



## Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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**Geopolitically strategic Yemen has become a focus of local Iranian-Saudi Arabian strife. The Yemeni government accuses Iran of supporting Zaydi-Shi'ite (Houthi) rebels in the northern part of the country with weapons, money and propaganda. Subverting local Shi'ite populations in the Middle East is a frequent Iranian modus operandi.**

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الله أكبر  
الموت لأمريكا  
الموت لإسرائيل  
لعنة على اليهود  
النصر للإسلام



Videotape produced by the Houthi rebels in north Yemen. The tank bears a poster reading "Death to Israel, Death to America, A curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam." (Marebvideo.com.) Similar pictures were posted by the Houthi rebels on a forum on the Hezbollah website in Lebanon.

## Overview

1. On August 11, 2009, the Yemeni army began an offensive against the rebels of the **al-Houthi clan, Zaydi-Shi'ites** who live in the Sa'ada district in north Yemen near the Saudi Arabian border. It was the sixth round of battles between the Yemeni government and the rebels, who have a militant anti-American Islamic ideology and, according to the Yemeni government, seek to overthrow it. The five-year conflict is the result of the sense of political, economic and social deprivation of the residents of north Yemen. However, the political-religious struggle between and Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the image of power projected by Iran in the region, **make the conflict doubly important, far beyond its internal Yemeni significance.**

2. Yemen's strategic geographic location across from the Horn of Africa at the entrance to the Red Sea and the weakness of its pro-Arab central government **make it an attractive target for subversion**, especially **Iranian and Saudi Arabian** (in addition, **Al-Qaeda**, which acts against the Yemeni regime, also opposes Iranian intervention). The continuing Houthi rebellion is **another regional area of conflict** in which Iran and Saudi Arabia are involved, each with its own interests and its own Yemeni allies. Iran, which customarily uses local Shi'ite populations in conflict areas in the Middle East to foment tension, provides the Houthi rebels, according to the Yemeni government, with military, political and propaganda support.

3. Since the latest round of battles, the Yemeni government headed by President Ali Abdallah Salah has accused **Iran of giving the Shi'ite rebels military aid, money, and especially propaganda support.** Clear evidence of Iranian propaganda support can be found in the Houthi use of the Iranian media and Hezbollah website. Yemen claims that its security forces captured money and trucks loaded with weapons sent to the rebels by Iran. It hinted that continued Iranian intervention in Yemeni affairs might lead to the end of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Claims of Iranian aid to the rebels were made during previous rounds of fighting as well. In May 2007 Yemen recalled its ambassadors to Iran and Libya for "consultations" because of claims they were supplying the rebels with weapons and money.

4. **Iran** regards Yemen in general and its Shi'ite north in particular as a **convenient arena from which to subvert Saudi Arabia**, its main religious-political rival in the area. In addition, Iran regards Yemen as an important part of its subversive policy to **establish an Iranian presence on land and sea in Red Sea countries which control the sea lanes**

**leading from the Persian Gulf to the heart of the Middle East and Europe.**<sup>1</sup> Yemen's Zaydi-Shi'ites, which make up about 30% of the population, are regarded by the Iranians as a convenient target for exporting the Islamic revolution, increasing Iranian influence and promoting regional Iranian interests. **Subverting local Shi'ites is a familiar Iranian modus operandi in conflict areas throughout the Middle East** (Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and the UAE). Iran also tries to subvert Sunni Egypt (with Hezbollah support) and the Palestinians (with Hamas support).

5. Reliable information about the extent of Iranian aid to the Houthi rebels is not available. **Iran customarily denies its subversive activities** in the Middle East and elsewhere, for example, Latin America. Iran denies its support for the Houthi rebels and has even "volunteered" to mediate the conflict (an offer rejected out of hand by the Yemeni government). On the other hand, Iranian spokesmen have accused Saudi Arabia of intervening in internal Yemeni affairs and inflaming the conflict. Members of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) criticized what they called the "helplessness" of the Iranian Foreign Ministry regarding the "slaughter of Shi'ites" in Yemen and accused the United States of supporting the Yemeni government against the Shi'ite rebels.

6. **Saudi Arabia**, facing Shi'ite Islamic subversion on its southern border, is afraid of security deteriorating in its back yard and of having terrorist operatives, especially Al-Qaeda, trickle into its territory from Yemen. Saudi Arabian-affiliated spokesmen and media have said that it is in the interests of Iran to fan the flames in the region and repeatedly claim that Iran is supporting the rebels in north Yemen. Saudi Arabian-funded Al-Arabiya TV recently broadcast a report about the "Al-Houthi rebellion and Iran's role in it," which accused Iran of interfering in the internal affairs of Yemen and many other countries in the region as well.

**7. In conclusion, Yemen is another area of conflict** between Shi'ite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. It is also a point of subversion for Iran's overall strategy for **regional hegemony**, targeting pro-Western Arab countries with large Shi'ite populations (Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen), and Sunni Muslim countries with almost no Shi'ites (Egypt, Morocco, the Gaza Strip). Iranian strategy, supported by its nuclear program, seeks to bring about a far-reaching, political-religious-historical revolution in the Middle East which **will make Iran and Shia' the main regional super-powers at the expense of the pro-Western Sunni Muslim Arab states.**

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<sup>1</sup> For further information see our July 29, 2009 bulletin "Iran's activity in East Africa, the gateway to the Middle East and the African continent" at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/iran\\_e011.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e011.pdf).

## Background

8. Since 2004 a rebellion of varying levels of intensity has been waged against the government in north Yemen near the Saudi Arabian border. In our assessment there are several thousand rebels, members of the al-Houthi clan residing in the Sa'ada district (See map below). The region is mountainous and its terrain is difficult for a regular army to operate in. Throughout history various powers have failed to subjugate the local guerilla forces active in the mountainous terrain of the Sa'ada district. The Ottoman Empire failed at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Saudi Arabian army failed during the Saudi Arabia-Yemen War in 1934 and Egypt's Nasser failed during the 1960s. So far the rebellion has claimed the lives of thousands on both sides. According to UN sources, since the beginning of the rebellion more than 150,000 Houthis have been displaced. Most of them (about 60%) are from the Sa'ada district. They have found shelter with relatives, in public institutions and in UN-supported refugee camps.<sup>2</sup>

9. The Houthi rebels are **Zaydi Shi'ites**, one of the moderate Shi'ite schools, close to the Safi'i Sunnis. They are named for Zayd, one of the descendants of the Caliph Ali (considered the founder of Shia' and having the title of Imam). Zayd demanded rights for the descendants of Ali from the Omayyad Caliphs and paid for it with his life (740 AD). About 30% of Yemenis (including the president, Ali Abdallah Salah) are Zaydi Shi'ites. The rest of the population is mainly Sunni (50%-60%), with small groups of minorities, among them Christians, Hindis and a small Jewish community.



Region of the Houthi rebellion in north Yemen (OCHA website, September 14, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA website, Report Number 6 about the emergency situation in the Sa'ada region in Yemen, September 14, 2009).

10. The Houthi rebellion broke out in 2004 and was headed by **Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi**,<sup>3</sup> an extremist Zaydi-Shi'ite sheikh who had been appointed by the Yemeni regime as liaison officer in the north to improve its relations with the periphery and to weaken the extremist Sunnis in the Sa'ada district. Claiming that Ali Abdallah Salah's regime had become too closely affiliated with the United States and Israel, he strengthened himself in the north, establishing an Islamic militia subordinate to his authority called "The Young Believers" (*shabab al-mu'minin*). In June 2004 the government ordered him to surrender to the authorities; he refused. His refusal increased the tension between the Houthis and the government and led to violent confrontations, during which he was killed (September 2004). After his death the rebellion abated for a while.

11. In March 2005 it flared up again and there was another round of battles, led by Hussein's brother, **Abd al-Malik al-Houthi** (who has led the rebellion to date). The rebels attacked a number of targets in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. At the end of 2006 violent operations were renewed, including harassments of Sa'ada's small Jewish community (which was rescued by the Yemeni government). In February 2007 the government presented the rebels with a new ultimatum, and when it was ignored, the government tried to subdue the rebellion with a military force of thousands of soldiers, tanks and fighter planes. On June 16, 2007 Qatar mediated a ceasefire. The agreement included a government commitment to rebuild the areas destroyed in battle, grant pardons to the Houthis who were in prison and make it possible in the future for the Houthis to establish a political party and start their own newspaper.



**Abd al-Malik Badr al-Din al-Houthi (Photo from aleshteraki.net)**

12. The agreement, however, was not implemented. On August 11, 2009, the Yemeni army initiated a new operation against the Houthi rebels in the region of the city of Sa'ada, near the Saudi Arabian border, the sixth operation carried out against them by the army since 2004, and to date the battles between the rival sides continue. Videotapes issued by the

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<sup>3</sup> Badr al-Din al-Houthi, Hussein's father, was forced to go into exile following the outcome of the civil war in 1994. He went to **Iran** and Lebanon, and was allowed to return to his country in 1997.

rebels at the end of August 2009 showed them in possession of tanks and armored personnel carriers. The tanks and APCs were hung with banners with militant Islamic slogans: "Allahu Akbar," "Death to America," "Death to Israel," "A curse on the Jews."

### Pictures from the Houthi rebel videotape



Pictures from a Houthi rebel propaganda videotape, including a tank and APC with a banner reading "Allahu akbar, Death to Israel, Death to America, A curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam" (Marebvideo.com).



A banner appearing in an al-Houthi propaganda videotape bearing a verse from the Qur'an: "You may kill those who wage war against you, and you may evict them whence they evicted you (Surah al-Baqarah, Verse 191) (Marebvideo.com). It is often used by extremist Muslim groups, including Palestinian terrorist organizations.

## Iranian intervention in the Houthi rebellion

13. The Houthi rebels want to overthrow the pro-American pro-Saudi Arabian Yemeni government, accusing its president, Ali Abdallah Salah, of corruption. On a deeper ideological level, the moderate Zaydi Shi'ites have apparently been exposed to the influence of the radical Shi'ite Islamic regime in Iran, **making them more extreme**.<sup>4</sup> The Yemeni government claims that the rebels want to change its nature and install a Muslim sage as its head, as was the custom until 1962 (when the monarchy of the Imam was deposed by revolutionary republican forces aided by Nasser's Egypt).

14. Yemeni government spokesmen have repeatedly accused Iran of supplying the Houthi rebels with weapons and money. In previous rounds of fighting they received propaganda support from the Shi'ite religious centers in Qom (Iran) and Najaf (Iraq). It has also been reported that the Lebanese Hezbollah flag has been flown in the Sa'ada district and that the rebels have adopted typical Iranian revolutionary slogans ("Death to Israel," "Death to America").

15. Yemeni President **Ali Abdallah Salah**, interviewed by Al-Jazeera TV on September 11, 2009, again accused Iran of supporting the rebels. He said it was suspected that Iran and extremist elements in Iraq close to **Moqtada Sadr** (extremist Shi'ite leader who heads the Mahdi Army in Iraq, who is close to Iran and has recently spent a great deal of time there) supported the Houthi rebels in north Yemen. Abdallah Salah, himself a Shi'ite, said that "the

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<sup>4</sup> The Shi'ites in Lebanon, known for their moderation and passivity, have undergone a similar change since the Islamic revolution in Iran. That can be seen by their establishing Hezbollah and turning it into an important force among Lebanese Shi'ites.

fact that Iran expressed a desire to mediate between Yemen and the rebels shows that they have open channels to them.”



Ali Abdallah Salah tells Al-Jazeera TV that Iranians are supporting the Houthi rebels (Al-Jazeera TV, September 11, 2009).

16. Ali Abdallah Salah also said that the Yemeni security forces had **detained two squads whose members admitted to having received \$100,000 from sources in Iran**. He said they already been tried and convicted. He warned that if there were elements in Iran which wanted to settle accounts with the various players in the region, such as the United States, Saudi Arabia or the Persian Gulf states, Yemen would not accept that it be done using the Houthi rebels, because in that way they were shedding Muslim blood.

17. President Salah also told Al-Arabiya TV that the Yemeni army had found **Iranian-made weapons in the hands of the rebels**. According to Al-Arabiya TV, “in the battle area near the city of Sa’ada, [Yemeni] soldiers found six storehouses belonging to Houthis containing **Iranian-made machine guns, short-range rockets and large quantities of ammunition.**”<sup>5</sup> The army later claimed that they had **attacked a number of trucks carrying weapons and ammunition for the rebels which had come from Iran**.

18. **As usual, Iran is playing both sides of the fence**: while supporting the Houthi rebels to destabilize the Yemeni government, on September 7 Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki telephoned Yemeni foreign minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi and called for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. He warned [hinting at the Saudis] against “some countries in the region [which] want to fuel conflicts and make problems between [the] Yemeni government and its nation.”<sup>6</sup> After having met with the Yemeni foreign minister in Tehran, he said in a statement that “Iran supports good relations between the Yemeni government and Houthi

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/08/22/82582.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-1398897&Lang=E>,  
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8806170>,  
<http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8806050534928>.

Shi'ites."<sup>7</sup> Iranian Foreign Minister Hassan Qashqavi made a similar statement, saying that Iran supported Yemen's territorial integrity, unity and stability.<sup>8</sup>



Iranian hypocrisy: Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki shakes hands in Tehran with the Yemenite ambassador while providing the al-Houthi rebels with military support (Photo: Fars News Agency, Iran).

## Hezbollah in Lebanon gives the Houthi rebels a propaganda stage

19. Hezbollah's Bint Jbeil website<sup>9</sup> gives the Houthi rebels a forum through the link "Ansar al-Hak min al-Yaman" ("Supporters of the truth from Yemen").<sup>10</sup> The forum posts the achievements of the rebels against the Yemeni army, including missions carried out, weapons seized and pictures of Yemeni army captives. It also posts pictures of organization operatives, including its leader, Abd al-Malik Badr al-Din al-Houthi, and posters stating the organization's radical Islamic ideology. The fact that Hezbollah provides the organization with a forum for its propaganda is additional proof of **Iranian support** for the Houthi rebels.



The Ansar al-Hak in Yemen slogan: Allahu akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, A curse upon the Jews, Victory for Islam

<sup>7</sup> <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8806050534>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.irna.ir/En/View/FullStory/?NewsId=674433&IdLanguage=3>.

<sup>9</sup> [www.bintjbell.org/forum/showthread.php?t=109442](http://www.bintjbell.org/forum/showthread.php?t=109442). Entering the forum is by password only.

<sup>10</sup> "Ansar" is a nickname of the followers of Muhammad who accompanied him from Mecca to Madinah. The literal translation of "al-hak" is "truth," that is, pure Islam.



The flag on the left reads "Ansar al-Hak in Yemen"



Abd al-Malik Badr al-Din, Houthi rebel leader



Left: APC bearing a banner with the rebels' slogans. Right: Houthis on a disabled Yemeni army tank



Yemeni army prisoners and booty

## Internal Iranian criticism of the government's silence in the face of what it calls "the slaughter of Shi'ites in Yemen"

20. There is harsh criticism within Iran over what is considered the **government's helplessness in the face of the continuing battles and the "slaughter of Shi'ites" in Yemen**. It is not the first time the Iranian leadership has been subjected to criticism from politicians and senior religious figures. Similar criticism was voiced when Uighur Muslims were recently killed in the Shenyang province of China, and the claim was made that Iran preferred promoting its economic interests to helping Muslims.

21. Interviewed by *Al-Quds*, **Muhammad Karim-Abadi**, a member of the Majlis' National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said that the Wahhabi [i.e., the Saudi Arabians] were behind the unrest in Yemen, and that they were trying to turn Yemen into Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> The conservative newspaper *Siasat-e-Ruz* claimed that American President Obama had sent a letter to the Yemeni president promising him military and economic support to preserve Yemeni unity and expressing support for the "slaughter of Shi'ites in the Sa'ada province." That was expressed by arguments in the Majlis calling on the ministry of the interior to do more to prevent violence against the Shi'ites in Yemen.<sup>12</sup>

## Yemen's responses

22. On August 31, 2009, Yemen made it clear that Iran's continued support for the Houthi rebels was liable to damage the relations between the two countries. The Iranian and Iraqi ambassadors to Yemen were separately invited to meetings by the Yemeni foreign minister and requested to end their countries' support for the rebels. According to **Yemeni foreign minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi**, "if the Iranian media wants to be a tool in the hands of subversive elements in the Sa'ada district and to adopt their positions, this will have negative consequences for Yemeni-Iranian relations, **which will require us to take difficult decisions**" [i.e., cut off diplomatic relations<sup>13</sup>]. He also stated that "We expressed our position to the Iranian ambassador in Sana'a. We warned them that the media rhetoric does not serve bilateral interests between us and Iran."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Al-Quds*, September 8, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> *Siasat-e-Ruz*, September 8, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> A number of months ago Morocco cut off its diplomatic relations with Iran following Iranian attempts to convert Morocco's Sunni population to Shia'. Egypt also accused Iran of carrying out subversive activities on its soil.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE57U2MY20090831>.

23. **Iskandar al-Asbahi, speaker of Yemen's ruling General People's Congress party**, told *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* on September 11 that his country was not at all interested in mediation: **"Why should we accept mediation?"** He said it was a matter of "a group of rebels who were digging their own graves...We will **continue our determined activities to crush them.**" He also said that the claim of the Houthi clan that Saudi Arabia was participating in the battles on the side of the Yemeni government forces was a "deception continually repeated by the Iranian media – Al-Alam TV in Arabic, Radio Tehran and Iranian websites."

24. **Yemen's ambassador to Lebanon**, Dr. Mohamed Abdulmajeed Qubaty, said that since the beginning of September [2009] he had met with envoys of Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Moqtada Sadr, who proposed an initiative to end the struggle between the Yemeni government and the al-Houthi clan.<sup>15</sup> Members of the Iraqi Parliament accused al-Sadr's Shi'ite movement, which receives military and economic support from Iran, **of involving Iran in internal conflicts in the Arab world, training al-Houthi fighters and even of transporting some of them to Iran for training.** Iraqi sources denied the claims, stating that Iraq was not aiding the al-Houthi clan and that Baath elements in Iraq were inciting the Yemeni government against the [Houthi] tribe in an attempt to cause dissention between the Yemeni and other Arab governments.<sup>16</sup>

25. **On the other hand, at the same time (the beginning of September 2009) Muhammad Abd al-Salam, the al-Houthi clan spokesman, rushed to the aid of Iran.** He called the accusations of the Yemeni government and the Arab media that Iran was aiding the Houthi rebels "empty," and said they were intended to please Saudi Arabia in order to receive financial aid. He added **that Saudi Arabia had been interfering in internal Yemeni affairs for years.** His statements were widely reported in the Iranian media.

## **The media battle between Iran and Saudi Arabia**

26. The Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels fight each other not only in the mountains in north Yemen but also on television screens, through the Internet and in the press. The two major opponents in the media war are Iran and Saudi Arabia: The Iranian media reports are **biased in favor of the rebels** and denounce **Saudi Arabia**. However, the Saudi Arabian-affiliated media, especially the Saudi-funded Al-Arabiya TV which broadcasts from Abu Dhabi,

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=1&issueno=11245&article=535558>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view\\_news.asp?sub\\_no=401\\_2009\\_09\\_05\\_72776](http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=401_2009_09_05_72776)

**strongly attack Iran** for supporting the Houthis to promote its strategic goals, especially **its desire for a foothold at the entrance to the Red Sea.**

27. On the Iranian side, the Arabic Iranian television station **Al-Alam TV** devoted a number of programs of its daily **"In the Spotlight"** to the crisis in Yemen. The programs hosted spokesmen representing the rival sides, who answered the Yemeni accusation that Iran was supporting the rebels. During one program a spokesman for the Iranian broadcasting authority accused Yemen of using phosphorous bombs against the Houthis, causing thousands to flee and seek refuge near the Saudi Arabian border.<sup>17</sup> On September 5, 2009 Press TV, the Iranian English-language channel, broadcast **a propaganda videotape produced and distributed by the al-Houthi clan** "proving" Saudi Arabia had intervened and supplied mortar shells to the Yemeni forces.<sup>18</sup>



**Iran's war of hearts and minds: A mortar the al-Houthi movement claims came from Saudi Arabia, bearing the Saudi Arabian insignia (Iranian Channel 5 TV, Press TV website, September 5, 2009).**

28. On the other hand, on September 5, 2009 **Al-Arabiya TV** devoted its "Panorama" program to **"The al-Houthi rebellion and Iran's role in it."** Its guests were **Zahar Harithiya**, a member of the Saudi Arabian Shira Council, **Hamoud al-Abad**, Yemeni youth minister and **General Jamal Mazloum**, a member of the Center for Security Research of the Gulf [States]. Before the discussion started, the program's host said that the Yemeni government hoped the operation against the Houthis would be **"short and decisive...especially in light of the revelation of Iranian involvement in support of the clan, which opposed the legitimacy of the Yemeni government."** The host added that the Yemeni government had presented evidence of the discovery of Iranian-manufactured weapons in the regions near the Saudi Arabian-Yemeni border, and **despite its denials, Tehran had not succeeded in convincing Yemen or other countries in the region that it was not involved in the conflict.** A short report was broadcast during

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Alam TV, August 19, 28, September 2, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-7QpLcKERS>, also see <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=105362&sectionid=351020206>.

the program about increased Iranian presence in the Gulf of Aden and **Iran's intention to acquire a foothold in the Red Sea.**

29. **General Mazloum** said that **Iran was still trying to play a leading role in the region** and that the Cooperation Council and the Arab League should aid and support Yemen [against Iranian domination attempts]. The Yemeni Minister Hamoud al-Abad said that **"the official Iranian media have clearly played a leading role in supporting the al-Houthi terrorism and broadcast deceptive propaganda to serve al-Houthi's divisive goals."** He called on Iran to stop its intervention in Yemen's internal affairs. The Saudi Arabian spokesman accused Iran of intervention in other issues in the Middle East, claiming that **Iran was responsible for the failure of the Hamas-Fatah agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia and for disrupting the regular functioning of the political process in Lebanon.**

30. Further on in the program the Saudi Arabian spokesman claimed that "it seems as though a **strange alliance is being forged between Iran, the al-Houthi clan and Al-Qaeda,** despite the religious differences between them, and it also seems that there is a common interest uniting them [i.e. toppling the Yemeni government]...**Iran brings the weapons and the money...**" He claimed that the al-Houthi clan supported Al-Qaeda and helped its operatives infiltrate into Saudi Arabia to carry out terrorist activities. He added that **"Iran wants to make north Yemen Zaydi-Shi'ite while Al-Qaeda wants to make the south Salafist...Both want to destabilize the country."**

31. On September 3, 2009 **Abd al-Rahman al-Rashad** wrote in the London-based Saudi Arabian-affiliated Arab newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* that the al-Houthi clan was employing external elements such as Iran to attack the Yemeni government, which they regarded as a Saudi Arabian ally. Iran, he said, **wants a base of operations that would give it more convenient access to East Africa, enabling it to wage the same kind of campaign there it was waging in Iraq and other places.** He claimed that the root of the problem was not that Iran was financing the al-Houthi clan, but rather the vacuum liable to be created if the central government of Yemen did not control the entire country. Thus, he said, it was not enough to defeat the al-Houthi clan, but the government had to effectively control all of Yemen.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&issueno=11237&article=534445>

## An expression of the struggle between Sunnis and Shi'ites: Sunni jihadist organizations in Iraq denounce the Iranian support of the Shi'ite al-Houthi rebels

32. Sunni jihadist organizations have become involved in the conflict between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels in an attempt to defame Iran and expose its increasing influence in Sunni Muslim areas. For example, the **Islamic Army in Iraq**, an umbrella organization for a number of Sunni networks which originated from the Sunni Baath Party in Iraq (which disintegrated after the invasion in 2003), issued an announcement on September 5, 2009. It was signed by the Army's commander and entitled "The logic is Yemeni but the buttons are [being pushed] elsewhere" [i.e., the rebels are being manipulated from afar to the detriment of the Yemeni government, a reference to Iran]. Although Al-Qaeda and Sunnis affiliated with it are working against the Yemeni government, the announcement expresses support for the government and **denounces Iran's support of Shi'ites in Yemen, the same kind of support it gives them in Iraq.**<sup>20</sup>



Announcement from the commanders of the Army of Islam in Iraq: "...The hands of Iraq are stirring up the al-Houthi clan..."

33. Relying on Shi'ite tradition, the announcement praised Yemeni logic and denounced the "Satan in the East" (Iran) which did not leave Yemen's tranquil citizens (Sunnis) in peace but came to its gates with its infidel [Shi'ite] beliefs and hypocrisy **to sow destruction as it had in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein**. According to the announcement, [Iran's] objective was "to destroy religion, to wipe out [Yemeni] identity and to divide the people...Despite the deserts, the wastelands, the mountains and the oceans [surrounding it], **Yemen has not succeeded in evading Iranian greed...[It incites] the al-Houthi clan, provides it with weapons and money and even sends Shi'ite fighters from**

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.iaisite.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=778&Itemid=57](http://www.iaisite.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=778&Itemid=57)

**Iran, Iraq and Lebanon**, Hezbollah fighters with forged passports, to fight [side by side] with them.”

34. **The announcement noted the increase in support it claimed the Shi’ites in Iraq gave the Houthi rebels**, quoting the vast correspondence between the Houthis and important Shi’ite figures in Iraq and Iran, including those close to the **Ayatollah Uzma Ali Hussaini Sistani** (the senior Shi’ite sage in Iraq, who has since denied the allegations). That was part of the “Zionist-Crusader conspiracy” to conquer the entrance to the Red Sea and take control of the sea lanes used for transmitting energy and the necessities of the economy. The announcement also claimed that Iran intended **to set up militias in Yemen based on the pattern of Hezbollah in Lebanon**, assisted by Hezbollah supporters [almost certainly Shi’ite] in Europe, especially Holland.

35. **The announcement listed a number of reasons for Iranian intervention in Yemen**: The Iranian plot to export the revolution; the desire to divide Yemen and install a pro-Iranian regime or one under Iranian influence similar to those in Lebanon and Iraq; to threaten the flank of Saudi Arabia and demand it cede territory; to distract the attention of the Islamic world to make it possible for Iran to do as it pleased while concealing the “atrocities” inflicted on its Sunni Muslims and the internal conflicts between its leaders, as was made evident in the recent elections. The announcement calls on the Ulama (Islamic sages) in Yemen to be aware of the plot being concocted against Yemen and its people. It also calls on Sunni rulers of the Gulf States to be aware of the danger of Iran’s plots and to come to the aid of their “Sunni brothers” to prevent a repeat of the scenario of Iraq. The announcement also calls on the Muslim nation to help overcome the “destructive plot in Yemen” in order to prevent its division, and to prevent the rebels from creating a “new Iraq.” It ends with an appeal to the citizens of Yemen and warns them not to be enticed by the anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans of the Houthi rebels.