

Allmode Intelligence Section

Advisory: 036 (Yemen)

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WARNING !!!

Yemen is effectively slipping into civil war. With a multi-faceted conflict involving the **US/Saudi** backed former government of **President Hadi** and his still loyal security forces, and the **Iranian** backed **al-Houthi** rebels. This conflict is overlaid by a secondary conflict between **al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**, and **The Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS)** who are fighting each other, the **al-Houthis** AND the former government/loyalist security forces concurrently.

The arrival of **ISIS** in Yemen could help fuel a broader sectarian war. They carried out five suicide bombings in Yemen on the 20th March (these being the first by **ISIS** in Yemen) killing at least 126 people. The targeting of Zaydi Shia mosques will fundamentally change political and security dynamics.

Events have escalated over the past week, with the aerial-bombing of the Presidential Palace in Aden on the 19th March (conducted by pro Houthi pilots of the Yemeni Air force¹), from where **Hadi** is trying to establish a rival government in the south to challenge the authority of the one now under Iranian-backed **al Houthi** control in the capital, Sana'a. On the same day, clashes caused the International Airport in Aden to close, with the eventual expulsion of the pro-**Houthis** head of the Special Security Forces (SSF) Abdul Hafiz al Saqqaf, from Aden. As at the 25th March the situation has again changed, with **Houthi** rebels entering the suburbs of Aden and capturing the al-Anad airbase near President Abedrabbo Mansour **Hadi's** southern refuge².

Al Houthis fighters are now said to be trying to consolidate their control in northern and central Yemen and making advances on the southern region provinces³. On the 19th March the **al Houthis** deployed a large force along the Ma'rib-al Bayda border, a province strategically important for its oil infrastructure. Reports have also indicated that the clashes are moving northwest of Aden to Tiaz, Yemen's third most influential city and home to some of the strategic ports on the Red Sea coastline, such as al-Mukha. Their entry into al-Mukha takes them to within 80 km (50 miles) north of Bab al-Mandeb Strait, which links the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal and Red Sea and is a main transit route for trade.

AQAP and **ISIS** are capitalising on this conflict to expand their control in Yemen's southern and eastern governorates of Ma'rib and al Bayda⁴.

In a report published in the Saudi-owned newspaper Asharq al-Awsat on the 24th March, it was revealed that former President Hadi had called on the **Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC)** to send its Peninsula Shield force to intervene militarily and prevent the fall of Aden⁵. The **Saudi Arabian** Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal has been reported as warning, "If the Houthi coup does not end peacefully, we will take the necessary measures for this crisis to protect the region." **Saudi Arabia** is sending troops, including armour and artillery to its southern border with **Yemen**⁶.

¹ BBC, "Yemen crisis: Houthi rebels 'capture air base' near Aden", 25 Mar 2015, 10:00 GMT

² Al Jazeera, "Yemen's Houthis advance towards Aden", 25 Mar 2015, 10:25 GMT

³ BBC, "Yemen crisis: Houthi rebels push into southern areas", 24 Mar 2015

⁴ NBC News, "The shadow war In Yemen", 25 Mar 2015, 09:52 GMT

⁵ Ashaq Al-Awsat, "Yemen's Hadi calls for no-fly zone, GCC military intervention", 23 Mar 2015

⁶ Reuters, "Saudi Arabia building up military near Yemen border - U.S. officials", 25 Mar2015, 00:49 GMT

In a move that indicates the volatility of the situation, the **U.S.** special operation forces have evacuated Yemen (though they still have the capacity to monitor the region from the air and electronically⁷. The **United Nations Security Council** will hold an urgent meeting on Sunday (29 March) to discuss the situation in Yemen.

It is therefore essential that all parties that have a vested interest in Yemen or transiting through the region remain updated daily as to the unfolding situation and stay on alert to withdraw from the region at a moment's notice.

The UK Foreign Commonwealth Office have advised against all travel to Yemen. This includes the mainland and all islands and they advise that all foreign personnel leave immediately.⁸

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⁷ Fox News, "US counterterrorism strategy in Yemen collapses as country's violence spins out of control", 24 Mar 2015

⁸ FCO, "Yemen foreign Travel Advice", 23 Mar 2015