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YEMEN: Saudi-UAE Coalition Divide Indicate a Sustained Conflict

Summary: The civil war in Yemen will likely endure despite the Saudi-UAE coalition's support of President Hadi's government. The continued conflict will strain global humanitarian aid efforts, depress Saudi Arabia's image as a regional power, and reinforce the UAE's authority over maritime commerce in the Arabian Sea as the Saudi-UAE coalition deteriorates.

Early Developments: The Arab Spring uprisings in Yemen forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh to transfer power to Deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. President Hadi struggled to maintain control as jihadist groups developed in the Northwest and a separatist movement formed in the South. Ansar Allah, a Zaidi-Shia Islamic movement known as the Houthi rebels, exploited the power vacuum formed in the midst of Hadi's power struggle with the support of Iran.

In 2015, a Saudi-UAE coalition deployed to fight alongside Sunni pro-Hadi forces to resist the threat of spreading militant-Shia Islamic groups and Iran's impact in the Arabian Peninsula. Additionally, Morocco, Bahrain, and Sudan stationed troops in Yemen in support of the Saudi mission. The Saudi-UAE coalition received intelligence and logistical support from members of NATO to combat Ansar Allah and other non-state forces in opposition to developing Iranian influence. Saudi Arabia supports the internationally recognized government of Hadi, while the UAE supports the separatist South Transitional Council (STC). Despite principally varied agendas, the two groups sustain a nominal alliance to combat Ansar Allah.

Conflicting Interests: Saudi Arabia and the UAE likely see the conflict as an opportunity to establish a Sunni government and keep Iranian influence out of a strategic geographic area in the Middle East. Yemen's location near Saudi Arabia, the Red Sea, and Gulf of Aden makes it key in the balance of power for the Middle East. Iran's support of the Ansar Allah and the Saudi-UAE support of the Hadi-separatist coalition essentially make this conflict a proxy war between the dominant Shia and Sunni powers respectively; however, varying underlying priorities of coalition members affect short-term decisions that will likely undermine indelible goals of combating Iranian influence. For example, the UAE's specific support for the separatist group of the coalition demonstrates an ambition for influence over southern Yemen, which holds strategic advantages economically and militarily due to its access to ports, while Saudi Arabia maintains focus on eliminating Ansar Allah.

Extremist Involvement: Ansar al-Sharia and AQAP will not likely present a threat to the Saudi-UAE coalition despite past attacks due to increased diplomatic ties to STC and the UAE. Islamic extremist groups developed an interest in Yemen subsequent to its steady destabilization due to their opportunity to exploit power vacuums and expand authority. Ansar al-Sharia and AQAP cultivated strength in the Southeast and established a physical presence within pro-Hadi control territory. Since 2014, Ansar al-Sharia maintained control of approximately 10 percent of Yemen and carried out consistent attacks against pro-Hadi forces; however, Ansar al-Sharia and AQAP recently halted attacks against the Saudi-UAE coalition due to diplomatic talks with the UAE, who likely intends to protect the separatist forces in the south from extremist groups' attacks.

Current Situation: Clashes between Hadi's forces and STC in 2019 demonstrate divergent long-term objectives that threaten the stability of the Saudi-UAE coalition. STC maintains support in missions against Ansar Allah, but seized control of Aden on 10 August with the air support of the UAE. Since 8 September, Hadi's forces remain outside of the temporary capital.

Due to fragmentation in the coalition, Saudi Arabia and the UAE called for an armistice between STC and Hadi's government to reestablish effective cooperation.

The conflict in Yemen will likely claim thousands more lives and remain a drain on global humanitarian aid despite continuous efforts to absolve the crisis. Since 2014, the civil war killed approximately 90,000 Yemenis, displaced 2 million, and left 24 million in need of aid. The United Nations, along with members of NATO, continuously dispersed humanitarian aid to Yemen through the Saudi-UAE coalition. In early 2019, the UN raised \$2.5 billion to support aid efforts in what it calls a humanitarian catastrophe; however, the situation will likely remain stagnant as sluggish attempts to support fail.

Outlook and Implications: Yemen will likely persist as a drain on global humanitarian aid efforts due to the uncompromising nature of Ansar Allah and conflicting long-term interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The continued divide of Yemen will negatively impact Saudi Arabia's international image due to Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) inability to prevail or disengage from the conflict without eliminating the proximate regional threat of Iran, impairing its influence on the world stage. Furthermore, the divide will benefit the UAE by enabling its control over maritime commerce in the Persian Sea, benefitting both its economy and military as well as global image as regional powerhouse in contrast to its economic rival Qatar.

The UAE will likely pursue the autonomy of South Yemen for its separatist allies to retain access to the Port of Aden to preserve commercial shipping dominance as well as Socotra and Kilmia islands to further establish its military presence in the Arabian Sea. Additionally, the UAE will likely encourage a diplomatic solution to end conflicts with Ansar Allah to protect its military personnel and separatist allies.

Saudi Arabia will likely pursue the complete eradication of Ansar Allah-controlled territories, particularly adjacent to its southern border to protect itself from adversaries. Although a divided Yemen may serve Saudi Arabia's interests in maintaining regional economic dominance, MBS will likely prioritize removing the proximate threat of Iranian influence. Despite Saudi Arabia's efforts to conclude conflicts in Yemen, the conflict will almost certainly stay in gridlock and divide.

Divergent long-term ambitions will likely continue to gradually erode the Saudi-UAE coalition, threatening their mutual objective of combating Iranian and Ansar Allah influence. Recent clashes between Saudi-backed government forces and UAE-backed separatist forces in Aden demonstrate the growing complexity of Saudi-UAE coalition relations as the stalemate with Ansar Allah continues. Despite visible differences in motivation between Hadi's government and the separatists, Saudi Arabia and the UAE will likely sustain relations in the short-term to quell the potential for a regional Iranian hegemony; however, each country holds supplementary strategic interests for preserving involvement in Yemen that will likely splinter the alliance in the long-term and threaten competition against Iran's provincial power.

[Riley Coder]

CANADA: Trudeau Formally Announces Start of National Election Campaign

Summary: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally announced the beginning of the campaign for the upcoming federal election, where he faces a challenge balancing his progressive record with overcoming questions about his ethical conduct.

Development: On 11 September, Trudeau formally called a national election which will take place on 21 October. Experts indicate Trudeau, Speaker of the House of Commons and Conservative Party member Andrew Scheer, and leader of the left-leaning New Democrats Jagmeet Singh make up the leading candidates in the race. Polls currently show Trudeau and Scheer basically tied with Singh lagging slightly behind. Trudeau will seek re-election amid an ethics scandal in which he pressured a justice minister into dropping an investigation against a large government contractor on the basis that the investigation would negatively affect the job market.

Analysis: Trudeau's re-election campaign will likely focus on the progressive policies he championed as Prime Minister balanced with attempting to overcome the ethics scandal and to appear more responsible to independent and more conservative voters. Trudeau's commitment to climate issues, the legalization of marijuana, and several re-negotiated trade deals will likely appeal to progressive voters and show his ability to deliver on campaign promises. His conduct in the ethics scandal, however, will likely constitute Trudeau's biggest single barrier to re-election. If Trudeau can distance himself from the ethics scandal, his platform and effectiveness at campaigning will likely make him the frontrunner in the lead-up to the election.

[Zach Coffee]

GREAT BRITAIN: Extension on Brexit Likely After Passage of New Legislation

Summary: Legislation passed requiring British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to seek an extension in the event of a no-deal Brexit on 31 October makes a delay in Brexit more likely.

Development: On 9 September, Parliament passed into law a bill requiring Johnson to seek an extension on Brexit in the event of a no deal on 31 October, blocking a no-deal exit situation. This law will force Johnson to seek a three-month extension to the current Brexit deadline if Parliament does not approve the deal by that date. Britain's monarch, Queen Elizabeth, approved the bill, providing the final piece of royal assent needed for it to become law. Johnson opposes this law, stating that the members of Parliament (MPs) voted to "scupper any serious negotiations," and that it would put the UK at a weaker negotiating position with the EU. Following the passage of this bill, Johnson pushed for a general election for 15 October, but MPs blocked this move. Due to previous statements of dedication to leaving the EU with or without the deal, Johnson's opposition to this bill raised concerns whether he will adhere to the law. This comes as the suspension of Parliament began on 9 September after the session ended and will last until 14 October.

Analysis: Despite Johnson's protests, an extension on Brexit will likely occur due to the low probability of a deal by 31 October. The suspension of Parliament until 14 October exacerbates the current disagreements within Parliament. While concerns grow that Johnson may not follow the law, adding incentive for all parties to pass a deal, he likely does not have enough time to accomplish this goal. Due to the unpopularity of a no-deal Brexit and its potential implications, Johnson likely cannot gain enough traction to carry through with his promise, activating the law requiring him to seek an extension. As Parliament blocked Johnson's move to hold a general election regarding the issue, he must adhere to the law unless he finds a loophole or Parliament passes a motion to hold a general election once it is brought back into session on 14 October. Once Parliament returns to session, MPs will probably focus on blocking Johnson's move to leave the EU with or without a deal. Parliament likely would prefer the added time an extension gives to pass a deal, rather than trying to complete such task in the two weeks remaining before the deadline.

[Alli McIntyre]

NORTH KOREA: Missile Launches Likely Indicate Commitment to Nuclear Program

Summary: North Korea's firing of undisclosed projectiles into the Sea of Japan likely demonstrates its plans to continue its nuclear programs despite its expressed willingness to continue denuclearization talks with South Korean allies.

Development: On 10 September, North Korea launched two short-range projectiles into the Sea of Japan shortly after it announced its willingness to return to denuclearization negotiations with Washington. South Korean officials have not provided any details regarding this testing beyond stating that it used radars and other equipment to detect the launch of a short-range ballistic missile. To determine the type of projectiles and details of the incident, South Korea and its allies plan to conduct further investigations.

Analysis: In continuing missile tests despite denuclearization talks, North Korea is likely indicating that it has no intention of fully abandoning its nuclear programs. North Korea will likely continue to ignore some if not all of the previous sanctions or statements through its ongoing missile launches to demonstrate its goal of maintaining some degree of nuclear capability in renewed negotiations. With these tests following North Korea's earlier 10 September proposal to return to denuclearization talks, North Korea is almost certainly reiterating its stance that it will not concede to full denuclearization. If North Korea continues tests in the coming months it will probably also raise concern about regional security, increasing tension in the Korean Peninsula.

[Hunter Binkley]

RUSSIA: Ruling Party Suffers Setback in Moscow Elections, but Gains in Other Regions

Summary: Russia's pro-Kremlin United Russia party lost seats in Moscow's city council elections but enjoyed victories in gubernatorial and other races across Russia, demonstrating political control despite opposition gains in Moscow.

Development: On 8 September, Russia held local elections across its 85 regions. In Moscow, Putin's United Russia Party suffered setbacks as opposition candidates gained 20 of Moscow City Duma's 45 seats. Experts attribute this win to anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny pushed a strategy of "smart voting," in which voters cast ballots for the candidate with the best chance of beating United Russia in each district. United Russia also employed a new strategy in local elections through registering nominally as independent candidates in numerous local elections in addition to Moscow. United Russia still holds the majority of 26 seats, a decrease from 2014 where it held 28 seats in addition to 10 seats occupied by allied independents. The Moscow City election drew international attention after the Central Election Commission barred many independent candidates from running, sparking massive protests. Meanwhile, United Russia succeeded in holding all 16 contested gubernatorial seats.

Analysis: Moscow's local elections symbolize the declining popularity of the United Russia party across Russia. A stagnant economy, corruption, flat incomes, and growing social discontent provided enough momentum to further undermine United Russia and push Muscovites to vote for opposition candidates, even communists and other unpopular choices. The apparent success of "smart voting" may set a trend for future elections, as other regions may increasingly disapprove of United Russia, but some less palatable anti-Kremlin candidates may make the strategy inaccessible in some regions. Despite losses in Moscow, the Kremlin held control of political power in many regions and showed its strong political leadership through the wins of 16 pro-Kremlin governors. United Russia will likely work to improve its public image to avoid a similar situation in the next election and regain the positions opposition gained in Moscow. While Moscow city elections and protest present a first step, opposition will need to expand its success to other regions by showing that pro-Kremlin voting is not producing the results Russians seek.

[Gianna Geiger]

This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.

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