, resulting in shipping routes being diverted around the Cape of Hope, the impact could be extremely devastating to the global economy.*

Key words: *Houthi insurgency, legitimate, Houthis against, coalition, political Council.*

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing conflict between the Houthi rebel group in northern Yemen and the country's government began in 2004, following the killing of Hussein Badr ad-Din al-Houthi in a clash between protestors and Yemeni military. Al-Houthi was a prominent religious leader in the Yemeni province of Saada whose preaching began to take on an anti-governmental tone when he founded the «Believing Youth», a group dedicated to reviving Zaydi ideology in North Yemen. The history of the al-Houthi family's connection to Iran began in 1978 and has helped shape the Iranian outlook on politics. Abdul Malik al-Houthi studied Shi'a Islam in Iran from 1978-1979 and has been noted to have an affinity for Iran, which may have been influenced in that period. Until 2004, there was not very much evidence of Iranian involvement within Yemen. After 2004, Iran began a limited support of military, financial, and political aid to the Houthis. This continued into the Arab Spring, but significantly increased in 2014.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

By March 2011, the ongoing Houthi conflict had evolved into civil war in Yemen. A Saudi-led coalition of states⁸⁴ in the region began a military campaign to restore U.S.-backed president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to power after the Houthi insurgency forced him out of Sanaa and into exile in Saudi Arabia. The coalition campaign began as a primarily aerial one, but limited efficacy and growing humanitarian concerns have since prompted a full-scale conventional ground assault, deploying thousands of coalition troops on the ground in Yemen. Since Ali Abdullah Saleh yielded his power in the face of national protests in 2011, the former president and forces loyal to him have begun backing the Houthi insurgency, whom the group fought against for roughly a decade.

In addition to the statistical issues in comparison, there are aspects of Yemen's overall refugee situation that suggest deficiencies in the available data's ability to accurately capture the impact of violence emanating from the country's civil war on its local populations. Refugee outflow is used in this study as a proxy variable for the indiscriminate nature of a rebel group's use of violence in civil war. So, examining the factors at work in Yemen which affect that proxy variable are essential to understanding the phenomenon it seeks to emulate. The large number of Internally Displaced Persons in Yemen, for example, depicts a much greater impact of the conflict's violence on civilian life than the outflow of refugees.

RESULTS

The Houthis, who have taken primary control of Yemen and desire to be recognized as the legitimate governing body of Yemen, have set their sights on disrupting maritime shipping and the safety of navigation in the Red Sea Region. Their primary targets are Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and U.S. and coalition partners. The political objective for the Houthis would be to force the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), primarily Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as the United States, into negotiations to end the war in Yemen. Ultimately, the Houthis' strategy for maritime insurgency centers on utilizing the coasts of Yemen to launch manned fast boats, armed drone boats, and medium to long-range missiles.

Piracy has occurred at sea for centuries, but maritime insurgency is a fairly new occurrence. Unlike piracy, where seafaring combatants seek to capture maritime vessels and their contents for monetary reward, maritime insurgency attempts to disrupt navigational safety in a coercive effort for political gain. Utilizing Yemen's Red Sea coastline and establishing offensive missile vantage points from mountains that overlook Bab-el-Mandeb, a critical maritime strait, allows the Houthis to prey upon the Red Sea's.

This thesis inquires as to whether the insurgency within Yemen is a threat to U.S. and coalition maritime operations within the Red Sea Region. In addition to drawing on the theories of U.S. grand strategy, to understand the domestic threat within Yemen the Houthis this thesis utilizes a National Defense Research Institute report titled, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen* by Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells to explain how Yemen's domestic causal factors have enabled insurgency. *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen* provides extensive qualitative data and historic coverage on the Yemen government, the Zaydi branch of Islam, the al-Houthi family, «Shi'ite Terror», and domestic oil production as it pertains to Yemen's economy.

Periphery in Northern Yemen also provides empirical demographic data, conflict statistics, and maps of economic and military networks within Yemen. To understand how the external reactions and foreign influence have either prevented growth or encouraged expansion of Yemen's insurgency, this thesis researches.

DISCUSSION

Both the Houthis and AQAP have already shown a willingness and ability to strike U.S. and coalition naval vessels and thus to challenge, and raise the cost of operations in, the maritime domain. Recent attacks by the Houthis against coalition vessels have proven that a very real and capable threat already exists and could increase. The strength of the Houthis has been attributed by the UN to training and provisions of military weapons from Iran. Such support has increased the sophistication of Houthi capabilities and might continue to do so through the near and medium terms. Therefore, understanding the threat in Yemen, what factors have allowed this threat to grow in sophistication, and how this threat has affected U.S. and coalition maritime operations, can provide information to better identify ways of improving U.S. and coalition maritime strategy and operations in the Red Sea region.

Coalition naval blockades also had a negative humanitarian impact. Although the blockades intended to prevent outside weapons (especially those originating from Iran) from being smuggled into Yemen, they also prevented vital food and medicine from reaching Yemen's civilian population. Since Yemen imports over 75% of its consumable goods, coalition naval blockades consequently created a humanitarian crisis as Yemen's population suffered from an enormous shortage of consumable goods.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored Yemen's security environment following the Arab Spring and documented support to the Houthis by Iran as well as the Houthis' ties to Hezbollah. Following the Arab Spring of 2011, the Houthis have created an unstable security environment, a consequence of the adverse result of the Houthi-Saleh alliance and the Iran's support to the Houthis, which has resulted in the Houthis taking control over strategic territory across Yemen. The following chapter discusses the unstable maritime security environment of the Red Sea region, the Houthis' increased frequency of maritime terrorism, and the various weapons capability utilized by the Houthis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The formality and structure of the Houthi organizations empower their maritime offensive capabilities. After the fall of Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the officially recognized state of Yemen, the Houthis created a very structured form of government and formally occupied provinces, imposed taxes, and enforced laws. The Houthis' government is led by the Supreme Political Council, currently Mahdi al-Mashat, and UN recognized authority for the Houthis. Receiving direction from the Supreme Political Council, each province has an appointed governor, listed as follows.

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