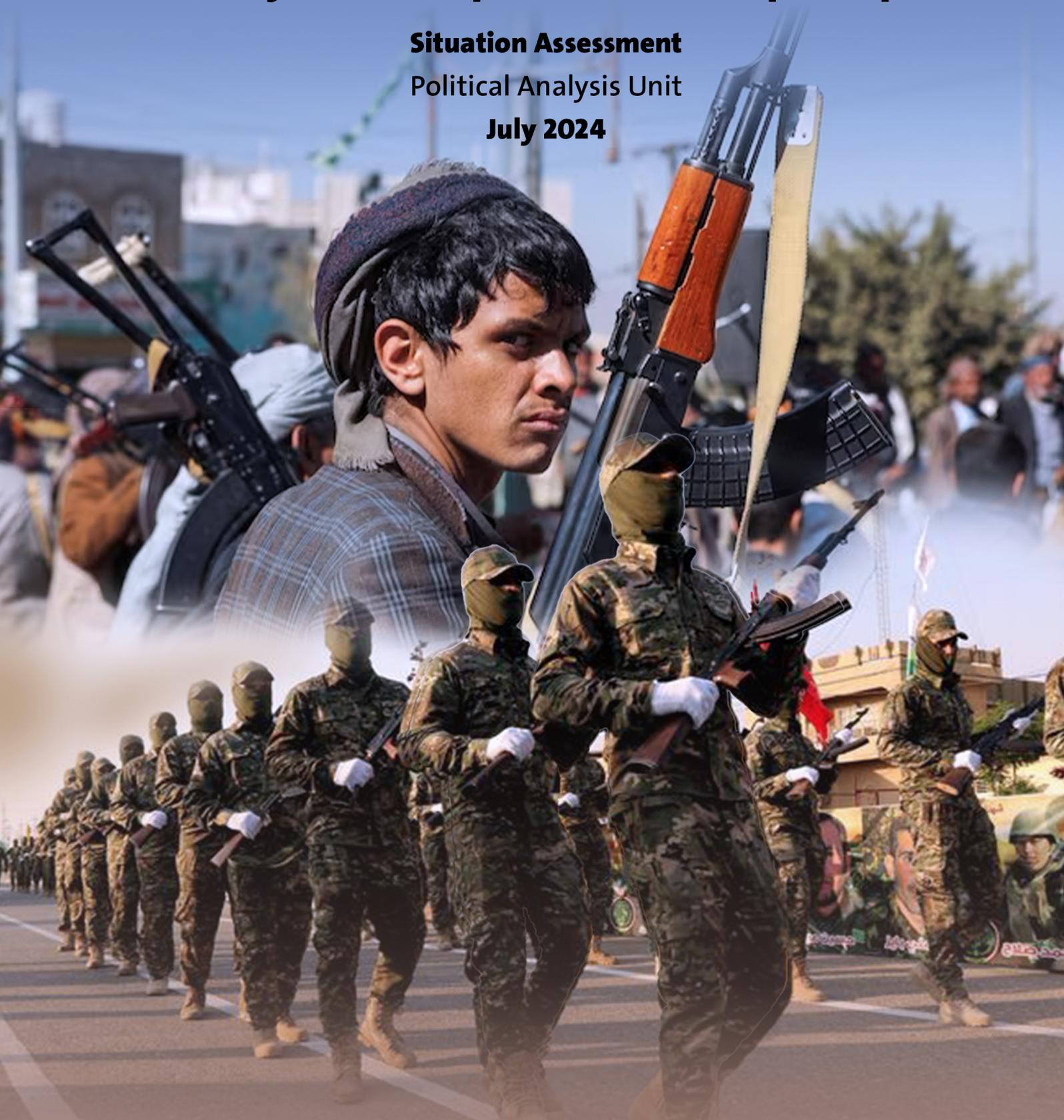


What's Beyond Houthis' Announcement of Military Partnership with Armed Iraqi Groups?

Situation Assessment
Political Analysis Unit
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Introduction:

In last June, the Houthis made an announcement claiming responsibility for two military operations against Israel in partnership with the “Iraqi Islamic Resistance.” They stated that the first operation targeted two ships carrying military equipment in Haifa sea port, while the second operation targeted a ship that “violated the entry ban into the port”. The “Islamic Resistance” in Iraq also issued a statement confirming this cooperation. What are the significances of this announcement? And what are the objectives the Houthis seek to achieve, and the potential repercussions for this escalation?

The present assessment attempts to answer the above questions.

Significance and Objectives:

While both parties justify their joint attacks as a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people, it appears that there is more to this cooperation than just confronting Israel and supporting the Palestinians. The declared partnership carries no meaning as it is basically based under the umbrella of the Resistance Axis. This is evident from the timing of the announcement, which is somewhat surprising. It comes at a time when Gaza war is about to reach its end and after several months of the two parties (Houthis and Iraqi Islamic Resistance) already conducting military operations against Israel, making this partnership slightly belated. Furthermore, this announcement comes at a sensitive time for the Houthi group locally and regionally, which of course is not favourable to the group and the Resistance Axis.

The Houthi group is currently facing internal pressure and growing public discontent due to its failure to fulfill its responsibilities as a de facto authority, including providing basic services and its refusal to pay the salaries of public sector employees. Additionally, the Yemeni government’s Central Bank has escalated economic pressure on the group through various measures related to monetary and financial policies, such as ordering the relocation of bank headquarters from Sana’a to Aden. In addition to these challenges, the Houthi group is also involved in confrontations with Western powers in the Red Sea, and the negotiations with Saudi Arabia have been suspended. Furthermore, the favorable understandings between the two parties in these negotiations have been put on hold, which were considered a significant victory for the group.

Hence, the Houthi group has expressed growing concerns about a US-led plan to target them militarily. Its leader explicitly referred to these concerns, stating that they are pressing issues for the group. He emphasized their continuous efforts to enhance their capabilities and their readiness to respond to any escalation. He said: "We are constantly working to develop our capabilities, and we will respond to escalation with escalation," He added: "We have pressure cards, and we will not stand idly by in the face of targeting our people economically or militarily«.

Moreover ,the announcement of this cooperation with the" Iraqi Resistance "aims to convey messages to regional and international actors and achieve specific political and media objectives for the Houthi group and the broader" Resistance Axis ."This is part of Houthis 'efforts to strengthen their positions in the face of existing economic difficulties and perceived risks, as well as to gain new advantages on the regional and international stage .Additionally ,they want to send a general message to various parties ,emphasizing their significance as a player in the regional arena that cannot be ignored ,or to bypass their interests.

Similarly ,this announcement aims to warn the United States of America and its allies ,particularly regional states actively involved in Yemeni affairs like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ,who support the Yemeni government and work to encounter any military action against them .They want to convey a message to these two states that the Houthi group is not alone and can target their interests from different directions.

The Houthis also seek to pressure Saudi Arabia to reconsider its positions on the suspension of peace negotiations and to push the Yemeni government to stop the economic escalation led by the central bank .Since they face limitations on military escalation against Saudi Arabia ,they are sending a message about their ability to target it through other hands and from outside Yemen .It can be assumed that joint attacks could be conducted.

The Resistance Axis has concerns about potential forthcoming developments that it perceives as existential threats .Specifically ,they are worried about the Biden administration's plan to end Gaza war and achieve a normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel .This includes advancing the Palestinian issue through a two-state solution and signing a defense treaty between Washington and Riyadh .These scenarios would not be favorable for the Resistance Axis ,as resolving the Palestinian issue would undermine the cause around which their alliances and activities revolve .Furthermore ,the signing of a defense treaty would shift the current balance of power in favor of Saudi Arabia.

Consequently, obstructing this normalization deal becomes a central goal for any cooperation pursued by pressuring and threatening Saudi Arabia, or even resorting to regional unrest as a last resort. Houthi leader Mohammed al-Bukhaiti tweeted on the X platform, stating “The defense treaty between America and the Saudi regime to protect Israel will not withstand the divine covenant between us and our brothers in the land of the Two Holy Mosques”. Hence, the most significant repercussion of the Houthi group’s cooperation with the Iraqi Resistance is not only the potential long-term strategy to enhance cooperation among Shiite armed groups allied with Iran in the region, but also the intention to expand their influence and activities beyond their traditional operational areas. This may be part of a larger plan by the Resistance Axis at the regional level to anticipate and address perceived threats. It opens the door to a potential strategic shift in the dynamics of the region. The leader of the Houthi group commented on the joint operations, stating that they “will provide a model of cooperation among Muslims and their joint operations in the context of jihad for the sake of Allah”.

Potential repercussions:

The announcement of the partnership between the Houthi group and the Iraqi Resistance “has serious security repercussions and could lead to increased tensions in the region and impact the dynamics of the conflict. This development raises concerns among various regional and international actors about Iran’s intentions and its allies, as well as the possibility of escalating violence in the region.

The Gulf countries view this cooperation as a significant security threat, which could escalate their concerns and cause tensions with the Houthis, Iranians, and Iraq. They may exert pressure on Iraq to limit the activities of Iranian-backed armed groups within its territory. For its part, Washington described this cooperation as worrisome, which could prompt a reassessment of its strategy towards Iran and the Houthi group, especially the United States strengthens its position in seeking to form international alliances to confront Iranian influence.

On the other hand, this cooperation will push Israel to increase its military and intelligence operations against Iranian-backed armed groups, including the Houthis, to curtail their offensive capabilities. Israel may also seek to strengthen its security and intelligence alliances with Gulf countries.

In contrast to the desires of Iran and the Houthis, the common concerns of Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Israel may actually incentivize the acceleration of the normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel. While the announcement of this cooperation may enhance the Houthis’ internal support, it will also increase pressure on them, including American and international pressure that could involve imposing additional sanctions and further international isolation. These factors complicate peace efforts in the region.



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