THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY ON YEMEN'S RED SEA GEOPOLITICS AND THE HOUTHI MARITIME INSURGENCY

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THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY ON YEMEN'S RED SEA GEOPOLITICS AND THE HOUTHI MARITIME INSURGENCY

ABSTRACT

Regardless of Yemen's historical significance in the construction of the Red Sea identity, contemporary studies of the Red Sea sub-system perceive it as a peripheral and fragile state, so the threat of non-state actors in the country could result in a spillover effect on the region. Meanwhile, Yemen's geographical factor has been understudied, there is a shortcoming in defining the causal relationship that geography grants Yemen in the Red Sea geopolitics. This fact is evident in the analysis of the current civil war in Yemen, especially the Houthi maritime operations. Given this setting, this study aims to illustrate the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and the Houthi maritime insurgency. This study aims to analyze the geographical configuration of Yemen in the context of the Red Sea as a narrow sea, to ascertain how geography influences the causal relationship between Yemen and the Red Sea geopolitics. Building on that, this study aims to analyze the operations of the Houthi maritime insurgency to explore their utilization of Yemen's geographical factors, and therefore realizing their long-term impacts and strategic objectives. To this end, this study adopts a geopolitical frame of analysis, borrowing from the hypothesis and assumptions of Vego's work 'Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas' in order to find the causal relationship between the research variables (geography, Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics, and the Houthi maritime insurgency). Accordingly, the study follows a qualitative research method, in which empirical data was collected from primary and secondary resources, coded, and then categorized into themes relevant to the research objectives. These were further analyzed based on the theoretical framework to conclude the findings. Consequently, the research found that the geographical configuration of Yemen grants it a natural influence and a central role in Red Sea geopolitics, which provides a strategic and operational advantage

for actors in the sea. Indeed, through the utilization of the geographical factors, the Houthi insurgents managed to execute maritime operations and challenge the superior coalition with limited naval capabilities and unconventional tactics, which could fulfill its aims of disputing control in the Red Sea, supporting the insurgency on land physically and morally, as well as utilizing the maritime insurgency as a political tool and a form of coercive diplomacy.

PENGARUH GEOGRAFI KE ATAS GEOPOLITIK LAUT MERAH YAMAN DAN PEMBERONTAKAN MARITIM HOUTHI

ABSTRAK

Tanpa mengira kepentingan sejarah Yaman dalam pembentukan identiti Laut Merah, penyelidikan kontemporari sub-sistem Laut Merah menganggapnya sebagai negara terpinggir dan rapuh. Maka ancaman pemain bukan negara di negara ini mampu menyebabkan kesan limpahan ke atas rantau ini. Memandangkan faktor geografi Yaman kurang diselidiki; terdapat kekurangan dalam mendefinasikan hubungan kausal yang diberikan oleh faktor geografi ke atas Yaman dalam geopolitik Laut Merah. Fakta ini terbukti dalam analisis perang saudara terkini di Yaman, terutamanya operasi-operasi maritim Houthi. Berdasarkan ketetapan ini, penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengilustrasi pengaruh geografi ke atas geopolitik Laut Merah Yaman dan pemberontakan maritim Houthi. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konfigurasi geografi Yaman dalam konteks Laut Merah sebagai laut sempit. Ini adalah untuk memastikan bagaimana geografi mempengaruhi hubungan kausal antara geopolitik Yaman dan Laut Merah. Berdasarkan perincian itu, penyelidikan ini bertujuan menganalisis operasi-operasi pemberontakan maritim Houthi untuk meneroka penggunaan faktor geografi Yaman mereka, dan dengan itu menyedari impak jangka panjang dan objektif-objektif strategik mereka. Untuk tujuan ini, penyelidikan ini mengadaptasikan rangka analisis geopolitik, dengan meminjam daripada hipotesis dan andaian kerja Vego 'Strategi dan Operasi Tentera Laut di Laut-Laut Sempit' untuk mencari hubungan kausal antara pembolehubah-pembolehubah penyelidikan (geografi, geopolitik Laut Merah Yaman, dan pemberontakan maritim Houthi). Secara teratur, kajian ini mengikuti kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif, di mana data empirikal dikumpulkan daripada sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder, dikodkan, dan kemudian dikategorikan kepada tema-tema yang relevan dengan objektif-objektif penyelidikan. Ini dianalisis

dengan lebih lanjut berdasarkan kerangka teori untuk menyimpulkan penemuan-penemuan. Hasilnya, penyelidikan mendapati bahawa konfigurasi geografi Yaman memberikan pengaruh semula jadi dan peranan utama dalam geopolitik Laut Merah, yang memberikan kelebihan strategik dan operasi untuk pemain di laut. Ternyata, melalui penggunaan faktor geografi, pemberontak Houthi berjaya melaksanakan operasi-operasi maritim dan mencabar pakatan unggul dengan keupayaan angkatan laut yang terhad dan taktik yang tidak konvensional, yang dapat memenuhi matlamatnya untuk mempertikaikan kawalan di Laut Merah, menyokong pemberontakan di darat secara fizikal dan secara moral, serta menggunakan pemberontakan maritim sebagai alat politik dan satu bentuk diplomasi paksaan.

Kata kunci: Geopolitik, Houthi, pemberontakan maritim, laut-laut sempit, Laut Merah, Yaman

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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

U.S.	United States
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenades
WBIEDs	Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
EU	European Union
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
POMEPS	Project on Middle East Political Science
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UN	United Nations
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
ARY	Arab Republic of Yemen
IRGC	Islamic Revolution Guard Corps
GPC	General People's Congress
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
UAE	United Arab Emirates
MARAD	U.S. Maritime Administration
SAM	surface to air missiles
SSM	Surface to surface missiles
IRIN	Islamic Republic of the Iran Navy

AQAP   Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula

UK   United Kingdoms

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1.　Background of Study

Since the dawn of civilization, the Red Sea has represented one of the most strategic waterways in the world, enduring through different historical periods and still maintaining its strategic significance until today. According to historical records, the Yemeni kingdoms were the first to emerge at the Southern part of the Red Sea in 8th century B.C., at least 300 years before the Africans came. The strategic location of the emerging kingdoms, fronting the Red Sea and connecting the East and West, played a vital role in their flourishment. Indeed, throughout different historical stages, the kingdoms of Yemen have been able to establish an active trade movement, especially the incense and frankincense trade, which were grown in Yemen, leading to the establishment of a network of maritime and land routes known historically as the "Incense and Frankincense Road".[1]

Historical sources indicate that the ancient Yemenis of the Sheba and Himyarite kingdoms were seafarers who had managed to utilize the Red Sea maritime routes through the construction of large ships that enabled them to conduct trans-continental trade with Africa, besides empowering them to sail across the Bab el-Mandeb strait.[2] In addition, the emergence of ports and global trade centers such as Mukha on the Red Sea, and Aden and Qana in the Gulf of Aden, played a vital role in linking trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, providing an exchange point for ships coming from India and Egypt. The old Yemen kingdoms were known as one the most prosperous centers in the world, with the Byzantine scholars and historians calling it the Arabia Felix.[3]

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[1] Mohammed Abd Al-Qader Bafaqih تاريخ اليمن القديم ،[The History of Ancient Yemen](Beirut: The Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 1985), p.165-71 .

[2] Huessein Ali Al-Hubieshi, اليمن في البحر الأحمر، الموضع والموقع [Yemen in the Red Sea, the Position and the Location](Beirut: Dar Al Fikr Publishing, 1992), p.38.

[3] Bafaqih, تاريخ اليمن القديم [The History of Ancient Yemen], p.171-85.

Accordingly, through the centuries, Yemen had an evident influence on the construction of the Red Sea identity, which became known as "Bahr Al Yaman" (meaning the Yemen Sea in Arabic).[4]

However, the strategic location of Yemen fronting the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb strait has had a contradictory impact; while it grants Yemen a central role during periods of inner stability, it could also turn Yemen into a target of foreign invasions at times of instability and fragmentation.[5] Indeed, following the collapse of the Himyarite kingdom in the 6th century, Yemen lost its role as a key player in the Red Sea, becoming a geopolitical pond in the competition of regional and international actors, and a target of foreign invasions by powers who had interest in the Red Sea. For instance, the foreign invasions include the Persian invasion in the 6th century [6], the Ayyubid campaign against the Crusaders in the 12th century[7], the Ottoman-Portuguese competition in the 16th century[8], the British-French competition in the late 18th century, followed by the British occupation in the 19th–20th century, and the competition between the United States (U.S.) and the Soviet Union in the Red Sea during the Cold War.[9] Thus, the legacy of Arabia Felix collapsed and Yemen fell out of the scope of geographical and political studies.

On the other hand, the historical and political accumulation in the Red Sea led to the regionalization and constitution of a sub-regional system in the sea basin. Yet, the

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[4] The word (Yemen, Yaman, Ayaman) is derived from a word in ancient Yemeni language (*Yamanat*) meaning the South. The word appeared first at the end of the third century in the title of the Himyarite kings, mostly the King Shammar Yahri'sh, who changed the name of the kingdom into the Kingdom of Sheba and Dhu Raydan and of Hadhramaut and Yamanat, after conquering most of the Southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula. See: Bafaqih, p.137

Also see: Ruth Lapidoth, *The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden*, vol. 5(Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982).

[5] Khalid Mohammed Al-Rababa'a الجغرافيا السياسية: دراسة تطبيقية على الجمهورية اليمنية[Poltical Geography: An Applied Study on the Republic of Yemen](Amman: Dar Jalis Al-Zaman, 2009), p.11.

[6] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Emma C Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*(London: Routledge, 2013), p.2-5.

[7] Mohammed Abd Al-A'al Ahmed, الأيوبيون في اليمن [The Ayyubids in Yemen](Alexandria: The Egyptian Books General Committee, 1980).

[8] Ghassan Mohammed Alrammal, "The Muslims Dispute with the Portuguese in the Red Sea During the 11th Hijri Century- 16th Century Ad " (King Abdulaziz University, 1981).

[9] Roberto Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region: Local Actors and the Superpowers*(London: Routledge, 2015).

domination of the power politics frame of analysis confined studies on international relations to only the strategic actors with less emphasis on strategic pivots [10], which have been studied from the point of view of their importance or impact on certain strategic actors. Accordingly, the geography of Yemen and its impact on the Red Sea was poorly addressed, as it was perceived as a peripheral state in the sub-system. Yet, in the early 2000s, Yemen gained some attention in academia with the rise of the threat of non-states on Red Sea shipping. However, the discussion mainly focused on the failed state narrative and spillover effect[11], which became a dominant stereotypic image of Yemen in academia.

Currently, the Red Sea is witnessing a new threat from another non-state actor operating from Yemen. In 2015, a civil war broke out in the country between the central government backed by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the Houthi insurgency supported by Iran.[12] The war was centered in the Western coast of Yemen, fronting the Red Sea and extended to the waterways, where the insurgents executed several attacks against shipping in the Red Sea.[13] Regardless of the asymmetry of capabilities, the insurgents managed to effectively pose a threat to their oppositions and the Red Sea sub-system, which indicates an advantage that extends beyond the power politics argument. Moreover, the insurgents declared their willingness to execute a naval blockade against Red Sea shipping.[14] This indicates the possession of geographical perquisites that allowed them to achieve geopolitical and geostrategic objectives.

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[10] According Brzezinski, geopolitical pivots are fragile states located at strategic locations and have geographical significance. See: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*(New York: Basic Books, 1997), p.41.

[11] Shaul Shay, *The Red Sea Terror Triangle: Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Islamic Terror*(New York: Routledge, 2017).

[12] Emile Hokayem and David B. Roberts, "The War in Yemen," *Survival* 58, no. 6 (2016).

[13] Michael Knights and Farzin Nadimi, "Curbing Houthi Attacks on Civilian Ships in the Bab Al-Mandab," The Washington Institute

2018, July 27, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/curbing-houthi-attacks-on-civilian-ships-in-the-bab-al-mandab.

[14] Ibrahim Al-Wade'i, "البحر الأحمر جواد اليمنيين الرابح لوقف الحرب" [The Red Sea Yemenis Winning Horse for Stopping the War]," Almasirah,2018, January 11,

https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=18013&cat_id=6.

Beyond the historical contribution of Yemen in the social construction of the Red Sea identity, linking the dots in Yemen's Red Sea experiences with the current threats of non-state actors reveals the geopolitical interplay between Yemen and the Red Sea sub-system, with geography as the agent of causation. Indeed, the threats of the non-state actors, in this case, the Houthi maritime insurgency, to superior adversaries, indicates that an actor utilizing the geographical factors of Yemen could certainly impact the geopolitics of the Red Sea regardless of the distribution of capabilities.

1.2.   Statement of Problem

This research aims to study how geography influences Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and how this has become a factor of advantage for the Houthi maritime insurgency. The nature of the Red Sea as a sub-regional system creates a condition of high interplay between domestic and regional issues of its states, moreover, the fact that Yemen is located near the Sea's southern entrance allows for even greater impact. Indeed, previous studies have addressed the geopolitical influence of Yemen on Red Sea politics, which is owed to its location within the Arab Peninsula near the oil-rich Gulf states, in addition to its extended coastline[15], as well as its possession of islands in the Sea, especially Perim island, which grants it the advantage over Bab el-Mandeb strait.[16] Hence, the Red Sea is an essential criterion in the making of Yemen's foreign policy.[17] Furthermore, the domestic issues in Yemen have also had an impact on the Red Sea sub-system.[18] This influence was more notable on security aspects, such as the Yemen impact

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[15] Khadija Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea](Cairo: Madbouly Library, 2002).

[16] Shihab Mohsen Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands](Sanaa: Obadi Center for Studies and Publishing, 1996).

[17] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea].

[18] Stig Jarle Hansen, "Yemeni Security-Political Dynamics and Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 8, no. 2 (2012).

on the Arab-Israeli conflicts as well as Al-Qaeda operations at the Sea.[19] Accordingly, amidst the current civil war in the country, it is inevitable that the conflict spilled over to the waterways. Meanwhile, the battles were focused on the Western coasts fronting the Red Sea, with the Houthi executing sporadic attacks in the Sea mainly against the coalition navy and commercial shipping, with threats of conducting a naval blockade if the raids continue.[20]

Nevertheless, although the geopolitical depth of Yemen has been addressed, it has not been comprehensively studied. Firstly, Yemen has always been perceived as a fragile and peripheral state in the Arabian Peninsula among a region rich with natural resources. Therefore, the focus on Yemen geopolitics was based on its impact on the Gulf states and oil flow in the global market, which have confined previous analyses to external factors such as the significance of Yemen's neighbors and not the geographical configuration of the country and the mechanism that grants it depth in the Red Sea.[21] On the other hand, while there were some attempts to study the geographical configuration of Yemen and its influence on the Red Sea, those attempts lacked a solid frame of analysis and were mostly conducted as a historical analysis focusing on a single aspect, such as the islands[22], or Bab el-Mandeb strait.[23] Consequently, the general rule of the causal relationship between the variables was not specified.

[19] Geoffrey Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, 2nd ed.(London: Springer, 1984), p.235-38.

[20] Al-Wade'i, "البحر الأحمر جواد اليمنيين الرابح لوقف الحرب" [The Red Sea Yemenis Winning Horse for Stopping the War]".

[21] For global powers, their interest in the Red Sea basin was mostly driven by the desire to secure the flow of natural resources from the region; hence, the states of the sub-system were marginalized and seen as peripheral actors, only measured by their impacts on energy security. See: Mordechai Abir, *Oil, Power and Politics: Conflict in Arabia, the Red Sea and the Gulf*(London: Cass, 1974).
Also: Yoel Guzansky, Gallia Lindenstrauss, and Jonathan Schachter, "Power, Pirates, and Petroleum: Maritime Choke Points in the Middle East," *Strategic Assessment* 14, no. 2 (2011).
And: Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Geopolitics of Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 2 (2011).

[22] Sayed Mustafa Salem, البحر الأحمر والجزر اليمنية [Red Sea and Yemen's Islands](Sanaa: Al-Mithaq Publishing, 2006).

[23] Hussain Al-Yadoomi, *The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait*(Pennsylvania US Army War College, April 9 1991).

Therefore, most of the discussions about the current war in Yemen neglected the maritime insurgency and the Houthi operations in the Red Sea. Since October 2016, the Houthi insurgents started to execute sporadic attacks in the Red Sea.[24] In several occasions, these operations succeeded in damaging military vessels and oil cargoes, to the extent of driving the Saudi national oil company, Aramco, to suspend oil shipping in the Red Sea.[25] There have been records about the Houthi operations in the Red Sea, the weapons and tactics used, and the damage it has caused, but the factors that gave the inferior Houthi insurgents the advantage to pose a threat to the superior coalition, regardless of the asymmetry of their capabilities, are still unclear. Moreover, while the damage of the Houthi operation has been identified[26], the strategic impact and objective of the maritime insurgency are still unexplained.

Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the causational relationship between geography and Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and the Houthi maritime insurgency. In particular, the mechanism by which Yemen's geographical configuration grants it influence in the Red Sea, and how it was exploited by the Houthi maritime insurgency in the asymmetric conflict with the superior Saudi-led Arab coalition, both tactically and strategically. To this end, this study starts by reviewing the relationship between geography, politics, and strategy with emphasis on the context of narrow seas and how their unique geographical configuration provides certain opportunities and challenges for the agents. Subsequently, this study aims to establish an overall understanding of the Red Sea geopolitics and the strategic points in the sea, as well as examine existing data on Yemen's geography, as mentioned in the existing

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[24] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping," Stratfor,2016, October 05, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/new-threat-red-sea-shipping.

[25] Rania El Gamal, "Saudi Arabia Halts Oil Exports in Red Sea Lane after Houthi Attacks " Reuters,2018, July 25, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/saudi-arabia-suspends-oil-exports-through-red-sea-lane-after-houthi-attack-idUSKBN1KF0XN.

[26] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping ".

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literature, to study the factors that grant Yemen influence in Red Sea geopolitics. Eventually, the utilization of these factors by the Houthi maritime insurgency as an agent of advantage in their operations is explained, and the potential impact of the insurgency and its objectives evaluated.

In sum, the influence that geography provides in Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics has been understudied. Consequently, the utilization of these factors by the Houthi insurgency, tactically in their operations and strategically in achieving their objectives, has not been studied. Therefore, this study aims to address these research gaps based on the research objectives and research questions formulated below:

1.3. Research Objectives

The research aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. study the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics.

2. analyze the utilization of Yemen's geographical influence by the Houthi maritime insurgency.

3. examine the objectives and impact of the Houthi maritime insurgency.

1.4. Research Questions

To achieve the objectives above, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. what are the geographical factors that grant Yemen a geopolitical influence in the Red Sea?

2. how were the geographical features of Yemen impactful in the operations of the Houthi maritime insurgency in the Red Sea?

3. what are the objectives and impact of the Houthi maritime insurgency?

1.5.   Literature Review

In view of the lack of literature on this topic, this study proposed a classification of the literature review into five themes that cover the main concepts and actors discussed in this thesis, which are Geopolitics, maritime security, the Red Sea, Yemen geopolitics in the Red Sea, and the rise of the Houthi insurgency and the civil war in Yemen.

The first and second themes in the literature review aim to build a skeleton for the research. In the first place, the realization of Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and its utilization in the Houthi maritime insurgency requires a review of the different discussions and perceptions of the role of geography in shaping politics and strategy. Following that, the first theme looks into the different definitions of geopolitics and the nature of the causal relationship between geography and politics, which define the guidelines for the case study in this thesis. By the same token, the second theme, maritime security, aims to examine the discussion on the interpretation of this concept, focusing on the issue of the rise of non-state actors as a main threat to maritime security and the catalysts that had induced it. Therefore, this study adds to the body of knowledge on the Houthi insurgency case as a maritime insurgency

The last three themes in the literature review showcase the literature on the case study. Starting with the Red Sea, the theme covers previous works on Red Sea geopolitics and regionalization, including the flashpoints and effective actors that include the non-state actors. In the fourth theme, Yemen geopolitics is reviewed, with a focus on Yemen's strategic depth in the Red Sea. The review starts with Yemen's geography, where most of the literature discusses the islands as well as Yemen's advantage in Bab el-Mandeb strait, and eventually, Yemen's impact on Red Sea security. In the last theme, the study reviews the literature on the Houthi movement and the current civil war in Yemen. The works within this section are chronologically organized with the aim of examining the timeline

of the rise of the Houthi group as a political movement and its transformation into a militant insurgency that fought six wars against the Yemen government before the outbreak of the ongoing civil war in the country.

1.5.1 Geopolitics and the Role of Geography in International Politics

The Yemen depth in Red Sea geopolitics and its impact on the Houthi maritime insurgency cannot be studied without defining the relationship between geopolitics and its variables. The foundations in this field emerged in the late 19th century and have undergone several stages of development and contribution from various scholars up to the present day. Yet, scholars do not agree on any one definition of the nature of the geographical causation in their classifications of these theories.

Scholars have attempted to systematically categorize previous works on geopolitics; for instance, Cohen divided the geopolitical discussion on a chronological basis.[27] On the other hand, in the multi-authored volume 'The Geopolitics Reader' Routledge, Ó Tuathail, and Dalby divided the geopolitical literature contextually according to their discourse.[28] Nevertheless, one shortcoming of both categorizations is the lack of coherence and consistency between works of the same category in defining geopolitics. For instance, chronologically, the theories of Mackinder and Ratzel were perceived to be in the same category, yet both scholars had different perceptions of geopolitics and different approaches of analysis. For instance, Ratzel had a deterministic approach that was influenced by social Darwinism[29], while Mackinder saw that it was man who initiates although nature controls.[30] Similarly, the classification of Fukuyama

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[27] Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*(London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[28] Simon Dalby, Paul Routledge, and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *The Geopolitics Reader*(New York: Routledge, 2003).

[29] Woodruff D Smith, "Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum," *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980).

[30] Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)," *The Geographical Journal* 170, no. 4 (2004).

and Huntington as either post-Cold War or New World Order geopoliticians was too oversimplified, as both scholars represent different poles.[31]

Given the above, the scholars' different points of references on the nature of the geographical causation were examined. Ratzel viewed the state as a living organ 'Lebensraum' that needs to grow in order to fulfill its need; thus, linking it with scientific expansionism. This was captured by his student, Kjellen, who defined geopolitics as 'the theory of the state as a geographical organ or a phenomenon in space', which is a theory of war and spatial determinism.[32] Similarly, Haushofer, the father of the German School of geopolitics, perceived geopolitics as the dogma of geographical determinism in the political processes,[33] indicating that statemen will always have to face the deterministic power of geography.[34] In another classic view, Mackinder claimed that there is a correlation between geography and history, and sought a formula that could express the geographical causation in universal history.[35]

On the other hand, in contemporary contributions, scholars such as Parker aimed to introduce a broad definition of geopolitics as "the study of international relations from a spatial or geographical perspective".[36] Similarly, Gray defined geopolitics as "the spatial study and practice of international relations".[37] Yet, in their work "Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy", Gray alongside Solan extensively discussed the causal relationship between geography and politics, indicating that geography has an influential effect on international relations by presenting opportunities and challenges for policymakers.[38] Equivalently, Kaplan illustrated that geography is not an inexorable

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[31] Dalby, Routledge, and Tuathail, *The Geopolitics Reader*.
[32] Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, p.17-24.
[33] Ibid., p.15.
[34] Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*(New York: Routledge, 2006), p.22.
[35] Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)."
[36] Geoffrey Parker, *Geopolitics: Past, Present and Future*(London: Pinter Pub Ltd, 1998), p.5.
[37] Colin S Gray and Geoffrey Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*(New York: Routledge, 2014), p.164.
[38] Ibid., p.1-2.

power that man is helpless to work against.[39] This was holistically stated by Flint in his model of the relationship between geography and politics within the frame of structure and agents, where the choices of agents will be influenced by the constitutive force of the structure, either by constraints or chances.[40] On the contrary, Dalby critically asserted that the study of geopolitics should not be made within 'pre-given' nor 'taken-for-granted' perceptions.[41] By the same token, Tuathail indicated that Critical Geopolitics aims to explore the context in which geopolitical theory should be coined.[42] In like manner, Agnew defined Critical Geopolitics as an investigation of the geographical hypothesis i.e. classifications that construct the perception of the world.[43] These works in sum address the wide discrepancy of views among scholars.

Overall, the above review reveals that the definitions of geopolitics can be classified into three main patterns: geographical determinism, which perceives geography as an inevitable dogma, with scholars such as Raztzel, Kjellen and the German School of Geopolitik; critical geopolitics, which claims that geopolitics has no all-encompassing general meaning and is a social construct of its context, with scholars within this pattern including Dalby, Agnew, and Ó Tuathail; and a middle ground approach, which accommodates old school contributors such as Mahan and Mackinder in addition to contemporary scholars such as Gray, Solan, and Kaplan. Geopoliticians of this view maintain the empirical approach to geopolitics, affirming the influential force of geography, yet they assure that policymaking is a human initiative. Altogether, the adoption of geographical determinism in geopolitics has negative outcomes on the field as a whole, as it is seen as one of the causes of World War II (WWII), which led to the

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[39] Robert D Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate*(New York: Random House, 2012), p.33.
[40] Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, p.26-27.
[41] Simon Dalby, "Critical Geopolitics: Discourse, Difference, and Dissent," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 9, no. 3 (1991).
[42] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space, (London: Routledge, 2005). p.112.
[43] John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics*(London: Routledge, 2004), p.2.

abandonment of geopolitics and its stigmatization due to the Nazi expansion.[44] Another shortcoming of determinism is the denial of the "human agency", which is the central variable in policymaking. However, the overstating of the "human agency" as held in critical geopolitics, undermines the empiricist nature of geopolitics, creating more ambiguity, which Gray describes as opening a floodgate.[45] Hence, the middle-ground approach is the most solid interpretation for the causal relation between geography and politics.

Amidst this hypothetical discussion, the thesis aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by providing empirical proof of the nature of geographical causation through a study of the physical factors in Yemen and an analysis on how these factors have inspired the Houthi maritime insurgency.

1.5.2 Maritime Security, Definition, and Elements

To analyze the maritime dimension of the Houthi insurgency, this research reviewed some of the major works on maritime security. The history of maritime security as a practice dates back to more than 3000 years[46], yet, academically, it only became a central concept in the new millennium, with the rise of non-state actors as a threat that must be included in the political agendas.[47] Throughout the existing literature, scholars extensively discussed piracy and maritime terrorism, while maritime insurgency is understudied. Hence, this study on the Houthi maritime insurgency will contribute much to existing studies in the field.

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[44] Ewald W Schnitzer, "German Geopolitics Revived," *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 3 (1955).
[45] Gray and Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, p.162.
[46] Michael McNicholas, *Maritime Security: An Introduction*(Cambridge: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2016), p.169.
[47] Christian Bueger, "What Is Maritime Security?," *Marine Policy* 53(2015).

There is no universal definition of maritime security. According to Bueger, maritime security is "one of the latest buzzwords of international relations", even though the term had been highly prioritized in government mandates in the last decade, including the U.S. government, which included maritime security as part of its War on Terror post-9/11 attacks, and more significantly, the reaction of the global community to the rise of the Somali pirates in 2008. Conversely, the physical reality of maritime threats necessitates an empirical study of its agents. Indeed, Benny enumerated five objects to be protected in the maritime community, which are Marinas, Ports and Port Facilities, Small Watercrafts, and Yachts and Ships such as Cruise and Passenger Ships, Tanker Ships, Container Ships, Oceangoing Tugboats or Military Ships.[48]

On the other hand, Edgerton categorized the agents of threats as state actors and non-state actors. Edgerton illustrated that the state threat could be carried out by conventional attacks against shipping, asymmetric attacks against infrastructure, as well as attacks by state proxies. Besides that, non-state actors can act as independent agents seeking to fulfill their own objectives, which, according to Edgerton, can be pirates, terrorists, or criminal groups. Indeed, since the last decade, non-state actors have become a major threat to maritime security.[49] In like manner, Moller added maritime insurgency as a fourth group of non-state actors threatening maritime security. Although this definition could also include maritime terrorism for tactical means, Moller distinguished insurgency from terrorism mainly based on two aspects; first, the unlikeliness of conducting suicidal attacks; and second, the inclusion of military and governmental targets, unlike terrorism, which is mostly confined to civilian targets.[50]

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[48] Daniel J Benny, *Maritime Security: Protection of Marinas, Ports, Small Watercraft, Yachts, and Ships*(Florida: CRC Press, 2015).

[49] Michael Edgerton, *A Practitioner's Guide to Effective Maritime and Port Security*(Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 49-68.

[50] Bjørn Møller, *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism and Naval Strategy*(Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies DIIS 2009).

Non-state actors usually conduct their operations using unconventional tactics. For pirates, their operations adopt tactics that involve attacking and boarding. Usually, pirates approach their targets using speedboats made from non-metal materials like fiberglass to avoid radar detection, in addition to mounting the boats with either heavy-caliber machine guns or rocket-propelled grenades (RPG).[51] Likewise, small boats have been a favorable choice for maritime terrorists, due to their high acceleration, maneuverability, low cost, and ability to fade between fishing boats. Moreover, another frequently used tactic by terrorists is equipping small crafts with Improvised Explosive Devices, known as the Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (WBIEDs). Similarly, minelaying has been utilized in several historical occasions, including in the Red Sea in 1984.[52] Furthermore, operations also include unconventional attacks carried out by individuals such as swimmer attacks, in which a diver will plant an explosive device to a docking ship or a facility as well as the use of standoff weapons such as missiles and machine guns.[53] Still, compared to piracy, maritime terrorism has a lower rate of occurrence, given that not all terrorist organizations are based in coastal areas, which lowers their opportunities to exploit maritime targets. Moreover, operations at sea require the terrorists to possess certain skills and resources that are unattainable to most groups.[54]

On the whole, the conceptualization of maritime security is still contested. Nevertheless, the empirical data and physical existence of the threat provides clear evidence of the nature of the stakeholders, which includes the targeted maritime community and the threatening actors that are majority non-state actors. Although the

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[51] Martin N Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: The Challenge of Piracy* (New York: Columbia University Press 2009), p.47-49.
[52] Ibid., p.52.
[53] Ibid. p.254.
[54] Michael D Greenberg et al., *Maritime Terrorism: Risk and Liability* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006).

existing literature has covered the techniques and objectives of piracy and maritime terrorism, maritime insurgency has not been as extensively discussed, owing to the fact that maritime security was given higher priority in political agendas due to the War on Terror in 2001, and the rise of piracy in 2008. Therefore, the thesis aims to provide an empirical case study on maritime piracy to address the gap in the discussion on maritime security.

1.5.3 The Red Sea

Historically, the Red Sea was a zone of interaction between civilizations. In the medieval ages, the Ottoman expansion into the sea created a holistic perception of the Red Sea as a geopolitical unit. This regional identity of the sea as a system was reinforced in the mid-20th century with the emergence of nation-states in the middle of the Cold War. Yet, the end of the Cold War paved the way for the sea states to become unitary actors in the sub-system. Hence, the dynamics of the local politics of the states turned into regional issues with a spillover effect, where the failure of the littoral states led to the rise of the non-state actors as a major threat to sea waters.

Scholars have adopted Braudel's conceptualization of the Mediterranean Sea as a historical framework in their study of the Red Sea. In his analysis of the sea history since 1500 AD, Miran explained that at the macro level the Red Sea was perceived as peripheral water that serves as a connection route to the Mediterranean. In contrast, the regional analysis of the Red Sea provided ancient cross-sea, commercial, political, and cultural interactions. The study emphasized the 16th century, which witnessed the Ottoman expansion in the sea basin in conjunction with the Portuguese interest in the region, which established the foundation for the perception of the Red Sea as a geopolitical entity.[55] By the same token, Wick advocated the conceptualization of the Ottoman Red Sea, referring

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[55] Jonathan Miran, "Space, Mobility, and Translocal Connections across the Red Sea Area since 1500," *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012).

to the Ottoman conquest of the sea as the starting point in the conceptualization of the Red Sea identity. Wick argued that the Red Sea became a 'lost space' as a result of the Eurocentricity of historical studies and the trends within Western Thalassology.[56] Moreover, for the West, the Red Sea only gained attention in the 19th century because of Britain's colonial interest in it. Nevertheless, the name 'The Red Sea' was coined by the British in the mid-nineteenth century; previously, the sea was called by several other names such as Bahr- Süveys, Bahr-Kulzüm, Bahr-Mekke, and Bahr-Yemen, leading to the marginalization of the sea's previous history.[57]

The 1970s was a period of major transformation in Red Sea geopolitics due to global and regional factors. According to Aliboni, in the second half of the 20th century, the Red Sea turned into a significant piece in the Cold War geopolitics in line with the strengthening of the Soviet Union's foothold in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, local actors began to adopt a more active policy in the Red Sea. For example, Saudi Arabia attempted to transform the sea into an 'Arab Lake'. Yet, both regional and international domains were highly intersected. For instance, in Somalia, Saudi Arabia perceived the Soviet presence as a threat and tried to push them out of the Horn of Africa by inducing Somalian nationalism.[58] Ehteshami and Murphy acknowledged the critical influence of the Cold War in shaping the Red Sea as a sub-region. Nonetheless, the end of the Cold War had a decisive impact on the regionalization of the Red Sea, as the regional players were left as the main actors in the sub-system. The relations among the regional actors became merely driven by their interests and thirst for recognition, shifting the political discourse towards issues such as border demarcation, rights of extracting resources, and bilateral conflicts, namely the Yemen-Eretria dispute over Hanish islands.[59]

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[56] A Greek word that can refer to marine science, oceanography and oceanology
[57] Alexis Wick, *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space*(Okland: University of California Press, 2016).
[58] Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region*.
[59] Ehteshami and Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*.

Another transformation in the post-Cold War period was the emergence of no-states actors as a regional threat. As noted earlier, the classical threat in the Red Sea had been mainly state-centric, driven by the dynamics of the Cold War, as well as the disputes of the regional states around the sea flashpoints.[60] Subsequently, in the 90s, non-state actors emerged as a new threat that was gaining a stronger foothold, especially at the chokepoints (islands, and straits). In the Red Sea, the rise of the non-state actors near Bab el-Mandeb became a critical issue because they posed a direct threat to the flow of oil and international trade.[61] Accordingly, Ulrichsen pointed out that in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, maritime routes were facing the rising threats of non-state actors, especially pirates and terrorists. These groups rose up as consequence of the security gap in failing peripheral states near Bab el-Mandeb strait, casting a threat to global commerce, most importantly oil exports from the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that are essential in the energy security of the stakeholders such as China, European Union (EU), and India. Henceforth, the activities of Somali pirates in 2008 triggered the international community to lunch naval operations in the region, such as the EU's first-ever naval mission (Operation Atalanta) and China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) anti-piracy operations.[62]

Briefly, the Red Sea is a sub-system, which is currently confronting the rise of non-state actors acting from fragile states near Ba el-Mandeb strait, who have become the main threat in the sea, especially to oil exports. Given this scenario, there are shortcomings that should be addressed. First, although the literature pointed to the Red Sea as a geopolitical unit, the geographical frame of analysis was not adopted since the discussion of the sea was made based on the strategic actors and not the strategic pivots,

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[60] Abir, *Oil, Power and Politics: Conflict in Arabia, the Red Sea and the Gulf.*
Also see: Abdel Majid Farid, *The Red Sea: Prospects for Stability*(London: Taylor & Francis, 1984).
[61] Guzansky, Lindenstrauss, and Schachter, "Power, Pirates, and Petroleum."
[62] Ulrichsen, "The Geopolitics of Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula," p.120-35.

which have been referred to as failed states that threaten the region with a spillover effect. Consequently, the literature did not recognize the strategic points in the Red Sea, and, more importantly, their influence on the rise of the threat of non-state actors, which this thesis aims to study through analyzing Yemen's geography and the Houthi maritime insurgency.

1.5.4 Yemen Geopolitics

In the large body of work in this field, Yemen has been perceived as a peripheral actor and a fragile state that threatens the Red Sea region through the spread of the network of non-state actors that execute operations regionally and support other radical groups. For instance, Razvan claimed that the fragility of the state of Yemen became a regional security threat due to the impact of globalization. The shift in the security paradigm for bipolarity into unipolarity allowed for the integrations of world politics among the Westphalian states. Yet, the globalization process induced a gap between the post-modern states and pre-modern ones, which became a threat to the system, including Yemen, which was ranked high in the global failed state index with developments that made it a regional and even global security threat.[63] By the same token, Mantzikos explained that because Yemen was a collapsed state that was struggling from inner conflicts and a devastated economy, it was the perfect incubator for international terrorism networks, which were able to spread their influence in the region and establish ties with other radical groups.[64] Similarly, Corbi addressed the issue of arms trafficking in Yemen as a regional threat. Corbi illustrated that the history of Yemen, which had undergone several stages of colonization, military coups, and civil war, had led to the militarization of the civil society and the flourishing of arms trade in the country. In fact,

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[63] Rãzvan Munteanu, "Yemen Crisis Impact on the Middle East Regional Security," *Strategic Impact*, no. 60 (2016).

[64] Ioannis Mantzikos, "Somalia and Yemen: The Links between Terrorism and State Failure," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011).

in Yemen, there are over 9.5 million small arms pieces, but only 1.5 million are possessed by Yemeni security forces. Consequently, Yemen has become the most important source of commercial arms transfer in the region, including to the terrorists in Saudi Arabia and the Somalian pirates.[65]

Lewis introduced a median perspective, arguing that the rise of the threat of non-state actors from Yemen was an outcome of both the state's fragility and its geographical location. Lewis indicated that the geographical location of Yemen, besides its underdeveloped status, has made it sensitive to economic fluctuations in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. For the same reason, terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda sought Yemen as their hub for regional operations and to spread their influence to the neighboring states, namely Somalia. Indeed, the group managed to execute two maritime attacks from Yemen in 2000 and 2002, with the first executed against the USS Cole, while the second was launched against the French tanker, Limburg. Accordingly, the continuity of instability in the country has created a fertile ground for such groups to strengthen their presence.[66]

On the other hand, several studies have addressed some of the geographical features of Yemen that allow it to influence the Red Sea waterways and sub-system. Some studies have studied the strategic importance of Yemeni islands in the Red Sea on the basis of their position and history. Meanwhile, other studies have illustrated the impact of Yemen on Bab el-Mandeb strait. This scenario gives a glimpse of the nature of the reciprocal relationship between the politics in Yemen and the Red Sea, especially the impact of the internal dynamics in Yemen.

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[65] Kathryn Corbi, "Small Arms Trafficking in Yemen: A Threat to Regional Security and Stability," *New Voices in Public Policy* 6, no. 1 (2012).
[66] Alexandra Lewis, "Unpacking Terrorism, Revolution and Insurgency in Yemen: Real and Imagined Threats to Regional Security," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 5 (2013).

A number of studies have analyzed the geographical aspect of Yemen in the Red Sea, mostly from the perspective of its islands. Historically, the Yemeni islands in the Red Sea were strategic points, which many regional and international powers sought to control. In the 16th century, the Ottomans and the Portuguese competed over the Southern entrance to the Red Sea, including Yemeni coasts and islands. Later, the 19th century witnessed the expansion of the colonial powers, Britain, Italy, and France, into the Red Sea, in the midst of the decline of the Ottoman Empire.[67] The Yemeni islands were contested between Britain and Italy for more than a century until the collapse of the Fascist regime in Italy, which left Britain as the dominant power in the sea. However, the second half of the 20th century witnessed the rise of the liberation movement against colonial powers, propelling the island issue into the regional sphere, especially in the border demarcation between emerging nation states. In 1995, a war broke out between Yemen and Eretria over Hanish island, which concluded with international arbitration. [68] The strategic importance of the islands lies in their location to Bab el-Mandeb strait and the global maritime routes, such as Perim island, which divides the strait into two waterways: a smaller passage towards the Yemen coast, and a larger Western waterway; thus, allowing the actor that dominates them to achieve sea control, and the ability to conduct blockades.[69]

Other studies aimed to illustrate the depth of Yemen with a focus on its influence on Bab el-Mandeb strait. The strait connects the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and is one of the most important chokepoints in the world maritime trade. Moreover, it was also of major military importance, as perceived in several historical cases. Among the states neighboring the strait, Yemen possesses a higher advantage in the strait waterways due to Perim island being located in Bab el-Mandeb. Indeed, in the October 1973 war between

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[67] Salem, البحر الأحمر والجزر اليمنية [Red Sea and Yemen's Islands].
[68] Ibid.
[69] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

Egypt and Israel, Egypt blocked Bab el-Mandeb against Israeli ships using Perim Island in coordination with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).[70] Al-Yadoomi shed more light on the military aspect of Bab el-Mandeb, focusing on the Cold War period regionally and internationally. In the regional domain, the strait remained a crucial piece in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Meanwhile, internationally, the Soviets saw the sea as the shortest route to connect their bases in the Black Sea to their fleets in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, the U.S. interest was to maintain free navigation, the flow of natural resources from the Gulf, and countering the Soviet presence.[71] Yet, the strait is still a global flashpoint, even up to the current moment, which illustrates the geopolitical significance of the states neighboring it, especially Yemen. Indeed, the U.S. government had discussed with the Yemeni government about establishing a military base in Mukha, North of Bab el- Mandeb.[72]

On the other hand, Al-Heisami attempted to provide a comprehensive study of Yemen's relations with the Red Sea. The researcher argued that the Red Sea has been a major determinant in shaping Yemen's foreign policy, illustrating that Yemen has strategic importance in the Red Sea due to its extended coastline, closeness to the oil-rich Gulf states, and its position between Asia and Africa. Not only that, but Yemen also possesses islands that have strategic importance to both the Arab Sea and the Red Sea. Given this scenario, the different governments in Yemen shared a unified perception of keeping the Red Sea outside international conflicts, especially the Government of Northern Yemen during the Cold War. Yemen supported efforts to create a collective security policy among the Red Sea states, signing the Jeddah charter in 1956, alongside Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which addressed the right for protecting the sea waters as an

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[70] Ewan W Anderson, "Bab El Mandeb," in *Global Geopolitical Flashpoints: An Atlas of Conflict* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).
[71] Al-Yadoomi, *The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait*.
[72] Anderson, "Bab El Mandeb".

extension of their lands. Later, in 1977, Yemen hosted a Red Sea conference aiming to create balance and to avoid turning the Red Sea into a conflict zone under the threat of the Cold War.[73] This non-alignment policy, as well as the efforts of preventing and reconciling conflicts in the Red Sea, was the main priority of the Yemeni governments even after the unification of South and North Yemens.

Considering the mutual interaction between Yemen and the Red Sea system, the dynamic of internal politics in Yemen would inevitably spill over. Indeed, Hansen explained that Yemen is located at a critical location at the heart of two strategic chokepoints on the maritime highways, which are Bab el-Mandeb and the Gate to Fortune. Hence, there has always been mutual interconnectedness between the security in Yemen, the Red Sea basin, the Gulf of Aden, and the Horn of Africa, seen mostly in the cases of terrorism and smuggling.[74] Moreover, Schmitz argued that the rise of globalization has created a new geopolitical system of interdependence between core and peripheries that have revived Yemen's significance, both economically and militarily.[75] All in all, these factors emphasize the Yemen-Red Sea effect.

Altogether, the geographical features of Yemen grant it significance in the Red Sea, especially via its islands that are positioned close to the international waterways and Perim island in Bab el-Mandeb strait. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship between the politics of Yemen and the Red Sea, which is a major determinant in shaping Yemen's foreign policy. On the other hand, the fragmentation of the state of Yemen has always been a threat to the Red Sea system due to the spillover of the non-state actors from the country.

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[73] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea].
[74] Hansen, "Yemeni Security-Political Dynamics and Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region."
[75] Charles Schmitz, "National Borders, the Global Economy and Geopolitics: A View from Yemen," *Geopolitics* 6, no. 2 (2001).

Yet, there are some understudied issues that require further analysis. Firstly, the geography of Yemen has not been comprehensively studied; for example, the literature has been confined to the location of Yemen and its islands without considering the shape of the country, the configuration of its coast, the availability of bases and natural ports, etc. Additionally, the literature has not effectively addressed the causational relationship between Yemen's geography and Red Sea politics. For instance, the literature investigated the Yemen islands in-depth, but failed to explain the mechanism by which this created a strategic advantage. Therefore, this thesis aims to adopt a geopolitical frame of analysis to study the geography of Yemen in order to ascertain the depth of Yemen's influence in Red Sea geopolitics.

1.5.5 The Houthi Insurgency and the War in Yemen

Since its emergence as a republic in 1962, Yemen has not managed to create a stable system of governance. The fragile state was confronted by several challenges including the Houthi group in Sa'ada. The group was transformed into a militant insurgency that fought six wars against the Government between 2004 and 2010. Yet, in 2014, the clashes resumed to cover most of the country. Hence, the literature mainly analyzed the formation and transformation of the Houthis and the root causes of the current civil war.

The book "Why Yemen Matters" sought to analyze the roots of the problem, but not via an in-depth study of the current structure of the state. The authors argued that Yemen's national identity was heavily challenged by group sub-identities such as the Houthis.[76] Moreover, functionally, the state utilization of tribes in military campaigns, for instance, 'colonel sheiks' in Sa'ada wars, cracked the base of the civil-military relations. Yet, the book went further by blaming foreign interventions, namely the U.S. and Saudi

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[76] Helen ed. Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*(London: Saqi, 2014).

Arabia as responsible for halting the political restoration, especially in the Arab Spring.[77] Similarly, Lewis and Rueschemeyer argued that the rise of non-state actors in Yemen was mostly a consequence of the country's weak central government. Indeed, the fragility of Yemen's government allowed criminal groups to actively smuggle drugs and weapons with spillover effects into the region.[78] Likewise, the book "Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen" described the Houthi-Government contestation as a regime-periphery tension that emerged as a consequence of the socio-economic dynamics in Sa'ada since the 1980s, in addition to the tribal/theological movement in the 1990s, which was seen as threat by the Central Government, which ruled the state through a system of neopatrimonialism at that time.[79]

On the other hand, other studies discussed the Houthi clashes with the Yemeni government. Freeman put forth an analysis that falls into a similar vein, but he argued that the radicalization of the Zaydis in Yemen could be traced back to the establishment of Al-Shabab Al- Moumineen (The Believing Youth) in Saad'a in 1992. The movement recruited youth through summer camps that hosted around 15,000 youth. The Houthi family was in charge of the ideological and the military branches of this movement. In the early 2000s, Hussein al Houthi openly started to oppose the Yemeni Government and its alignment with the U.S. War on Terror; calling for demonstrations in Sanaa, which led to the outbreak of six wars between the Government and Al-Shabab Al- Moumineen in 2004-2010.[80] On the other hand, Dorlian claimed that the roots of the tension could be traced back to the 1960s, as Sa'da became a shelter of the Imamate monarchs after the republican revolution. Dorlian pointed out that the tension is therefore political and

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Alexandra Lewis and Marilyn Rueschemeyer, *Security, Clans and Tribes: Unstable Governance in Somaliland, Yemen and the Gulf of Aden*(Basingstoke: Springer, 2014).

[79] Barak A Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*(Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010).

[80] Jack Freeman, "The Al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab Al Moumineen," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 11 (2009).

denied the Sectarian narrative promoted by the Yemeni government, as he saw it as an attempt to depoliticize the Houthis. Unlike Freeman's discussion earlier, Dorlian argued that Hussein al Houthi was a political reformist who had politicized the Al-Sahab Al-Moumineen movement and was also a religious leader,[81] which, in sum, indicates the dissimilarities regarding the emergence and rise of the Houthi movement.

In line with the above, in the literature, there are different interpretations of the ongoing war in Yemen. The former U.S. ambassador to Yemen, Rugh, claimed that even with the presence of a foreign factor, the war in Yemen was mostly due to domestic factors, which were political and not sectarian.[82] Similarly, Brandt stated that the war in Yemen was due to the neglect and marginalization of the Zaydis since the 1962 revolution.[83] Likewise, Salisbury claimed that although a Saudi-Iranian cold war was ongoing in the Middle East, in Yemen, the conflict was relationship and the regional dimension more exaggerated.[84]

Conversely, other scholars addressed the foreign role in this issue, but with different perceptions. Juneau argued that, regionally, the involvement of Saudi Arabia is evident, while Iran's role paled in comparison. The author emphasized the fact that Iran had utilized non-state actors to wage proxy wars in different places. However, in Yemen, the Houthis are not a strategic potential ally and have no promising tangible returns.[85] The focus on the Gulf as the main international actor in Yemen was built on the fact that Yemen is a natural geographical extension of the Gulf region, which is not politically integrated into it; thus always creating several flashpoints between the two sides and

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[81] Samy Dorlian, "The Ṣa'da War in Yemen: Between Politics and Sectarianism," *The Muslim World* 101, no. 2 (2011).

[82] William A Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign," *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 4 (2015).

[83] Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*(London: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[84] Peter Salisbury, "Yemen and the Saudi–Iranian 'Cold War'," *Research Paper, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 11(2015).

[85] Thomas Juneau, "Iran's Policy Towards the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Return on a Modest Investment," *International Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2016).

making Yemen the center of the Gulf political agenda, especially after the Arab Spring.[86]

On the contrary, other works indicate evident Iranian involvement in the conflict. Al-Qadhi assured that Iran has an actual interest in Yemen, inspired by the legacy of the Persian Empire at its zenith. The Iranian role was not only confined to soft power measurements, such as the spread of their ideology, but also was seen in their support of the Houthi with weapons, and provision of experts and military training, with the aim of copying the Hezbollah experience in Yemen, thus creating a proxy for themselves.[87]

More holistically, Al-Maashi analyzed the conflict from a macro perception, describing the conflict in Yemen as an extension of the GCC-Iran contest in the Gulf. The author illustrated that, due to the increasing Iranian threat in the Gulf waters, GCC perceives the security of the Yemen Maritime a part of its homeland security, which Iran violated by smuggling weapons to the Houthis through the Western coast of Yemen; therefore, fueling the civil war. Maashi explained that GCC interfered directly, unlike Iran that preferred a proxy war, because of the asymmetry of their interests, as GCC interest in Yemen outweighs their Iranian rivals.[88] Meanwhile, Clausen took a middle approach on the issue, indicating that no single narrative could explain the war in Yemen. The conflict has its domestic causes, yet the Saudi role is evident and so is Iran's support of the Houthi group. By the same token, both sectarianism and socio-economic deprivations were seen as catalysts of the Houthi insurgency.[89]

In sum, the weak central government in Yemen created a chance for the rise of non-state actors, especially within the groups that opposed the creation of the republican

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[86] Helen Lackner and Daniel Martin Varisco, *Yemen and the Gulf States: The Making of a Crisis*(Berlin: Gerlach Press Islamic Studies, 2017).

[87] Mohammad Hassan Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and Its Implications on the Regional Security*(Riyadh: Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies, 2017).

[88] Haifa Ahmed Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 4 (2017).

[89] Maria-Louise Clausen, "Understanding the Crisis in Yemen: Evaluating Competing Narratives," *The International Spectator* 50, no. 3 (2015).

regime. There is no consent about the roots of the Houthi insurgency. Yet, the formation of Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen in the early 1990s was the first public opposition of the Zaydis against the government. The return of Hussein Al-Houthi marked a turning point in the movement towards a more oppositional political attitude, leading to the outbreak of the six wars. Considering all this, there has been broad discussion on the causes of the current war with different competing narratives. However, among the extensive literature on the subject, the maritime aspect of the conflict has not been much discussed, as the Houthi insurgency was perceived as an insurgency on land, although the group has conducted several operations in the Red Sea and declared their intention to execute a naval blockade, which is a gap this thesis aims to address.

In final analysis of all the literature themes reviewed above, geopolitics involves the study of the geographical causation in international relations i.e. the causal relationship between geography and politics. Scholars have been divided on how to determine the nature of the relationship—either determinists, critical realists, or the third wave, which lies between the two previous waves; thus, affirming the empirical influence of geography, but still retaining a space for human factor. On the other hand, as waters contribute the largest geographical zone for transportation, the current maritime security affairs had witnessed the rise of non-state actors as a main threat to global shipping. While the threat comes from groups such as pirates, terrorists and insurgents, most of the literature focused on piracy while maritime insurgency was the least addressed. The Red Sea region, which constitutes a sub-system, witnessed the rise of the non-state actors threat since the last decade, acting from fragile states at the Southern entrance of the sea, including Yemen. Yet, the study of Yemen in the Red Sea geopolitical scene is dominated by power politics and counterterrorism frames in the expense of a geopolitical analysis. Consequently, there is a lack of analysis on the geographical configuration of the country and its causational relation in the Red Sea system, which constitutes the influence of

geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics. Accordingly, in analyzing the ongoing civil war in Yemen, the Red Sea has not been the central theme in the discussion. Therefore, the Houthi maritime insurgency and the utilization of the geographical factors have not been addressed; indicating evident gaps in the literature themes relevant to the research topic.

1.6.   Research Method

This research adopts a case study design focusing on Yemen and the Houthi maritime insurgency. The research aims to specifically analyze the unique geographical features of Yemen with respect to the Red Sea and its influence on the tactical and strategic options of the Houthis. Therefore, this research is qualitative in nature. Data was collected through primary and secondary resources and then analyzed in light of the findings, as explained below.

1.6.1 Data Collection

This research collected data from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources involved data from official news agencies of stakeholders such as the Yemen official news agency (Sheba), the Houthi official channel (AlMasirah), and the Saudi Arabia official news agency. Moreover, official documents, papers, and statements made by relevant personnel were also collected from official websites and news agencies. Another primary source for data from semi-structured interviews. The researcher interviewed personnel from the Yemen government, the Houthi movement, military personnel, leaders of the Public Resistance, researchers specializing in the Yemen, Red Sea region, and naval strategy, and academicians. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via personal communication, e-mail, recorded voice answers, and/or social media apps.[90]

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[90] See appendix I for interviewee list and questions

The secondary source in this research consisted of books, books chapters, journal articles, think-tank reports, and news agencies. The academic literature was obtained via databases accessible from the University of Malaya library, including the Web of Science, JESTOR, Oxford University Press Journals, Project MUSE, SAGE journals, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley Online Library, in addition to searching in other databases and platforms such as Google Scholar, Academia, and ResearchGate. Additionally, data were collected from Arabic books and studies, which were accessed via manual search, consultation with Arab-speaking researchers, and ordering from publishers in the Middle East. Moreover, the research followed the publications from several prestigious think-tanks and research centers such as The Middle East Institute, Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), Carnegie, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Washington Institute, Chatham House, and RAND cooperation. On the other hand, data collection encompassed the websites of specialized agencies like "Stratfor", and "Critical threats" and prominent news agencies in Arabic and English languages such as Reuters, BBC, Alarabya, Sky News Arabic, RT Arabic, and Aljazeera.

1.6.2 Data Analysis

One challenge in dealing with qualitative data is the vastness of information, where not the whole content will be directly relevant to the subject of study. The research looked into the process of qualitative research as suggested by several sources, including Creswell and Matthews and Ross[91] [92], in order to set the method of data collection and analysis adopted in this research, which include:

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[91] John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*(California: Sage publications, 2017).
[92] Bob Matthews and Liz Ross, *Research Methods*(Harlow: Pearson Higher Ed, 2014).

a)   Reading through all data: basically, scanning the data through abstracts, conclusions, comments in the interview, etc. to derive a common understanding of the content and discussion.

b)   Labeling the data: in this step, the resources were reviewed and read carefully to identify the information that could be utilized in the research.

c)   Creating an index: in this step, marks were created to access labeled data. In this research, the labeled data were marked with different colors for easy identification, as well as for easy collection of the original documents into one file.

d)   Coding and categorization: in this step, the research defined keywords, such as the Red Sea, Yemen geography, the Houthi insurgency, Yemen civil war, etc. to sort the data in terms of segments and chunks. Accordingly, themes were identified, in which the data was categorized with reference to the research questions, for example, a theme for the Yemen geography and the Red Sea. This allowed for rendering of the information, providing a further description of the content, and building links between the data and the themes.

e)   Data analysis: finally, the data was analyzed with reference to a theoretical framework in order to obtain the desired research findings.

1.7.   The Significance of Study

Given the gaps illustrated in the literature review, this thesis aims to conduct a novel case study pertaining to the Red Sea and the Yemen war. Besides that, this study aims to provide a hypothetical contribution to the geopolitical theory and practice on this subject.

Firstly, meanwhile maritime insurgency is understudied, no previous works have explored the maritime aspect of the Houthi insurgency, consequently, this study addresses the criterion of novelty. Moreover, amidst the lack of a comprehensive study on the

Yemen geography and influence on the Red Sea, the study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the geographical configuration of Yemen in order to realize its causational effect in Red Sea geopolitics, which addresses another existing gap. In addition, this study contributes new knowledge to existing studies on the Red Sea studies, which have not been prevalent in the academic literature. On the other hand, by studying the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and its impact on the Houthi maritime insurgency study, a milestone for future studies could be derived, based on the impact of geography as a power factor in asymmetric warfare. In turn, an effective framework for understanding the struggle of big powers in unconventional warfare could be developed; consequently, contributing to the revival of geopolitics as an effective framework of analysis.

1.8.   The Scope of Study

This study focuses on the maritime dimension of the Houthi insurgency, which started in September 2014 and is still effective up to the point of writing this research in December 2018. Geographically, the research sheds light on Yemen with a focus on the battles around the Western coasts and its vicinity in the Red Sea.

1.9.   Limitations

The accomplishment of this study was accompanied by the following challenges:

a)   Due to the ongoing conflict, some information and data are considered to be confidential and classified.

b)   The classified data has caused stakeholders to restrain from participating in interviews for this research. In fact, the researcher sent over 26 interview requests, and only 9 positively replied. In three cases, the participants withdrew from the research after they had agreed to participate, and because of the code of conduct of research ethics, the

researcher chose to respect their privacy and not include any testimony given by them earlier.

c)   There could be biases in the primary resources, as each side aimed to promote his narrative for the purpose of justifying his actions or as part of the war propaganda.

d)   The lack of academic literature and resources on the topic in the English language was a significant barrier, added to the limited access to the university library of prominent academic databases. On the other hand, some of the Arabic resources were not available online nor in libraries and had to be ordered from the original publisher in the Middle East, which sometimes took months to obtain.

The research aims to overcome these limitations by first accessing the local community and magazines in order to mitigate the impact of confidentiality. Secondly, to overcome the high rate of interview rejection, the researcher sought to approach different personnel from each section to provide alternative views, for example, as the research aimed to interview a leader from the Southern Public Resistance, the research contacted three personnel and obtained a positive response from one of them, while the other two restrained from participating. Third, the research used source triangulation to avoid any biases in the sources. The triangulation method included the variety of interviews involving representatives from each of the competing sides in addition to academicians and experts. Also, the triangulation method included comparing the information from various sources such as news agencies from each side of the conflict in addition to academic resources. Fourth, the area for data searching and exploring different databases was widened to bypass the limited accessibility and obtain the most amount of data as possible. The research also attempted to request articles from the personal pages of the researchers on other academic platforms such as ResearchGate. Moreover, the researcher's proficiency in the Arabic language allowed for easy access to Arabic

resources covering some of the important aspects that have been overlooked in the English language sources.

1.10. Chapters Outline

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the study with a discussion on the background of the study, the research problem statement, the objectives of the study, the research questions, a review of the previous studies and the literature, the research methodology and the methods of data collection and analysis, the significance of the study and the contributions of the study that add to the body of knowledge, the geographical and time scope of the study, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter II discusses the theoretical framework adopted by the study. The chapter begins with an introduction of geography as a frame of analysis, illustrating the importance of reviving the geopolitical tradition in the study of international relations and the method of application. After that, the chapter provides a review on the naval aspect of geopolitics and the development of its key terms and concepts. Hence, the chapter illustrates the geopolitics of narrow seas, exploring its uniqueness and sensitivity to geographical factors, and the effective strategies for fulfilling sea control, denial, and other objectives. Finally, the method by which the framework in this study was applied is explained.

Chapter III is dedicated to fulfilling the first research objective, i.e. on studying the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics. To this end, the chapter starts by explaining the Red Sea geopolitics, illustrating how it constitutes a geopolitical sub-system. From there, the chapter analyzes Yemen's strategic depth and influence in the Red Sea system by studying the geographical configuration of Yemen and its influence on Red Sea geopolitics. The analysis encompasses the location, position, configuration of coasts, bases and natural ports, islands, and Yemen's advantage in Bab el-Mandeb,

before reviewing historical experiences and empirical evidences on how geography has allowed Yemen to play a crucial role in Red Sea geopolitics.

Based on the above, Chapter IV explores how the Houthi maritime insurgency exploited the geographical factor as an agent of advantage in their asymmetric conflict against the coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which fulfills the second research objective. The discussion starts by defining the Houthi group as an insurgency with a study of the historical context of their rise and the stages the group underwent from ideological recruitment, politicization, to militarization. After that, the chapter explores the background of the current civil war in Yemen and the role of its Western coast, which fronts the Red Sea in battles; and consequently, giving rise to the emergence of the maritime insurgency, which is analyzed in light of the influence of geography utilized by the insurgency.

Chapter V presents the objectives and goals of the maritime insurgency. The chapter discussion is divided into three parts. Firstly, the chapter explores the potential threats of the maritime insurgency. In the second part, the limitations of the maritime insurgency are studied and discussed to assess the probability of the threats. Hence, the third part provides a synthesis that is analyzed with the theoretical framework to obtain a vivid assessment of its impacts on the maritime insurgency, as well as its strategic objectives and goals.

Last but not least, Chapter VI holistically contextualizes the discussions of the study and provides an overall conclusion based on the findings of each chapter.

CHAPTER II: THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to establish the theoretical framework for the analysis of data collected in the thesis case study. The chapter starts by introducing geography as a frame of analysis, illustrating the importance of geographical causation in international politics. In specific, the chapter discusses the naval aspect of geopolitics, with a focus on the context of narrow seas, especially based on Vego's 'Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas'. The discussion covers three main aspects: first, the unique geography of narrow seas compared to oceans and open seas and its impacts on tactical and strategic domains; second, the geographical factors that grant a land or a state influence over the sea waterways; and third, the methods by which an actor can utilize the geography of the sea and land to achieve sea control, denial control, and/or disputing control. Altogether, these constitute the theoretical framework of this study. Last but not least, the chapter concludes by illustrating how the theory will be applied in this study to analyze the data collected in order to achieve the research objectives.

2.1 Introduction: Geography as a Frame of Analysis

While some scholars have attempted to trace it back to the time of Aristotle, the adoption of geography in the study of international relations emerged as an independent field in the late 19th century and the early 20th century through the writings of Mahan, Ratzel, Mackinder, and Kjellen, who coined the term Geopolitics in 1899.[93] However, since the 1970s, and the inter-paradigm debate in international relations, the notion of anarchy has become the core of concept in this field, and has since been accepted as the primary nature of the international system in most schools of thought.[94] The study has

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[93] Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*.
[94] In the period between 1960-1970, behaviorism emerged as the new paradigm in the study of international relations. The approach adopts anarchy as its starting point of analysis. See: Ole Wæver, "The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate," in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. S. Smith, K. Booth, and M. Zalewski(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

become dominated by the paradigm of the functional structure of the international system in which actors' capabilities are measured in terms of dynamic factors, such as military power, and economy[95], with less emphasis on the physical factor of space and the influence of geography.

In light of this discussion, scholars have attempted to revive the geopolitical tradition in the contemporary study of international relations; indeed, in his book, 'The Revenge of Geography', Kaplan asserted that the driving force in international politics is embodied in the geographical factor; thus it is geography that can give insight about past and future conflicts.[96] Similarly, Gray emphasized on the self-evident causal link between geography and politics, given the fact that all political matters occur within a geographical context. Henceforth, interplays between the physical factors, embodied in geographical patterns and the psychological factors, can be seen to dominate the mind of the strategist. Gray admitted the presence of other influencing factors but the impact of geography is like the curry in a chicken curry dish, the taste of which dominates every other ingredient. Indeed, the unique geographical configuration and its physical parameters will shape technological options, military culture, logistical means, and the structure and system of institutions. For example, the strategic choices and policies of a sea nation are derived from that of a land nation. Thereupon, all politics is geopolitics and all strategy is geostrategy.[97] Holistically, the relation between geography and politics should be perceived within the frame of structure and agents, where the choices of agents, which

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[95] The concept of anarchic structure was first introduced in the neo-realism school. According to Kenneth Waltz, the structure of the system is dependent on three factors: first, the function of the units; second, their ordering principles; and third, the distribution of capabilities. Meanwhile, in the international system, states are units that perform the same function; therefore, the structure of the system is anarchic. See:Kenneth N Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*(Illinois: Waveland Press, 2010).
[96] Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate*.
[97] Gray and Sloan, *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, p.162-69.

can be states or non-state actors, will be influenced by the constitutive force of the structure—either by constraints or chances.[98]

Henceforth, the utilization of a geographical frame of analysis can illustrate the relationship between the geography of Yemen and the politics of the Red Sea, as well as its impact on the Houthi maritime insurgency.

2.2 The Development of Naval Geopolitics

The surface of the earth is covered by continental masses and oceans, so too the study of geopolitics is divided into continental and maritime domains with prominent advocates for each. In favor of the sea argument, strategists believed that seas are open highways in which ships can freely move in all directions with no terrain obstacles, even entering other state territories, which is an inherent advantage over land[99]; therefore, they emphasized that to become a sea power, a nation should achieve both military and commercial interests.[100] Thus, scholars began to define some key concepts, including sea power, command of the sea, and sea control, which have underwent several developments.

Among the most influential founding strategists is the American admiral, Alfred Thayer Mahan. In his study, Mahan saw the sea as a decisive factor that gave states the upper hand since the time of the Roman Empire wars with Hannibal[101], holding that the sea still has the same impact in the 20th century.[102] He assertively pointed to the direct link between command of the sea and a nation's prosperity, and therefore the importance

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[98] Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, p.26-27.
[99] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.159.
[100] Ibid., p.2.
[101] Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*(Worcestershire: Read Books Ltd, 2013).
[102] Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*(New York: Routledge, 2009), p.33.

of establishing marine trade and a naval force to protect its movement in the open seas, building a causal relation between geostrategic and geoeconomic affairs.[103]

To achieve command of the sea and for a state to become a sea power, Mahan underlines six requirements: 1) geography, meaning the position of the state and the nature of its surrounding space; 2) physical confirmation, which is the configuration of coasts and the possession of accessible ports and harbors; 3) the extent of territory, which does not indicate a quantitative measurement of a state's area but the relative measurement of coastline length to the area of the state, and the quality of the coastline that allows for establishing supply lines; 4) the number of the population, which refers to the population size, but with emphasis on the number of people following the sea or that can be employed on board and in the naval industry; 5) the characters of the people, which indicates the nation's inclination towards trade and the industry in addition to the preparedness of its people for seafaring; 6) the character of the government. Mahan perceives that the nature of the government and its institution have a direct impact on the nation's establishment as a sea power. Moreover, it has a psychological influence on the attitude of people towards the sea.[104]

In the contemporary context, several of Mahan's assumptions have prevailed as influential to strategists and scholars; on the other hand, there are some concepts, which are vague or irrelevant. For example, Mahan coined his work around the notion 'command of the sea', which means the ability to use sea routes and completely deny the enemy from using them; however, this notion seems to be absolute and inconvenient in contemporary naval strategy in the midst of the technological advancement that navies have access to and the integration of sea powers. In this sense, navalists prefers to substitute 'command

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[103] *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.67.
[104] Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, p.82-113.

of the sea' with sea control[105], which Till expands into five categories: 1) absolute control, which is the level of command of the sea as defined in the Mahanian tradition; 2) working control, where one's fleet can operate freely, while his enemy works under risk; 3) control in dispute, where both sides are at risk and aim for limited control for a certain time and space in order to conduct an operation; 4) enemy working control, the opposite of the 2nd position; 5) enemy absolute control, the opposite of the 1st position.[106]

Moreover, sea power was another central term that Mahan asserted, but did not define. Again, Till tries to identify the concept through a holistic approach that considers land and sea in military and civil affairs, breaking sea power into input and output. As input, sea power includes both civil and military domains, while their inputs are the navy, the coastal guard, commercial ships, the marine industry, and air and land power, where relevant. Meanwhile, sea power as output is a measure of the impact of sea inputs on the events on land. In other words, it is a method for measuring seapower based on its outcomes.[107]

All in all, advocates of the sea argue the advantage of water over land in terms of the high mobility afforded by open oceans with no borders or physical obstacles. Mahan was among the first to set a framework of prerequisites for a nation to become a sea power and achieve command of the sea. Nevertheless, the development of this notion has undermined the absolutism of Mahan's assumption, changing from command of the sea to control of the sea and the redefinition of the concept of seapower based on the current inputs and agents of sea power and its outcomes. However, although Mahan addressed

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[105] Milan N. Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, 2nd ed.(London: Routledge, 2003), p.111.
[106] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.188-89.
[107] *Seapower*, p.20-22.

the importance of chokepoints, most of his discussions ignored the narrow seas, which might be a crucial part of naval strategy.[108]

2.3 The Geopolitics and Geostrategy of Narrow Seas

Narrow seas are the most crucial of all naval strategies. According to Corbett's observation, the most successful attacks against shipping were conducted in narrow seas and not open oceans.[109] Indeed, in World War I (WWI), the majority of naval battles were fought in narrow seas, such as in the English Channel, the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, and the Black Sea.[110]

The control of narrow seas requires many prerequisites involving open seas, but the unique geographical nature of narrow seas, between two landmasses and close to the shores, allows for a greater level of influence over other national power instruments. Consequently, strategy is more sensitive to geographical frictions, which defines unique means for control of the sea.[111] For instance, oceans, which cover 70 percent of the earth surface, have been regarded as open highways that carry more than 80 percent of global trade.[112] Moreover, militarily, open seas provide several advantages. First, it provides connectivity, as there are no physical barriers such as terrains. Second, the vastness of the open seas makes the targets scarce and difficult to find.[113] Third, the vastness and the openness of open seas also provide better surveillance for ships and less coverage for the attackers, and consequently, a better chance of maneuverability.[114]

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[108] Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Panama Canal and the Distribution of the Fleet," *The North American Review* 200, no. 706 (1914).
[109] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.42.
[110] Stavros Karlatiras, "The Changing Nature of Naval Conflicts in Confined and Shallow Waters (Csw)," in *Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security*, ed. J. Krause and S. Bruns(London: Routledge, 2016), p.166.
[111] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.16.
[112] Gal Luft and Anne Korin, "Terrorism Goes to Sea," *Foreign Affairs* 36, no. 6 (2004).
[113] Ian Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*(London: Routledge, 2018), p.23-25.
[114] Paul W Parfomak and John Frittelli, "Maritime Security: Potential Terrorist Attacks and Protection Priorities" (Washington DC, 2007).

However, in narrow seas, the same factors are reversed. Firstly, straits become bottlenecks by which all navies and ships have to pass from; therefore straits act as focal points that provide the best point for engagement. [115] In general, narrow seas are characterized by the presence of large numbers of different vessels that increase the availability of potential targets. Moreover, the shallowness of narrow seas forces ships, especially larger ships, to considerably reduce their speed by up to 60 percent, making them an easier target for attacks. Adding insult to injury is the limited space for mobility, which restricts ship maneuverability. On the other hand, the narrowness of the sea allows for better observation, making larger ships easily detectable targets, while smaller hostile ships can fade into the background of other ships or utilize islands and the short line of operation to gain an element of surprise against a target that has a short time to respond.[116]

Given the above, in narrow seas, an inferior party acting from a geographical advantage can challenge a superior navy, through exploiting the geopolitical advantage, such as the utilization of a position near a strait to execute a naval blockade. For instance, the Turkish Navy can block the Black Sea even against a superior opponent by virtue of their control over the Dardanelles and the Bosporus straits.[117] In such an environment, the asymmetric approach to warfare, including non-conventional arms tactics, are ideal for exploiting maritime vulnerability, even by non-state actors.[118] Indeed, commenting on the impact of asymmetric warfare during the Korean War, the United States (U.S.) commander of the amphibious task force, Rear Admiral Allen E. Smith, ironically admitted that they had lost against an opponent that did not have a naval force, and which

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[115] Khaldoon Ahmed Abdulla and Jatswan Singh Harnam Singh, "The Influence of Geography in Asymmetric Conflicts in Narrow Seas and the Houthi Insurgency in Yemen," *MJIR/ Malaysian Journal of International Relations* 6(2018).

[116]*Milan N. Vego, "On Littoral Warfare," Naval War College Review 68, no. 2 (2015).*

[117] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.206

[118] Karlatiras, "The Changing Nature of Naval Conflicts in Confined and Shallow Waters (Csw)," p.168.

had used pre-world war weapons installed on vessels that belonged to the time before the birth of Christ.[119]

Hence, the study of the geopolitics of narrow seas can be divided into two: first, the geographical study of the unique features of the sea, littorals, coasts, islands, and straits; and second, the study of the strategies and tactics applied in this unique geography such as strait blockades.

2.4 Geographical Study of Narrow Seas

a) Position

With respect to land and sea boundaries, a state can have a central, semi-central, peninsular, or insular position. A state that is not bordering the seas is said to be central while a state located on the rim of a landmass with sea borders is semi-central. If the sea borders are longer than land, the state is said to occupy a peninsular position; accordingly, a state positioned on an island is said to have an insular position. Among the three types of positions of sea frontiers, the insular position is the most favorable for building sea power, while the semi-central position is the least. Meanwhile, although a peninsular position is favorable, it would always be threatened by potential invasion from land.[120] According to Mahan, a state with an insular position, like Britain, will not be threatened by invasion through land. In addition, the insular position allows for better concentration of forces compared to the continental position.[121]

b) Shape

Besides the position of the country, the shape of the country is another crucial factor that influences sea power. Shapes are classified into compact, elongated, or

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[119] Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: The Challenge of Piracy*, p.235.
[120] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.16.
[121] Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, p.82-97.

concentrated. A country with all its edges approximately lying at an equal distance from the center is said to have a compact shape. Such a shape allows for a high level of coordination between industrial zones, transport lines, and administration. China and Germany are good examples of compact countries. On the other hand, when the length of the land is bigger than its width by a significant ratio of roughly 1/6, the country is said to have an elongated shape. Such countries are vulnerable to attack and have no strategic depth. Finally, a country is considered to be physically concentrated if it is extended over a landmass, either on a rim or an island, which gives the country a high defensive ability against attack.[122] A physically concentrated country is the opposite of a physically fragmented one, which can consist of an archipelago of several scattered islands that are difficult to defend, such as Indonesia.[123]

c) Employment Area

Employment area denotes the distance between the points of employment and its impacts. A large distance between points will allow larger employment and therefore an advantage in defense and offense. Comparatively, a short distance would limit the capabilities of deploying and moving large forces, making the area vulnerable to hostile navies. In this sense, in narrow seas, defenders will endure difficulties when confronting large forces, as these forces can encircle the country and cut its lines of supply.[124] For example, one of the challenges that restricted Saddam's regime from turning Iraq into a naval power in the Gulf is its geographical limitation, as Iraq has a small deployment area in the sea.[125]

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[122] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.21-22.
[123] *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice*(Rhode Island: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), p.III-10.
[124] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.23-24.
[125] Raja Menon, *Maritime Strategy and Continental Wars*(London: Franc Kass, 1998), p.96.

d) Configuration and Character of Coasts

As costs are a point of connection between the sea and the hinterlands, its character and configuration are decisive factors in developing sea power. The configuration of coasts indicates the physical arrangement of the natural factors that can be utilized such as the quantity and quality of natural harbors, seaboard terrains, the availability of natural resources, and the lines of communication between the coasts and inland. Similarly, the significance of the coast's character, which is the length of the coastline and the location with reference to the adversary's coasts, also factor into the sea power development. Both factors indicate the strengths and weaknesses of a state's base of operation. For example, the existence of high terrains around the coast offers natural protection for an established base for civil and military uses. Comparatively, a rocky coast with difficult terrains limits the ability to observe the water near the shore, especially small surface boats.[126] Meanwhile, a plain coast with none or a few offshore islands would be vulnerable to invasion and thus facilitate any breakthrough to the hinterland.[127]

e) Landform

In line with the configuration of coasts and its character, the study of landform examines the coasts from the perspective of the efficiency of the lines of communication and transportation. For instance, extended coasts allow for the construction of railroads and, therefore, effective transportation lines for moving troops and materials. Additionally, natural formations such as coral reefs could provide a natural barrier for the enemy navy, and similarly, rocky coasts could complicate an enemy's entrance into the coasts.[128]

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[126] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.30-31.
[127] "On Littoral Warfare."
[128] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.32.

f) Straits and Islands

Straits and islands are considered 'Decisive Points'; controlling them can lead to control of the sea. [129] They act like bottlenecks in narrow seas through which all ships and navies must pass. Strategists anticipate that in modern naval strategy straits will play a much more important role, as they provide the best zones for engagement.[130] Moreover, straits are critical points in "Sea Lines of Communication". Hence, the geopolitical security of straits will always impact mobility in the seas.[131] Strategically, a state will have total dominance over a strait if it controls both flanks of the shore, such as Turkey, while a state, which controls one shore of the strait, will still have considerable control, but not full dominance.[132] In World War II (WWII), semi-closed seas were essential in connecting self-troops and isolating the enemy, such that major battles were fought to gain control of these chokepoints.[133]

Besides that, islands are also a factor of advantage in peace and war and serve as positions of defense and offense. In times of peace, islands can provide guidance and control for shipping lines, whereas in the case of disputes, islands provide a strategic depth for the mainland, acting as an early warning for defense and a frontier for attack, where, the more distant they are from the shore and the closer they are to the enemy coasts, the more this advantage is manifested.[134] For an extended seashore, which is exposed to attacks, islands would act like armor that will distinctively limit its vulnerability. Additionally, the presence of islands in narrow seas and shallow waters could highly impact the accuracy of sonar contacts and acoustic detecting devices, leading

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[129] Walter A Vanderbeek, "The Decisive Point: The Key to Victory,"(Kansas: US Army Command and General Staff College School of Advanced Military Studies, 1988).
[130] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.187.
[131] Edgerton, *A Practitioner's Guide to Effective Maritime and Port Security*, p.28-30.
[132] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.20.
[133] Karlatiras, "The Changing Nature of Naval Conflicts in Confined and Shallow Waters (Csw)," p.166.
[134] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.30-31.

to a high rate of false alarms.[135] Moreover, islands can be used as military bases for the navy and aircrafts. Indeed, in WWI, islands were decisive in the U.S. campaign in the Pacific, where they served as shields to flank Japanese lines of communication[136], leading the U.S. strategists to define the term "Island Chains" in the Cold War era, which could be broadly described as the utilization of a continuous line of islands to contain and encircle an enemy. Recently, this concept has become central to the Chinese naval strategy.[137]

Accordingly, the possession of islands grants an advantage in gaining sea control. Indeed, in 1942, the German and Finnish navy attempted to deny the Soviets from sailing the Baltic Sea through blocking the Western end of the Gulf of Finland. However, the Soviets managed to seize the Lavansaari, Peninsaari, and Seiskari islands, which they utilized as air bases and platforms to fire gun batteries, therefore, preventing the penetration of German and Finnish fleets into the Gulf of Finland and foiling the blockade.[138]

Meanwhile, on the whole, as both islands and chokepoints are decisive points in narrow seas, an island located at the heart of a strait will gain absolute control over chokepoints.[139]

g) Bases

Historically, bases were the cornerstone of imperial sea powers, and the loss of a base could mean the collapse of an empire. Mahan described a navy without a base as a

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[135] " On Littoral Warfare".

[136] Andrew S Erickson and Joel Wuthnow, "Why Islands Still Matter in Asia," *The National Interest* 6(2016).

[137] "Barriers, Springboards and Benchmarks: China Conceptualizes the Pacific "Island Chains"," *The China Quarterly* 225(2016).

[138] Friedrich Ruge, *The Soviets as Naval Opponents, 1941-1945*(Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979), p.24-26.

[139] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.55.

land bird incapable of flying.[140] Indeed, bases are the core aspect of operation within a definite sea area. Bases can serve as shelters, maintenance, and supply stations for ships, as well as a resting place for the crew. Additionally, bases facilitate the monitoring and control of ship movements. Therefore, militarily, it is essential for early anticipations of attacks to protect maritime trade and block the enemy. Besides that, the navy lines of operation will directly depend on the availability of bases and the distances between them. Considering the above, there are some factors that must be considered in selecting basing areas.[141]

In terms of location, the quality of the base location could be ascertained from its closeness to the zones of operation, whether it is an area of combat, a coast of an adversary, or a trade route. Typically, it is favorable for bases to be surrounded by mountains or hills, which provide natural protection against attacks including air attacks and even weapons of mass destruction. Cliffs could also be utilized for constructing bases for small surface boasts and launchers underneath. Narrow seas possess several bases situated at close distances from the focal points, which shortens the line of operation and enhances the efficacy of fleets even against blue navies. On the other hand, a base located at a distance from the focal point in a narrow sea might be unfavorable for operational purposes, but it can still act as the main base for force concentration.[142]

2.5 The Geostrategies in the Narrow Sea

Corbett describes maritime strategy as the principles that define the conduct of war in which sea is a fundamental aspect.[143] In a competition over a maritime theatre of war, the objectives of the adversaries can either be to achieve control of the sea, denial of

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[140] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.86-87.
[141] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.61-63.
[142] Ibid., p.64-69.
[143] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.36.

control, disputing control, or to support the army flanks on land. The objective will vary according to the difference in power factors. For instance, a superior fleet will aim for sea control while an inferior fleet will focus on achieving sea denial or disputing control. Navies can carry their operations through conventional and decisive conflicts or by low-intensity conflicts and asymmetric warfare; a low-intensity conflict at sea is for operational objectives, mostly to back or counter an insurgency on land.[144] Moreover, in contrast to open seas, the geography of narrow seas creates a dynamic environment, which allows for rapid and dire changes in operational aspects of war. Consequently, it restricts the planning and execution of major and joint operations, and requires a great level of decentralization of the command in control; thus, creating a better environment for unconventional warfare.[145]

2.5.1 Sea Control

As mentioned earlier, sea control is an alternative term to command of the sea and is divided into absolute control, working control, and control of dispute. However, in narrow seas, the aim of control may extend over the entire waterway. Moreover, it involves controlling the surrounding coasts. Meanwhile, its operations include attacking from the land, as well as the air, with weapon systems that might be inconvenient to use in open oceans such as mines and coastal guns. Henceforth, in narrow seas, absolute control or command of the sea is a tangible aim, unlike oceans where the same aim becomes irrelevant.[146] Additionally, control of the sea can be permanent or temporary. It can also be general, considering the whole sea as the theatre, or local, in which the aim is to control a certain area of the sea for strategic importance or for operational purposes.[147]

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[144] Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p.21-24.
[145] "On Littoral Warfare."
[146] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.116-19.
[147] Till, *Seapower*, P.147.

These aims can be fulfilled by several means including the control of chokepoints, controlling the air, and/or seizing strategic points and bases.

a) Controlling Chokepoints

A critical factor in controlling narrow seas is the control over straits and/or islands, also referred to as 'chokepoints'. Physically, straits are narrow passages that connect narrow seas with adjacent waters. Besides being the only exits, straits also have extra importance due to an increase in the dependency on seas for military and trade purposes. Therefore, straits provide a convenient, short, and quick passage. In this sense, a power that expands its influence over straits can influence the theatre surrounding it, either waters or lands besides being the best spot for deploying ground troops to other shores. The control of straits can be either direct, through a physical presence in the water, or indirect, through influence over strait flanks. Still, it is possible to fulfill this strategy even from one shore. Additionally, control can be achieved through land defenses, by virtue of passage narrowness, as well as through land and air force. Eventually, the control of straits can lead to the absolute control of the narrow sea.[148] For example, in 1956, the Egyptian dominance over the Suez channel granted it control over the Red Sea and the capability of denying the Israelis from sailing in the sea.[149]

b) Control by Air Force

By the same token, air forces operating from land bases can determine the control of narrow seas, sometimes with or without limited support from the navy. The first aircraft versus ship scenario occurred in WWII, in which airstrikes cast the biggest threat to naval pieces.[150] Currently, the integration of the air force into naval operation is even wider,

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[148] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.120-23.

[149] Jeremy Black, *Naval Warfare: A Global History since 1860* (London Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p.187.

[150] Bernard Brodie, "New Tactics in Naval Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* 24, no. 2.

where even small aircrafts and helicopters are integrated in naval operations for several uses including airborne warning and air to surface strikes.[151] Henceforth, in contemporary geostrategy, the concept of sea control may not, by necessity, mean a naval presence on the strategic points. Conversely, it can also mean gaining air supremacy above it.[152]

c) Using Ground Troops to Seize Land Bases and Strategic Positions

Another factor to consider is the role of land power and ground troops. Bearing in mind the significance of land bases and strategic points, using land troops to capture enemy bases, islands, as well as large areas of the enemy coasts, will cede control over to the fronting sea areas and in some cases, could also lead to absolute control.[153] Similarly, land troops can be deployed to seize strategic chokepoints, which could decide the fate of battles, as enemy territories could be captured. Therefore, in the context of narrow seas, the side that lacks the strength of a navy could overcome this limitation through the integration of ground troops and air forces. Indeed, in WWII, German troops managed to control the Baltic Sea during the period between 1941–1942, seizing the coasts fronting the sea at the Gulf of Finland, before the Soviets shifted the balance by seizing three islands on the other side of the Baltic Sea to dispute German's control and gain the advantage.[154]

2.5.2 Sea Denial

Sea denial, also referred to as 'guerrilla warfare at sea', consists of several intermittent conflicts at sea.[155] It could also include hit-and-run operations, where an inferior fleet will avoid direct conflict and control the time and space aspect of the battles

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[151] Menon, *Maritime Strategy and Continental Wars*, p.85.
[152] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.123-26.
[153] Ibid., p.126.
[154] Ruge, *The Soviets as Naval Opponents, 1941-1945*, p.23.
[155] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.191.

in order to achieve an element of surprise against a superior enemy; therefore, hindering the enemy fleet at sea, such as the German U-boat warfare during WWI and WWII.[156] Similarly, in the Naval Operation Volume published by the U.S. Marine Corps, Naval Operations and Coast Guard, the U.S. navy showed that it was possible to face unconventional attacks carried by opponents that aimed to deny the U.S. navy access to certain waters and narrow seas.[157] The main objective of denial is to deny the enemy from using certain waterways by rendering the enemy attempts useless and therefore inconvenient.[158] The denial strategy can be fulfilled by:

a) Minelaying and Unconventional Warfare

For most, the denial strategy is fulfilled through guerrilla and unconventional tactics.[159] Operationally, mines are used to fulfill sea denial, mostly chokepoint denial. Usually, minelaying will be done in consecutive lines of mine lines to establish a barrier at strategic points in the narrow sea, in order to destroy surface ships and submarines of the enemy or to complicate his deployment operations. Even more, the risk of confronting minefields may sometimes drive an opponent to avoid the suspected waters even if the presence of mines is doubtful and there are no actual mines.[160] Besides that, unconventional operation is becoming a common criterion in naval operations. Unconventional means have proven reliable in several occasions against the world's great naval forces, such as in operations usually carried by non-state actors operating from the shores using nontraditional weapons. The USS Cole attack in Aden, in the South of Yemen, is such an example.[161]

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[156] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.98.

[157] U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard, *Naval Operations Concept 2010: Naval Operations and Coast Guard*(Washington DC, 2010).

[158] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.65-66.

[159] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.191.

[160] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.167-71.

[161] Till, *Seapower*, p.7.

b) Distant Blockade

In a historical context, superior fleets usually seek to fight battles against the weaker side, who, in return, will be forced to keep their ships at bay to avoid confrontation, resulting in a state that the navalists call "Fleet in Being". The superior side will aim to sustain the situation by keeping their navy close to the enemy harbors to execute a closed blockade. However, the developments of torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and weapons that can be fired from land have rendered closed blockades obsolete. Alternatively, navies have also developed the strategy of distant blockades, which do not aim at a particular fleet but rather to deny the enemy from accessing certain waters.[162] Navalists perceive that modern blockades have implemented diversified attacking methods and the integration of air and land operations into sea battles. Moreover, a higher utilization of smaller units and unconventional means such as mines have also been deployed.[163]

The geographical factor is the cornerstone for a successful distant blockade. Generally, in narrow seas, chokepoints are the ideal strategic points for a blockade, as they allow the launching of attacks on the enemy fleet from land or through minelaying. Indeed, in several historical cases, superior fleets were rendered unable to penetrate through a blockade applied by an inferior enemy. In 1915, the Turks managed to block the Allied navies from using mines and coastal guns.[164] Similarly, in 1973, the Israeli Navy gained the advantage over the Egyptians in direct confrontation, but the Egyptian Navy managed to change the course of the war by controlling the Bab el-Mandeb strait and successfully blocking the Israeli Navy in the Red Sea.[165]

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[162] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.49-50.
[163] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.187-88.
[164] Black, *Naval Warfare* p.64.
[165] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.103.

2.5.3 Disputing Control

Similar to denial, disputing sea control is an objective that the inferior side seeks to fulfill. However, the aim of disputing control is not to block or deny the opposition from utilizing the waterway, but to make the sea a disputed region and an unsafe passage in which the superior cannot exercise sea control nor gain an advantage. Indeed, in narrow seas, for the reason discussed earlier, the superior navy will not be able to prevent inferior attacks, especially in the case of hit-and-run attacks and insurgencies, which make the waterway vulnerable to the exercise of disputing control.[166] Besides the efficiency of sporadic attacks, disputing control could also be achieved through strategic diversion and defensive mining.

a) Strategic Diversion

Strategic diversion is a strategy in which the inferior party disperses the opposition's naval power by conducting several attacks at other points (or seas) far from the opponent's focal points. It is a strategy that attacks the enemy's strategy and distracts their forces from their main objective.[167] The aim of diversion is to stretch the opposition's forces over an extended or multiple theatres of war, which prevents the concentration of the enemy's naval power and restrains the gain or exercise of opposition's superiority. Hence, the execution of strategic diversion is critical in cases involving an asymmetry of capabilities or whenever the enemy is enforcing too much pressure. In addition to the defensive advantage, strategic diversion facilitates the task of the inferior navy, by creating a favorable ratio of forces between the adversaries. This grants the inferior party the opportunity to attack and significantly damage the superior, through assembling one's

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[166] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.206.
[167] Julian Stafford Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*(Frankfurt: Outlook Verlag GmbH, 2018), p.198.

force against the divided enemy navy, which can lead to decisive results.[168] The French executed a strategic diversion in the Seven-Year War against Britain in 1756. As the French had been overwhelmed by the superior British Navy, they changed their strategy to deceiving the British fleet using a fake attack on the British colonies in North America while they secretly prepared a second transport contingent in Toulon to seize the Mahon port which granted them the control of the Western parts of the Mediterranean Sea.[169]

b) Defensive Mining

Mines are an effective weapon designed for shallow waters and can be used for offensive and defensive purposes. Defensive mines are laid in fields as a series of barriers bigger than the offensive mines, but they are simpler in nature, and will usually be used as procedures prior to any expected crisis. The objective of defensive mines can be either to seal entrances to strategic points or centers of gravity such as ports to prevent the enemy from reaching these points, reduce navigable waters, and limit the enemy's mobility in a certain theatre and/or to force the enemy vessels to take certain routes so the enemy will be targeted by another attack from the coast.[170] Thus, minelaying can be classified as a tactical measurement that can be utilized effectively in protecting areas of operational strategic importance. Mines were an effective tactic in both World Wars; for instance, in WWI, the British Navy aimed to protect the Irish Channel from the German Navy, by laying mines across the channel. The tactic effectively limited the movability of the German U-boats with some even detonating the mines. By the same token, in WWII, the Soviets disputed the German control of the Baltic Sea through defense mining.

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[168] Milan N. Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Control: Theory and Practice*(New York: Routledge, 2018), p.177.
[169] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.215.
[170] Michael S Lindberg, *Geographical Impact on Coastal Defense Navies: The Entwining of Force Structure, Technology and Operational Environment*(London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.80-82.

Throughout the dispute in 1941, the Soviets laid 8,000 mines and managed to sink 21 German and Finnish warships and 10 commercial ships.[171]

c) Support Land Operations

A regular character of wars in narrow seas is the mutual cooperation and integration between land and sea powers. Indeed, for ground troops based in littoral areas, the support from sea forces has been proven in several cases as an essential factor to success. Typically, sea operations serve to support army flanks, deploy and transport troops, defend a base against an attack, as well as support advancing troops through the control of the waters from which the supply line passes.[172] In the American Civil War, the success of the land troops of the Union Army in Virginia, the Peninsula Campaign, and Richmond, was dependent on their cooperation with the Union Navy.[173] On the other hand, for insurgencies, the cooperation between land and maritime operations has further objectives. The exploitation of maritime routes is vital for insurgencies to provide logistics support and funds for the land insurgency, which is usually carried through the activities of smuggling and sometimes piracy. Moreover, in many cases, a foreign power may arm an insurgency through maritime smuggling. Additionally, the execution of maritime insurgency operations has been effective in increasing the whole durability of land insurgency, especially in brown and green waters where the least skill will be required to execute it.[174]

2.5.4 Actions Against Enemy Navy and Commercial Shipping

Depending on the level of control and presence in the sea, as well as the objectives, the attacker may acquire several actions against the enemy navy and commercial

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[171] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.218-20.
[172] Ibid., p.268.
[173] Harold Hance Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *Rise of American Naval Power 1776-1918*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), p.155.
[174] Zachary Griffiths, "Small Boats, Long Wars the Impact of Maritime Operations on Insurgency Duration," *United States Military Academy* (2017).

shipping. In military operations, a naval power would seek to destroy, attrite, or neutralize the enemy navy. The destruction of the enemy fleet could be attained through decisive battles that include the maximum use of force and concentration of the navy— also referred to as 'General Fleet Action'. The decisive battles and destruction of the enemy fleet or bases is an ideal method for sea control from both economic and time aspects. Yet, empirically, fleet-to-fleet confrontation rarely occurs. Alternatively, fleets, both superior and inferior, normally adopt an attrition strategy, which includes the conduct of a series of sporadic attacks, usually by unconventional means, such as mines, aircrafts, land attacks, etc. Attrition can extend over to maritime trade, which can bring serious damage to the economy of the enemy as well as the fulfillment of the enemy demand of supplies, which depends on the level blocked trade. A third strategy is neutralization, in which a greater navy aims to inactivate the enemy fleet by blocking it from its bases, or limiting its areas of operation to a significant extent. In some cases, the inferior fleet will choose to neutralize its fleet because of significant deterrence.[175]

On the other hand, attacking commercial targets is classified as 'trade warfare'. This was evident during the American Civil War (1861-1865)[176] when seas started to become the main route for importing and exporting resources, products, and life necessities. A block against commercial ships could put a country under a pressure and cause great damage to its economy, such that it would take years to recover. The level of damage is correlated with the level of the blockade, which can be classified as: 1) hampering, if the enemy trade is reduced by 25–30 percent; 2) curtailing, if the enemy trade is reduced by 30–50 percent; 3) interrupting, if the trade is reduced by 60–80 percent; and last but not least 4) cutting-off the enemy maritime trade, which requires a blockade of at least 80 percent of the enemy trade.[177]

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[175] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.147-56.
[176] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.59.
[177] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.147-56.

2.6 The Model of Application into Dissertation

This dissertation aims to study the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and its utilization by the Houthi maritime insurgency. Therefore, the variables of this research have been divided into the independent variable, geography, and the dependent variables, Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and the Houthi maritime insurgency. This study adopted a geopolitical frame of analysis to find the causal link between the variables. Therefore, as indicated in the research methodology section in Chapter I, the thesis adopts a qualitative research approach, where the data collected was coded under five keywords, Red Sea, Yemen geography, the Houthi insurgency, Yemen civil war, and the Houthi maritime operations. The coded information was then categorized into two main themes. The first theme is the Yemen geography and the Red Sea, which encompasses data on the Red Sea history, geography, and politics, as well as Yemen's geography, politics, and relation to the Red Sea. On the other hand, the second theme is the Houthi insurgency and operations in the Red Sea, including the data on the rise of the Houthi movement, the background of the insurgency, the current civil war, and the details of the recorded maritime operations executed by the insurgents. The application of the theoretical framework based on Theme I aims to address the first research objective and realize the causal link between geography and Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics, in addition to laying the foundation for the second objective, i.e. the determination of the Houthi's utilization of geography in their maritime insurgency, which will be obtained from the analysis of Theme II. Likewise, the third objective is the analysis of the objectives of the Houthi maritime insurgency. The variables and their link are illustrated in figure 2.1:
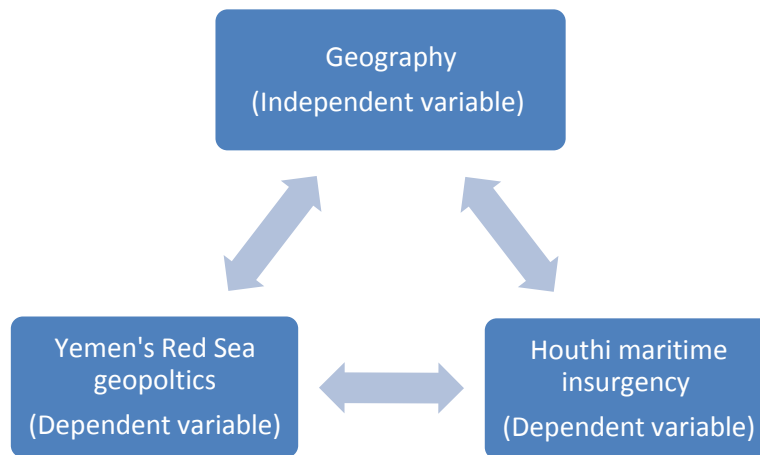
Figure 2. 1: Research variables

In the analysis of Theme I, the theoretical framework will provide in-depth understanding of the role of geographical factors in Yemen and its relation with the Red Sea. Since the Red Sea is a geopolitical unit, the theoretical framework can give insight on the strategic points, vulnerabilities, and opportunities given to actors in the sea. For instance, the theoretical framework extensively discusses the importance of straits as decisive points in narrow seas, which provides a hypothetical basis for analyzing the Bab el-Mandeb strait, realizing the opportunities and limitations it provides to actors. Moreover, the data on the geographical configuration of Yemen is also assessed. For instance, within the category of the Yemen geography, the research included data on the coasts of the country regarding its length, configuration, distance from hinterlands and available bases and ports; thus, with reference to the theoretical frame, the research can conclude the weaknesses and strengths of the Yemen coastline, its impact on the Red Sea, and vice versa, the accessibility to the hinterland from the coasts, in addition to its potential deployment areas.

Moreover, the theory defines different positions and shapes of states with certain characteristics for each—these premises can be utilized to analyze why the location of Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula creates a favorable situation for a seafaring nation. By the same token, this thesis aims to utilize the hypothesis of the theory to analyze the Yemeni islands and its strategic values in terms of its interaction with the routes in the sea and coasts. Most importantly, the position of Yemen near Bab el-Mandeb strait and its possession of Perim island is analyzed as to whether it affords a strategic advantage over its neighbors in the Horn of Africa. Consequently, the influence of Yemen in the Red Sea Geopolitics could be determined, in line with the first research objective.

Similarly, the second theme of collected data contains information on the Houthi maritime insurgency operations in the Red Sea, which includes the number of operations, the locations of the attacks, the tactics and weapons used, and the nature of the targets. Hence, applying the theoretical framework is essential in analyzing the contribution of the geographical factors on the attacks from two sides. Initially, the configuration of narrow seas pose a natural challenge for larger fleets and may facilitate asymmetric attacks and unconventional arms tactics, which gives a broad understanding of the Houthis' opportunities in the asymmetric conflict against the Saudi-led Arab coalition. With reference to the geographical impact of Yemen in the Red Sea, obtained in the first research objective, the research intends to utilize the theoretical framework to comprehensively analyze the correlation between geography and the nature of the operations, for example, how the location of Yemen fronting the narrowest point of the sea at Bab el-Mandeb elevated the Houthi naval threat without their possessing a navy and facilitating their attacks from land against coalition ships. Similarly, how the extended coasts of Yemen provide several points for conducting the attacks are analyzed. For example, according to the data, the Houthi insurgents managed to execute several operations from the plain coastlines, which indicates a geographical advantage in which

the entire coastline could be utilized as an effective area of employment. This, in sum, fulfills the second research objective.

Also, the study intends to adopt the theoretical framework in analyzing Theme II, to find the objectives of the maritime insurgency. According to the theoretical assumptions, naval operations in narrow seas could aim to control the sea, denial of the sea, dispute control of the sea, or to support a land operation. Within each objective, there are operational prerequisites embodied in the nature and rationale of the operations. Meanwhile, sea control is a strategy that the superior navy usually adopts, but the inferiority of the Houthi insurgency compared to the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia limits this analysis and shifts the focus to the other objectives. Hence, the research aims to adopt a theoretical framework to ascertain the level of threats and the strategic objectives of the Houthi operations, and to estimate their potential impact and thus their objectives.

In light of the theoretical assumption on the unconventional arms tactics, the tactics of the Houthi insurgency are assessed. For example, the theory discusses the efficiency of minelaying, which can be utilized either to conduct a blockade, if excessively laid in chokepoints, or as a defensive measurement, if laid as barriers in the vicinity of coasts and bases in order to prevent the enemy navy from approaching those centers of gravity, which can be utilized to analyze the objective of the mines laid by the insurgents. By the same token, this theory provides an assessment on the impact of the unconventional tactics that can be utilized for different objectives. According to the theory, 80 percent damage to the enemy's trade would be enough to be considered as a cut-off leading to the successful denial and exercise of sea control, and subsequently, reducing the ratio of influence on the impact of hampering, curtailing, or interrupting attacks, which will indicate the objective of the attacks. Similarly, the attacks against the military targets could either aim to destroy, neutralize, or attrite the enemy navy.

Therefore, the theory provides an identification tool to classify the operations and their potential threats as well as serves as a scale to measure their attainable impacts and therefore the objective of the maritime insurgency, which fulfills the research objective. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is outlined in Figure 2.2.
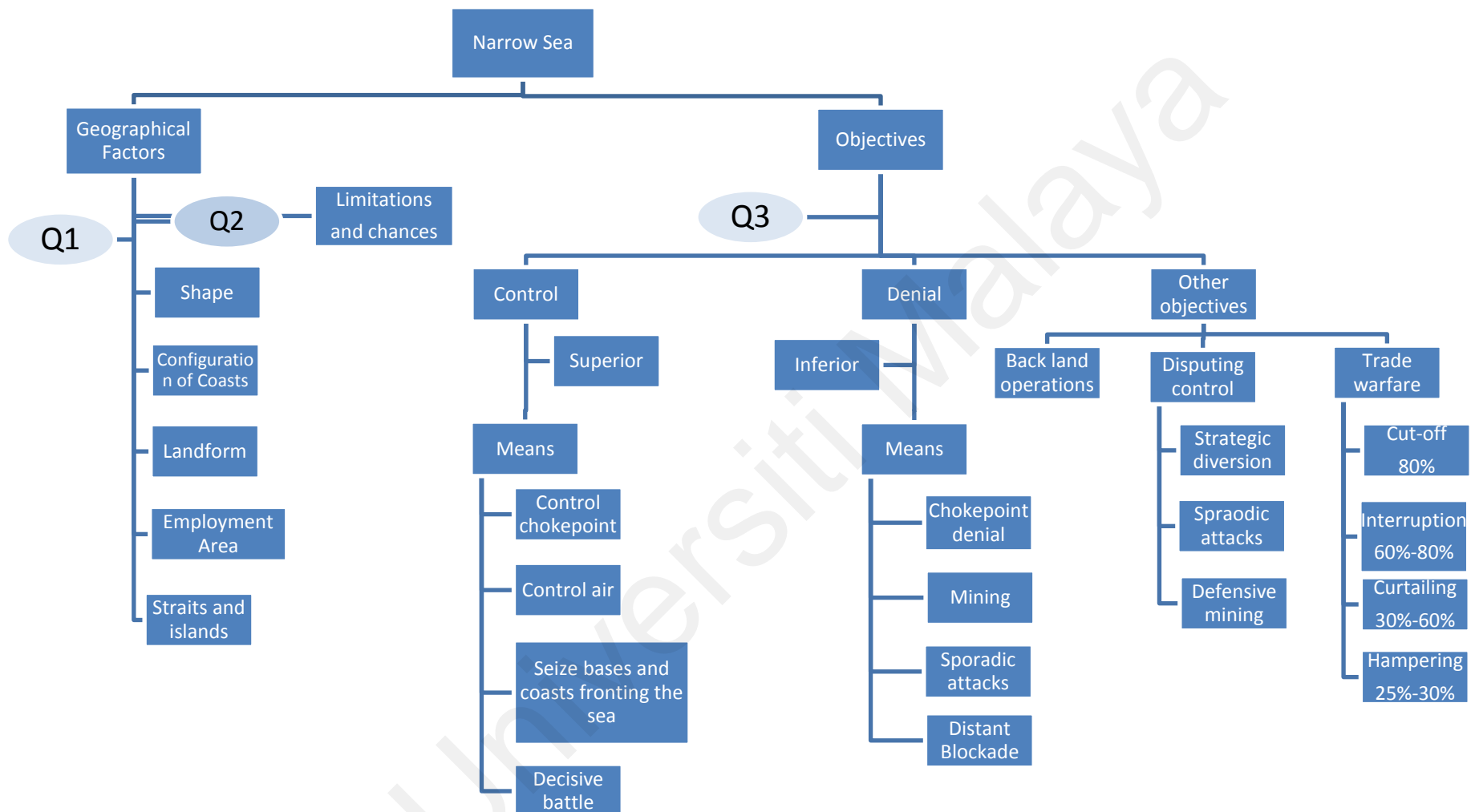
Figure 2. 2: The theoritical framework

CHAPTER III: YEMEN AND THE RED SEA GEOPOLITICS

This chapter aims to explore the geographical configuration of Yemen and analyze it with reference to the theoretical framework in order to conclude how geography influences Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics. The chapter starts with an overall conceptualization of the Red Sea as a geopolitical sub-system. Then, the study analyzes the geographical configuration of Yemen focusing on the factors of location, shape, nature of the coasts, bases, islands, and the advantage of the Bab el-Mandeb strait. Consequently, the causational relation between the geography of Yemen and the Red Sea geopolitics is framed. Last but not least, this conception is empirically perceived through historical experiences, namely the impact of Yemen on the British control of the Red Sea in the 18th-20th centuries as well as the Egyptian denial of the Israeli navy during the 1973 war. This, in sum, fulfills the objective of understanding the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics.

3.1 The Red Sea Geopolitical Sub-System

The Red Sea is a narrow passage that separates the Asian and African continents. It extends 1932 km longitudinally, bordering the Arabian Peninsula on the eastern flank and the Horn of Africa on the western side. The sea has a maximum width of 306 km at Massawa and a minimum width of less than 30 km at the Bab el-Mandeb strait, while the average width of the sea is 380 km. Furthermore, the mean depth of the sea is around 500m with a maximum depth of 3093 m.[1] The strategic importance of the Red Sea lies in its role as a junction between the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aden, connecting Asia and Europe, as well as linking the Pacific and the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. The sea is accessible through two strategic chokepoints, the Suez channel in the

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[1] Abdulla and Harnam Singh, "The Influence of Geography in Asymmetric Conflicts in Narrow Seas and the Houthi Insurgency in Yemen."

North and Bab el-Mandeb strait in the South. Both sea exits are seen as counterparts to the Straits of Malacca, which connects the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean as well as the Hurmuz strait that provides passage for Gulf natural resources. Additionally, in comparison to other maritime routes, such as the Cape of Good Hope, the Red Sea provides the shortest route between the East and the West. Thus, it is the main route for transporting oil and trade between Europe and Asia. In addition to its economic significance, the sea is the fastest route for navies sailing between the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean—a critical factor in military operations.[2] For instance, a vessel sailing from Norfolk, Virginia, to the Gulf may reduce its travel duration by a week compared to other routes.[3] Similar to the Russian Navy and the Black Sea states, the Red Sea is the shortest line of communication with the Indian Ocean, indicating the reason behind the prioritization of the Sea in the Cold War geopolitics.[4]

3.1.1 The Regionalization of the Red Sea

For centuries, internal and external actors have recognized the Red Sea as a zone with independent calculations. The emergence of the nation state system in the sea zone emphasized the regional affairs in Red Sea politics. Therefore, from the perspective of regional studies, the Red Sea constitutes a sub-system within the international system.

Historically, the Red Sea was a central theatre for the interaction of civilization, and was known by different names, including 'Bahr El Yaman', which means 'the Yemen Sea'.[5] The sea linked the African and Asian shores and acted as a channel for exchanging goods and cultures among the civilizations that emerged at its flanks such as the Pharaon, Sheba, Himyarite, and Aksum kingdoms.[6] At different historical stages, the Red Sea was

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[2] Turki Al-Anazi, "Strategic Importance of the Red Sea,"(Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2001).
[3] Salwa Ahmed Qasem Dammag, "United States in the Red Sea : An Analysis on Foreign and Security, 1990-2002 " (Univerity of Malaya, 2014).
[4] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea].
[5] Miran, "Space, Mobility, and Translocal Connections across the Red Sea Area since 1500."
[6] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

a playground for great power politics. The Greeks and the Romans were among the first to compete over access to the sea, while the sixth century AD witnessed the Byzantines challenging the Persians over control of the sea. Later in the medieval age, the Muslims controlled the Red Sea and blocked the Crusader expansion in the Arabian Peninsula. Meanwhile, in the Age of exploration, the sea was disputed between the Ottomans and the Portuguese, concluding with the Ottomans controlling the sea, and driving the European power to bypass the Red Sea through the Cape of Good Hope. Nevertheless, in the 18th century, the Red Sea regained its significance, this time by Britain and Napoleonic France, both having colonial ambitions of the sea waterways. Yet, the significance of the sea was elevated in the late 19th century with the opening of the Suez channel.[7]

From this historical accumulation, the identity of the Red Sea emerged. Again, the emergence of the post-colonial nation states around the sea basin introduced a new system of actors, which induced a new dimension of analyzing the Red Sea as a sub-regional system. The Cold War period introduced systems of alliances and polarity among the states, creating sub-regional consciousness alongside regional enmities such as the Arab-Israeli rivalry. Additionally, the post-Cold War period witnessed the rise of the role of regional actors, which increased their influence in the sea waterways and states; thus, shifting the Red Sea affairs from internationalization to regionalization, and giving rise to sub-regional identities, interests, and conflicts. This regionalization of the Red Sea stands on five theoretical pillars: 1) the adjacency of states: 2) the existence of at least two regional powers; 3) the constitution of a closed system in which the change in one impacts the others; 4) the recognition of the actors of a zone as a theatre of operation for both local and external actors; and 5) the dynamics in the sub-region that influences the foreign policy of the states.[8]

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[7] Ehteshami and Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*, p.2-5.
[8] Ibid., p.8-12.

Considering these five factors empirically, since the 50s, Egypt, Israel, and later Saudi Arabia were the regional actors that have sought to increase their influence on the states along the Red Sea. Yet, it was the 60s that witnessed the rise of regional affairs in the Red Sea with the establishment of inter-Arab, inter-African, and Afro-Arab relations. Moreover, the regional powers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, established tendencies to expand their influence in the sea basin through soft and military powers.[9] The prioritization of the sea grew even higher in the 70s as Egypt re-opened the Suez channel after eight years of closure and Saudi Arabia established the Yanbu terminal in the Red Sea to bypass the Gulf, which motivated both states to increase their involvement in the local affairs of their neighbors to protect their own interest in the sea pathways.[10]

Therefore, the sea region has become a system in which the action of an actor has an impact on the calculation of others; for instance, Egyptian involvement in Yemen's republican revolution against the monarchs in the north alerted the Saudis to become involved and to counter the Egyptians. Consequently, the Red Sea became a crucial theatre for the regional states in which its dynamics influenced the strategies and policies of the states.[11] In 1976, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan met in Jeddah to discuss the development of a mutual 'Red Sea centrist consciousness'. Similarly, in 1977, North Yemen, also known as the Yemen Arab Republic, hosted an Arab conference to discuss the security issues of the Red Sea.[12]

Furthermore, the security-oriented alliances that emerged in the Red Sea region were another indication of regionalization. For instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) emerged as an institution that established ties with Western powers, putting itself

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[9] Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region*, p.93-98.
[10] Ehteshami and Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*.
[11] Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region*, p.95-96.
[12] Ehteshami and Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*.

under their security umbrella.[13] By the same token, the East African front emerged, made up of an alliance between Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eretria against Sudan. Indeed, the absence of superpowers in the sea since the end of the Cold War manifested regional power politics, in which most consisted of territorial disputes, such as the disputes between Yemen and Eretria.[14] Moreover, local non-state actors emerged as an impactful actor in the regional arena such as the terroristic groups in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and East Africa.[15] In sum, these examples prove the regionalization of the Red Sea and its classification as a sub-system.

3.1.2 The Security Threats in the Red Sea in the Post-Cold War Era

The classical security issues in the Red Sea were mainly associated with the competition between global powers, such as the United States (U.S.) and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, the dynamics of security issues in the Red Sea could be seen from three aspects. First, the regional powers continued to compete to become the main geostrategic players, reinforcing Red Sea regionalism. Second, the solidification of the regional identity allowed for greater impact to be made by the smaller actors in the sea basin, introducing novel security issues to the region. The states started to dispute over defining their borders and territories, in a way that can be seen as a process of building state identity. Therefore, thirdly, the absence of a solid-state identity in the realm of the peripheral Red Sea states opened up a space for local non-state actors to start influencing regional politics, fracturing the fragile states, building networks across the sea, and even attacking maritime trade.[16, 17]

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[13] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Internal and External Security in the Arab Gulf States," *Middle East Policy* 16, no. 2 (2009).

[14] Ehteshami and Murphy, *The International Politics of the Red Sea*, p.185-88.

[15] Jeffrey A Lefebvre, "Red Sea Security and the Geopolitical-Economy of the Hanish Islands Dispute," *The Middle East Journal* (1998).

[16] Ulrichsen, "The Geopolitics of Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula."

[17] Sally Healy and Ginny Hill, *Yemen and Somalia: Terrorism, Shadow Networks and the Limitations of State-Building* (Chatham House, 2010).

With this flip between the power politics of geostrategic players and the asymmetric threats of non-state actors, there is a crucial dimension in the Red Sea security that lies mostly in the states that have made geographical pivots.[18] Since the main objective in maritime strategy, and the strategic players acting in sea theatre, is to attain control over the waterways, the major security threat is anything that could impact the free flow of shipping lines or grant decisive victory during war. Consequently, in the Red Sea, the states the can influence the geopolitics of the sub-system are those located near the sea exits, Bab el-Mandeb in the south and Suez at its north. However, it is conceptually valid to claim that, within the Red Sea system, the geopolitical pivots are only the states at the Bab el-Mandeb zone, which are Yemen, Somalia, Djibouti, Eretria, and Somalia, being fragile states vulnerable to intervention.[19] By this reasoning, Egypt is a regional power and a geostrategic player.[20]

In contemporary Red Sea affairs, the stage for stakeholders has expanded beyond global hegemons and even state-centrism. On the other hand, the geopolitical classification of the Red Sea as a sub-system indicates the importance of considering the geopolitical pivots, which are the states neighboring the sea exits, mostly Bab el-Mandeb, as they can be a decisive factor in Red Sea security.

3.2 Yemen's Geographical Configuration

In light of the theoretical assumptions illustrated in Chapter II, the analysis of the geographical configuration of Yemen allows for realizing its depth in the Red Sea geopolitics. The analysis starts with a general perception of Yemen's location in the global map and then zooms into the regional arena. In addition, the shape of the territorial

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[18] Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, p.41.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region*, p.95-96.

configuration of Yemen and how those factors have impacted the Red Sea politics throughout history is also discussed.

3.2.1 The Position of Yemen

Continentally, Yemen is located at the south-eastern end of Asia, in a central position between the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and East Africa. From a maritime point of analysis, Yemen is located in one of the busiest global maritime trade routes between the East and the West, at the Northern entrance of the Indian Ocean and the Southern gate of the Red Sea, connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Also, Yemen links between three regional seas; the Arab sea, which connects the Middle East with the Indian Ocean; the Red sea, which links Europe, Africa, and Asia; and the oil-rich Arabian Gulf. Regionally, Yemen is located at the tipping point in the south-western part of the Arabian Peninsula—a region that is known historically by the name of Arabia Felix, the first populated zone in the Peninsula due to its geographical characteristics.[21] Currently, the state occupies an area of around 527,970 km^2, which includes the mainland and the islands with land border lengths of 1,746 km, 1,458 km with Saudi Arabia and 288 km with Oman, and a coastline of 1906 km, extending in the Red Sea by 730 km, and longer coasts alongside the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Besides that, Yemen has a territorial sea claim of 12 nm, in addition to a 24 nm contiguous zone, a 200 nm exclusive economic zone, and a 200 nm continental shelf.[22]

Shedding more light on the location of Yemen with reference to the Red Sea and the Middle East, Yemen can be classified as a peninsular location, which is an essential requirement for a country to become a sea power.[23] Besides, from an operational

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[21] Ewan W. Anderson and Liam D. Anderson, *An Atlas of Middle Eastern Affairs*(Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.167-69.

[22] Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Yemen,"(Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, 2008).

[23] For description of the advantages of a peninsular position see: Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.16.

perspective, continentally, Yemen is located at an exterior position with reference to the Middle East, as it is located at a peripheral position at the South-Western corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Conversely, from the maritime perspective, Yemen can be classified as a country with a central position in the Red Sea, as it is close to its southern entrance, which gives it an advantage in offense and defense of the sea.[24] Therefore, it can be inferred that Yemen can act in the Red Sea from different lines of operation to impact the sea states.

3.2.2 The Shape of the Country and the Configuration of Coasts

The shape of the territorial configuration of Yemen is not ideally compact. The ratio between the height of the Eastern borders and the Northern shore is roughly 1:4. In contrast, the ratio between the Southern and Western coasts is around 1:2.6.[25] Generally, as illustrated in the theoretical framework, the semi-compacted shape of Yemen provides a high level of integration between the Central and Western side of the country; thus, creating effective lines of communications. On the other hand, the extension of the Southern coastline isolates the Far-East region of the country and makes the Southern parts difficult to defend.[25]

However, the natural characteristics of Yemen coasts have a reversal effect, which mitigate the impact of its extended coastline. Indeed, the mountain backing of the 1906 km coastal plains[26] provides a natural protection for the coasts and the bases along it, most importantly the long southern coast. The geographical configuration of the country is characterized by narrow coastal plains backed by mountains in the exterior part, as well as a mountainous and desert interior.[27] The contour level in the mountainous areas ranges

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[24] Ibid., p.56.

[25] The ratios were obtained by calculating the length and width of Yemen's boarders as obtained from: Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Yemen."

[25] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea], p.48.

[26] Anderson and Anderson, *An Atlas of Middle Eastern Affairs*, p.167.

[27] CIA, " Yemen," CIA The World Factbook,2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html.

from a few hundred meters near the coasts to 3,760 meters above sea level at the peak of the mountain of Nabi Shuayb. These heights are interposed by seasonal rivers and valleys that dry during the summer, most notably the wadi of Hadhramaut at the Eastern part of the country. Meanwhile, the deserts are at the Northern part of the country along its border with Saudi Arabia.[28]

On the other hand, the configuration of the marine and coastal environment can be classified into several categories. First, the off-shelf islands, which were originally formed by volcanic eruptions, such as Az Aubayr island in the Red Sea. The islands are mostly clustered in archipelagoes with sizes ranging from 100 m^2 to over 100 km^2. The biggest off-shelf islands in the Red Sea are Zuqar with an elevation of 624 m, and Hanish with an elevation of 407 m. Second, the deep-sea basin, which is a geological basin that exists under the sea between 100 m and 1600 m, with certain environmental features such as the continental shelf, the shelf slope, and islands. The depth of waters south of Zuqar island is less than 500 m, whereas to the north it overpasses 1000 m. Third, the shelf islands, which are the islands in shallow waters, less than 100 m, within the continental shelf. Yemen possesses more than 100 shelf islands, with the majority of them being small islands with areas less than 7 km^2 located at the North of the country near the Yemen-Saudi borders, while the largest is Kamaran with an area of 112 km^2. The fourth is the mainland coast fronting the Red Sea, which is almost 730 km long. The shelf islands provide a natural barrier against strong tides, sheltering the coast areas near it, mostly north of Al-Salif port. Meanwhile, the Southern areas are exposed to sea tides, while big sand spites, like Ras Aakathib, provides another natural shelter in the form of bays and lagoons.[29]

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[28] Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Yemen".

[29] Ali Douabul and Abdul Majied Haddad, "The Red Sea and Yemen's Red Sea Environments," *Hassell and Assoc., AMSAT and UNOPS* (1970).

Besides that, the plain level of the coasts facilitates transportation along the coastline, which limits the isolation of the Far Eastern areas, and can be utilized for military and civil uses. In addition, unlike rocky coasts, the plain coasts allow for greater monitoring of the local waters, providing extra defensive measurements[30], which, in sum, creates natural defenses for the coasts and the hinterland, and eliminates the vulnerability of extension. Map 3.1 and 3.2 show the Yemen contours and topography.
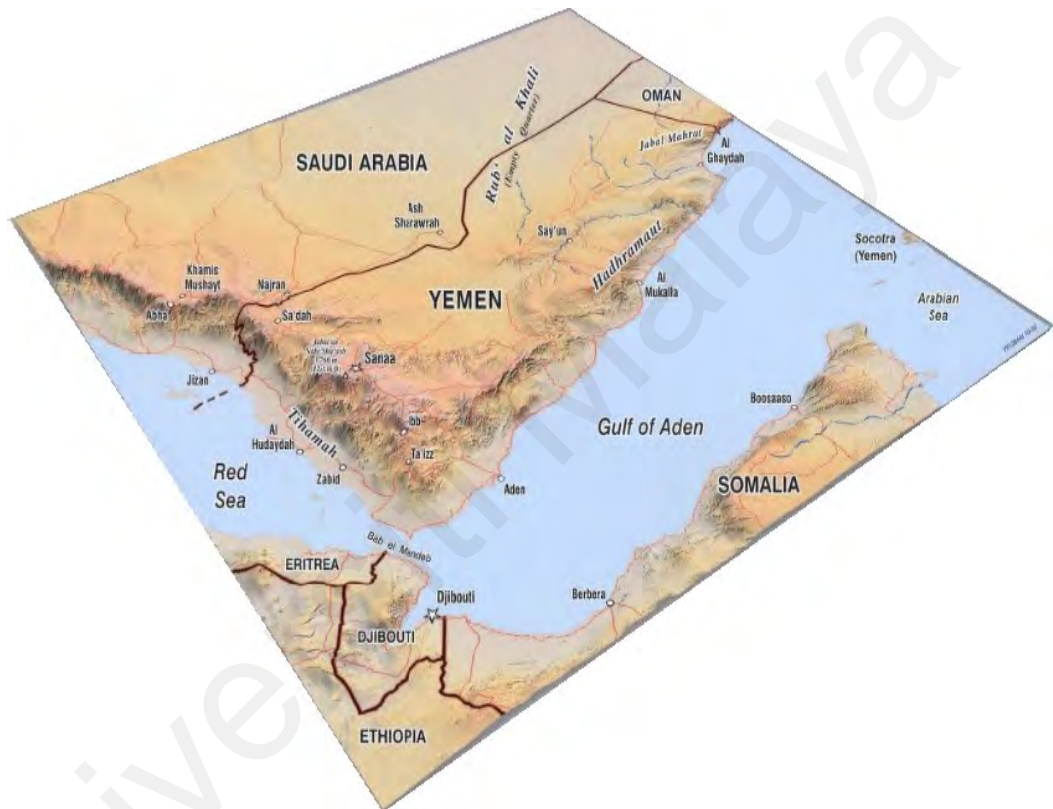
Map 3.1: Model of Yemen contours [31]

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[30] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.30-31.

[31] Cartography Center - United States and Central Intelligence Agency Design Center, "Model of Yemen Contours,"(Washington DC: Library of the Congress).
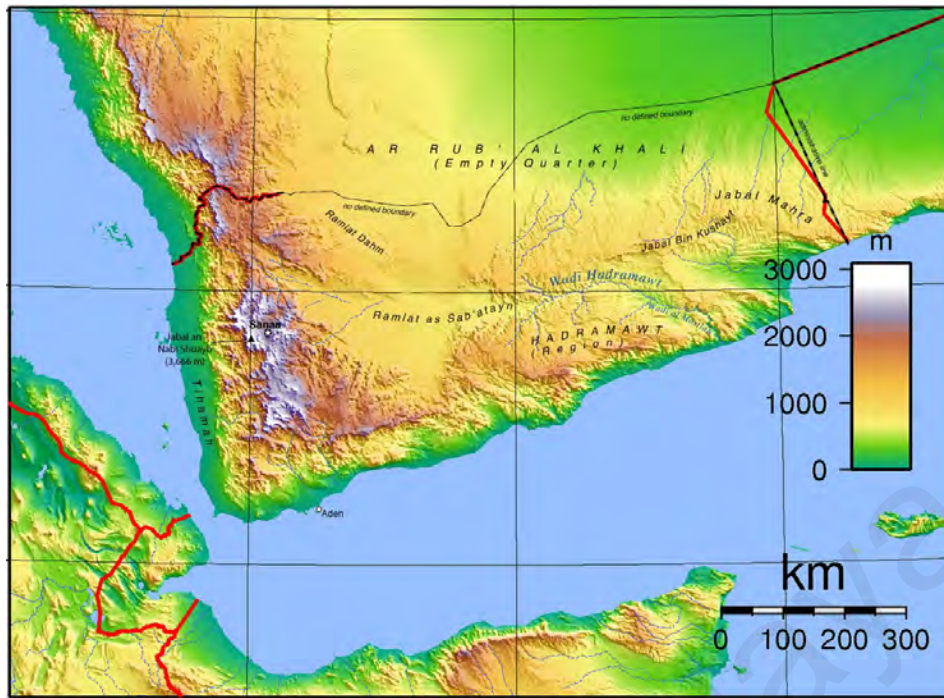
Map 3.2: Topographic map of Yemen[32]

3.2.3 Natural Ports and Bases and the Deployment area

Yemen possesses ten natural ports along its coastline, all at a strategic position close to the global maritime trade. Four ports are distributed in the Red Sea and six are located in the Arabian Sea, providing a place for transit, maintenance, and supply for ships as well.[33] The distribution ports and their purposes are listed in Table 3.1 and Map 3.3 below:

Table 3.1: Ports of Yemen[34]

Port Name	Location	Utilization
Aden Port	Gulf of Aden (Arabian Sea)	Export and import commercial goods
Al Hudaydah Port	Red Sea	Export and import commercial goods
Mukalla Port	Arabian Sea	Export and import commercial goods
Mukha Port	Red Sea	Export and import commercial goods
Salif Port	Red Sea	Export and import commercial goods
Nishton Port	Arabian Sea	Export and import commercial goods
Ash Shir Port	Arabian Sea	Oil export
Socotra Port	Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean	Export and import commercial goods
Ras Isa Port	Red Sea	Oil export
Belhaf Port	Arabian Sea	Oil and natural gas export

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[32] " Topographic Map of Yemen," (Nations Online).

[33] Saleh Gaber Ahmed, "Sustainable Port Development and Planning (for Port Engineer),"(Aden: Aden Port 2018).

[34] Ibid.

Map 3.3: Ports and their locations[35]

Among the ten ports, those closest to the focal point of Bab el-Mandeb are the most important. The most strategic is Aden port, which consists of a large deep-water natural harbor surrounded by high terrains. The port lies at the Gulf of Aden near the Red

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[35] Ibid.

Sea entrance, directly fronting the global maritime route.[36] Other strategic ports are Al Hudaydah port, also known as Hodeidah port, and Mukha port. The two historical harbors lie in the Red Sea, North of Bab el-Mandeb strait and close to the shipping lines, specially Mukha port, which is six kilometers (3.2 nm) from the global maritime trade route. On the other hand, the configuration of Al-Hudaydah port provides a natural protection from high tides and seasonal winds, which makes it accessible, with stable waters all year round.[37]

All in all, Yemen's possession of bases along the coastline near the global maritime route gives it the advantage of monitoring and dominating the shipping lines; consequently, in military use, the bases provide early recognition of any potential attack and provides Yemen with a large deployment area. The presence of four ports in the Red Sea within a short distance provides a deployment area, which allows for swift operations in the Red Sea, while the extended coasts in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea allows for a lager deployment area, which backs and reinforces the Western coast, therefore, effectively breaking any encirclement.[38] Furthermore, the Red Sea bases alongside Aden Port, which encircle the focal point at Bab el-Mandeb strait, provide a high-efficiency platform for operations, which can be carried from multiple lines of operations from the South and North. Meanwhile, the distant bases at the East of the country are ideal for force concentration, backing the zone of operation during offense as well.[39] Historically, the Yemeni ports have been points of interest for global powers. Reports indicate that the U.S. discussed with the Yemeni government about the use of Aden and Mukha for its

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[36] Yemen Gulf of Aden Corporation, "Why Aden," Aden Port,2010, http://www.portofaden.net/WhyAden.aspx.

[37] Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation, "Mukha Port Data Tariff," Yemen Red Sea Ports Corporation,2014, http://yrspc.net/SiteEnglish/index.php/2014-04-07-15-33-49/2014-04-07-15-39-55/data-tariff.

[38] For detailed analysis on deployment areas see: Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.23-27.

[39] Usually, ports near strait area are utilized as employment areas due to their closeness to the scene of action. Meanwhile, bases and ports situated far from the straits are utilized as main bases as they ideally serve as points of assembly for the navy. See: ibid., p.69.

fleet[40]. Similarly, China showed interest in establishing a naval base in Aden.[41] However, due to the instability in the country, such requests were not carried further.[42] Still, those interests denote the strategic importance of the Yemen harbors.

3.2.4 Islands

Yemen possesses more than 180 islands clustered in four main archipelagoes, with almost 112 of these islands located in the Red Sea (out of a total of 379 islands in the Red Sea).[43] Studies counted 57 of Yemen's Red Sea islands that could be strategically utilized.[44] Yet, from historical and geographical points of analyses, the most important islands are Kamaran, Zubair, Jabal Al-Tair, Hanish, Zuqar, Abu Ali, and Perim, located in the Red Sea, as well as Socotra in the Indian Ocean.[45]

In the Red Sea, Kamaran is a shelf island fronting Al-Hudaydah city with an area of around 304 km^2 and a limited population of fishermen.[46] Due to its strategic location, it was used as a military base in several historical occasions and attracted the interest of global powers including the Ottomans, the British, and the French. Indeed, in the Turco-Italian war of 1911-1912, the Ottomans used Kamaran as a base to attack the Italians at the African shore.[47] On the other hand, at the off-shelf between African and Asian shores is Jabal Al-Tair island, which is 87 km to the West of Yemeni shores and 150 km to the East of Eretria. Jabal Al-Tair was used as a base during the time of the British colony, which established two lighthouses on the island that still function with a 55 km field of vision.[48] Similarly, a lighthouse was also established on Zubair island, which is located

[40] Anderson, "Bab El Mandeb."

[41] Shaista Shaheen Zafar, "European Union-Yemen Relations," *Journal of European Studies* 27, no. 2 (2011).

[42] Thomas Mountain, interview by The Researcher2018, July 25.

[43] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

[44] Abd Allah Burji الجزر اليمنية في البحر الأحمر وخليج عدن ،[Yemen's Islands in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden](Damascus: The Arabic Center for Strategic Studies 1999).

[45] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

[46] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea].

[47] John E Peterson, "The Islands of Arabia: Their Recent History and Strategic Importance," *Arabian Studies* 7(1985).

[48] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

at the center of the Red Sea, roughly 68 km from Al-Hudaydah coasts and 38 km East of Kamaran.[49] Another important island is Greater Hanish (Hanish al-Kabir). It is the biggest island within an archipelago of 40 islands located to the South of the Red sea, 160 km north of Bab el-Mandeb strait, in a central position, almost at an equal distance between the Arabian Peninsula and West Africa.[50,51] The geographical features and the location of the island—53 km to the West of the Yemeni coasts and 59 km to the East of the Eretria coasts—grants it dominance over Red Sea waterways.[52] That is, the one who controls it will gain the ability to block passage through the sea. Indeed, in 1973, the Egyptian Navy used Greater Hanish besides other Yemeni Islands to block Israeli ships from the Red Sea.[53] Moreover, the position of the island close to the African shore induced a dispute between Yemen in Eretria, leading to clashes in 1995, which concluded with arbitration in which Yemen was given control over the island.[54] Similarly, part of Hanish archipelago, and to the North of Greater Hanish, lies Zuqar island with similarly strategic importance.[55] Moreover, the area of the island of 130 km^2 alongside the configuration of its coasts allow for the establishment of military bases that can accommodate various naval units.[56]

Yet, the Yemeni island with the highest strategic importance in the Red Sea is Perim (Mayun). Regardless of its small size, the island is located at the heart of Bab el-Mandeb strait, dividing the passages in the strait into an Eastern waterway, bordering Yemeni coasts with a width of nearly 4 km and approximately 25 km Western waterway bordering the African coast.[57] The island attracted the British Navy, which occupied it for

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Martin Plaut, "Eritrea and Yemen: Control of the Shipping Lanes," *Review of African Political Economy* 23, no. 67 (1996).

[51] Lefebvre, "Red Sea Security and the Geopolitical-Economy of the Hanish Islands Dispute".

[52] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

[53] Plaut, "Eritrea and Yemen: Control of the Shipping Lanes."

[54] Lefebvre, "Red Sea Security and the Geopolitical-Economy of the Hanish Islands Dispute".

[55] Peterson, "The Islands of Arabia: Their Recent History and Strategic Importance".

[56] Abbas, الجزر اليمنية [Yemen's Islands].

[57] Al-Yadoomi, *The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait*.

the first time in 1799, later turning it into a base and a coaling station in 1883. The control of the island allowed the British colony to dominate Bab el-Mandeb strait as part of its domination of the region and the Cold War with France in the late 18th century and mid-19th century.[58]

Comparatively, in the Arabian Sea, Socotra is the largest and most known among the Yemeni islands. The island is around 113 km in length and 32 km in width, situated between the Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Peninsula. Britain occupied the island shortly in 1835. Then, in 1886, it fell officially under British protection via a treaty signed with the Mahri Sultan. During World War II (WWII), the island was used as a base for convoy escorts and anti-submarine patrols by the British Navy alongside the Canadian, South African, and Dutch Navies.[59] Generally, the location of Socotra, which is far from the Yemen mainland, gives it two advantages: first, it provides an early warning, defense base, and a strategic depth for Yemen's Southern coasts, therefore, nullifying its vulnerability.[60] Second, the distance provides a passage for global maritime trade, as it passes between two Yemeni territories.

Meanwhile, from the regional perspective, the island provides an advantage in dominating the Western side of the Indian Ocean and its seas, namely the Arabian Sea, the Oman Sea, and the Red Sea.[61] Indeed, it is a grand piece in the waterways between the Indian Ocean and Bab el-Mandeb. Because of its importance, the island attracted several powers with interests in influencing those waterways. For instance, as part of their strategy in the Indian Ocean, the Soviets recognized the importance of the Yemen islands, especially Socotra, and sent over 2000 military personal. Later in the Cold War, the

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[58] Peterson, "The Islands of Arabia: Their Recent History and Strategic Importance".
[59] Ibid.
[60] For details on the importance of islands see: Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.47.
[61] Dhilal Gawad Kadhem, "الأهمية الاستراتيجية لجزيرة سقطرى/ اليمن: دراسة في الجغرافيا السياسية" [The Strategic Importance of Socotra Island/Yemen: a Sttudy in Politcal Geograph]." (University of Kufa, 2012).

Soviets aimed to utilize their presence to balance the U.S. power in the Red Sea. In the post-Cold War period, the U.S. requested to establish a military base in Socotra to utilize for its War on Terror; even more, some analysts believed that this request fell under the U.S. interest to counter any Chinese expansion in the Indian Ocean and the region.[62] Table 3.2 shows the Yemeni islands and their distance from the international maritime route in the Red Sea while Map 3.4 shows the location of the Yemeni islands in the world map.

Table 3.2: The distance between main islands and the international maritime route in the Red Sea[63]

Island	Distance from the international maritime route in the Red Sea
Perim	2 miles
Hanish islands	3-5 miles
Zuqar	10 miles
Zubair islands	4 miles
Kamaran	40 miles
Jabal Al-Tair	4 miles

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea].
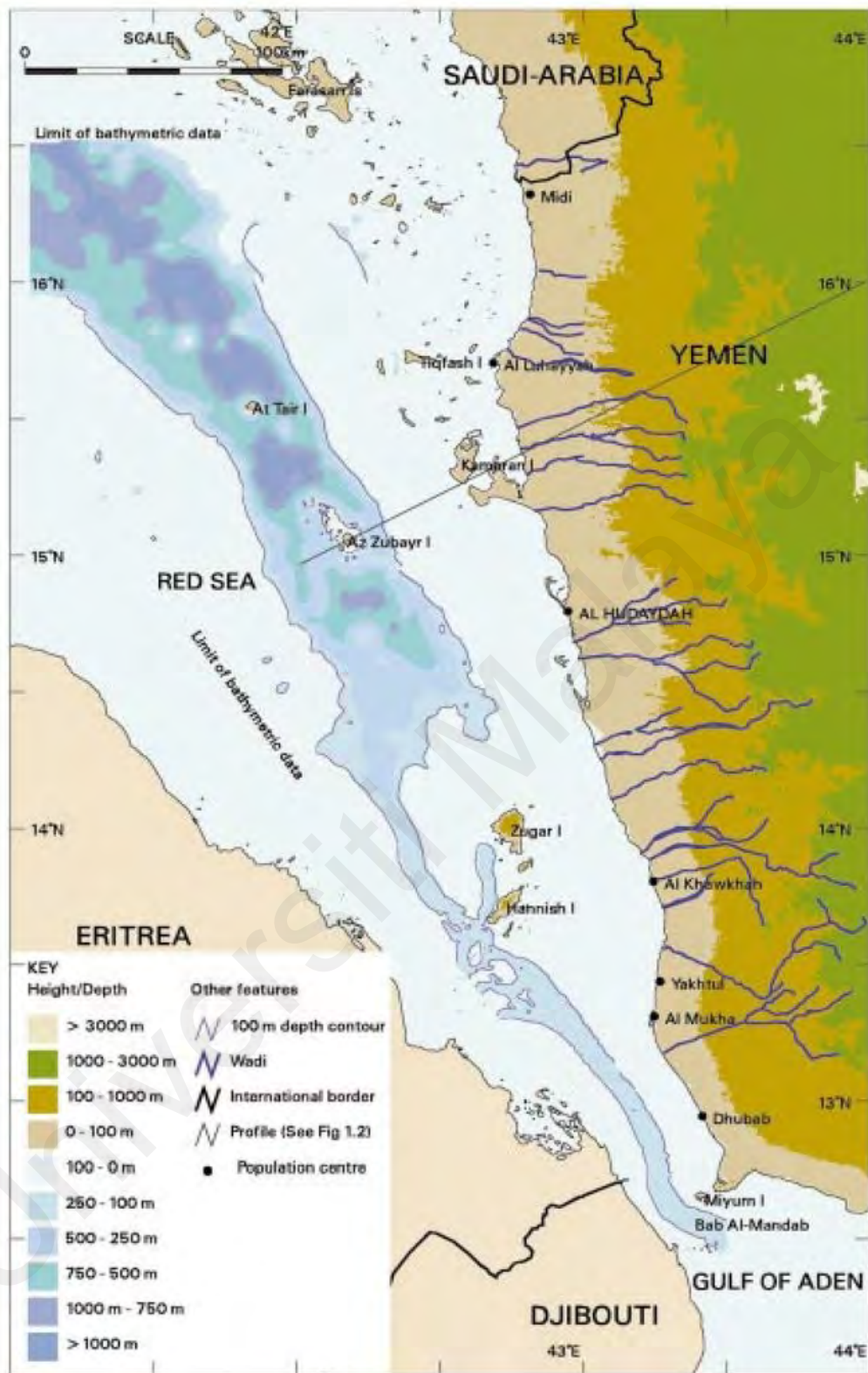
Map 3.4: Yemen's main islands in the Red Sea[64]

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[64] Douabul and Haddad, "The Red Sea and Yemen's Red Sea Environments."

Altogether, the Yemeni islands are situated in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, allowing Yemen to influence both sides of the Red Sea's Southern entrance, adding the advantage of Perim at the heart of Bab el-Mandeb strait. The advantage of the islands can be described based on five aspects. First, the islands afford a legal advantage in expanding Yemen's territorial waters. According to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) Articles 4 and 5 in Yemen Law 34, the Yemeni territorial borders extend for another 12 nm from the islands.[65,66] Moreover, for the islands that are located more than 12 nm from Yemeni coasts, the straight line between the coast and the island is considered Yemeni territorial water.[67] Second, the islands provide the advantage of surveillance and monitoring of the movement in the sea, which is effective in guiding ships through the sea and helps in the early detection of any potential attacks. Third, the islands provide a strategic depth for the coasts and a forward defense point, especially the presence of the chain of islands, which act like a shield for the land. Fourth, being close to the main shipping lanes, the islands provide an advantage in offense, either by attacking other navies, blocking the strait, or attacking fronting coasts. Fifth, the islands can also serve as 'Sea Lines of Communication'.[68] Sixth, from strategic and military viewpoints, the islands are a factor of domination in the Red Sea.[69]

3.2.5 Bab el-Mandeb Strait

Bab el-Mandeb is a strategic chokepoint in the global shipping lines. The strait, which serves as the Southern entrance to the Red Sea, has a width of less than 30 km, bordering four states, Yemen in the East, and Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti on the West.[70]

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[65] United Nations, "United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea Unclos," ed. UN(New York: UN, 1982).
[66] Presidency of the Republic of Yemen National Information Center, "Presidential Resolution: The Law 34 for the Year 1991 on Territorial Water, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone, and Continental Shelf," ed. Yemen National Information Center(Sanaa1991.(
[67] Dr. Wafaa Al-Hamzi, interview by Researcher2018, December 30.
[68] See the discussion on islands in chapter 2
[69] Colonel (Staff). Fikry Alattab, interview by Researcher2019, Febraury.
[70] Al-Yadoomi, *The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait.*

Historically, for many centuries, Bab el-Mandeb served as the only entrance to the Red Sea, and was one of the most active routes in the global maritime trade. Commodities were shipped from India and China, passing through Bab el-Mandeb and sailing toward Egypt at the northern end of the sea. There, the goods were loaded on caravans across Egypt into the ports on the Mediterranean Sea before being shipped to Europe. Furthermore, the opening of the Suez channel in 1896 provided a continuous shipping line to the Mediterranean, making the Red Sea the shortest route to Europe. Consequently, the strategic significance of Bab el-Mandeb was elevated.[71] Contemporarily, the strategic importance of Bab el-Mandeb still lies in its location between two important waterways, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Yet, it is gaining increasing importance due to the resources of the regions and the sea lanes of oil exports from the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf.[72] Around 20 thousand ships pass from the strait annually, along with an average of 3.4 million barrels of oil per day with a peak of 4.7 million barrels per day.[73] [74]

As signed in UNCLOS in 1987, Yemen enjoys 12 nm of territorial waters in Bab el-Mandeb[75], alongside Eretria and Djibouti. This geographical adjacency created a geopolitical link between Yemen and the Horn of Africa, which was manifested in the spillover of domestic issues. For instance, the wars in the Horn Africa during the 90s led to the rise of smuggling weapons to Yemen and vice versa. Moreover, the humanitarian crisis led to waves of migration toward Yemen. Consequently, the attitude of the Yemeni government toward the Horn of Africa was to support peace talks and reconciliations. For

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Richard B. Remnek, "The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa: A Global Perspective," in *The Horn of Africa and Arabia*, ed. David A. Kom, et al.(Washington DC: Defense Academic Research Support Program and The Middle East Institute, 1990).

[73] Anderson, "Bab El Mandeb".

[74] US Department of Energy, "Oil Trade Off Yemen Coast Grew by 20% to 4.7 Million Barrels Per Day in 2014," U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA),2015, April 23, https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=20932.

[75] Charles Emmerson and Paul Stevens, "Maritime Choke Points and the Global Energy System," in *Charting a Way Forward, Chatham House Briefing Paper*(London: Chatham House 2012).

example, Yemen mediated between the government and insurgency in Djibouti in 1992.[76] However, in the international scene, the Horn of Africa played a more central role in the Red Sea geopolitics compared to Yemen. In the past, the interest in the region was evident during the Cold War, as both the U.S. and the Soviets competed to influence the Horn states, which were perceived as a buffer zone. Moreover, in the 1990s, the region witnessed the outbreak of civil wars such as the war in Somalia, which brought foreign attention that was seen in peace initiatives and state building efforts. Meanwhile contemporarily, the rise of non-state actors, namely terrorists and pirates, has been a major concern attracting foreign powers to the region. Conversely, the prospect of extracting natural resources is another reason for this attention.[77] Moreover, as both Yemen and the Horn of Africa are counterparts in the same strategic location, all foreign and regional powers established their bases in the Horn of Africa to further their commercial and military objectives in the Red Sea.

However, from a geopolitical point of analysis, Yemen seems to possess a strategic significance compared to the states of the Horn of Africa. As the political lens was in several cases focused on the African counterparts, in different cases, this was motivated by the interest in the other side of the Red Sea and not the African continent itself.[78] In that sense, the inclination towards the Horn of Africa was due to its geopolitical status as a buffer zone located in a strategic region.[79] Another factor, which attracted global and regional powers towards the Horn of Africa, is the instability and the consecutive domestic conflicts in Yemen.[80] Yet, among other states, Yemen has an advantage in the strait due to four main reasons. First, Yemen fronts both fringes of Babel-Mandeb. Along the strategic zone around the strait lie two naval fringes. The first extends

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[76] Al-Heisami, سياسة اليمن في البحر الأحمر [Yemen Politics in the Red Sea], p.181.

[77] Dr. Muhammad Danial Bin Azman, interview by Researcher2018, December 11.

[78] Remnek, "The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa".

[79] Azman.

[80] Mountain.

from the port of Midi at the north of Yemen's Western coast till the port of Dobab in the South in parallel to the African shores from Massawa port in Eretria to Djibouti. On the other hand, the second fringes extend from the Gulf of Aden at the tip point of the Yemen Western coast until the port of Daba in Hadramout at the East of Yemen in parallel to the coastline that extends from Barbara port at the North of Somalia to Bosasso port in Puntland.[81] As the value of Bab el-Mandeb is its connection between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden is a key transit point and is the Southern path of the Bab el-Mandeb strait.[82] The fact that Yemen is the only state around Bab el-Mandeb to have coasts on both fringes gives it an advantage in the strait. Moreover, the possession of Socotra island in the Arabian Sea adds strategic depth to Yemen in the Gulf of Aden.

The second advantage is the geographical factor of Yemeni lands, especially the aspect of shape and area, in comparison to the African Horn states. In the first place comes Djibouti, which is like Yemen, and has access to the strait and the Gulf of Aden. However, it is a small state with only 873,000 inhabitants.[83] The geographical limitation of area reversely impacts the size of the country deployment area, weakening its offense and defense capabilities, and making it prone to encirclement. Moreover, the lack of manpower limits its ability to become a seapower. On the other hand, Eretria, which has an area greater than Djibouti, 117,600 km^2, is still less than a quarter of the area of Yemen. Moreover, the shape of the territorial configuration is highly elongated, as the depth of the country at the borders with Djibouti is only 125 km.[84] Thus, the coastal line is an extremely vulnerable zone, without a strategic depth, especially near the port of Assab. On the other hand, Somalia has access to the Gulf of Aden but not the Red Sea, while

[81] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean."

[82] Robert M Shelala, "Maritime Security in the Middle East and North Africa: A Strategic Assessment,"(Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS, 2014).

[83] Geoffrey F. Gresh, "A Vital Maritime Pinch Point: China, the Bab Al-Mandeb, and the Middle East," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017).

[84] CIA, "Eritrea," CIA The World Factbook,2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/er.html.

Ethiopia has no sea boundaries at all. Map 3.5 shows the location of Yemen and the states of the Horn of Africa.
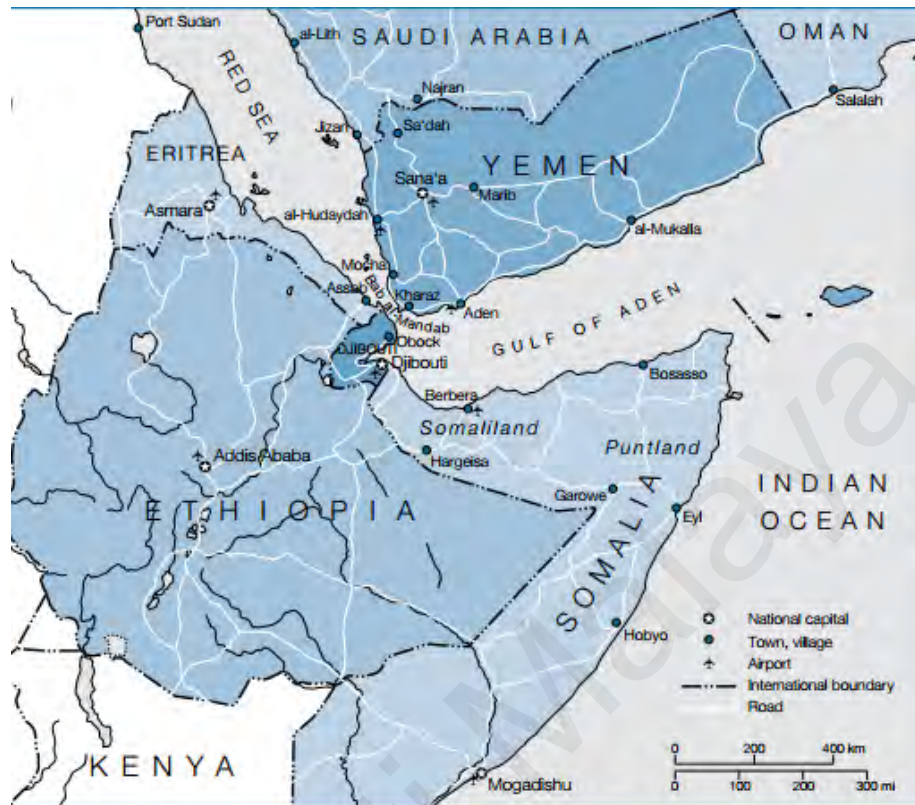
Map 3.5: Yemen and the Horn of Africa[85]

The third advantage is Yemen's possession of Perim island in Bab el-Mandeb. Indeed, as discussed earlier, the island is situated at the heart of the strait, granting Yemen advantage of near-absolute domination over the strait; thus the location of Perim island at the heart of Bab el-Mandeb makes Yemen the dominant state in the strait.[86],[87] The fourth advantage is the Yemen natural ports and islands to the north of Bab el-Mandeb, which provide lines of operation that secure the Yemeni superiority over the strait. As a matter of fact, near Bab el-Mandab, there are ten important islands, four islands belonging to Yemen, four to Eretria, all of them are in the Red Sea, and two islands belonging to Djibouti located at the Gulf of Aden.[88] This is empirically perceived in the British-French

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[85] Sally Healy and Ginny Hill, "Yemen and Somalia: Terrorism, Shadow Networks and the Limitations of State-Building,"(London Chatham House 2010).
[86] Brigadier General. Mohammed Jawwas, interview by Researcher2018, October 26.
[87] Alattab.
[88] Al-Yadoomi, *The Strategic Importance of Bab Al-Mandab Strait*.

dispute over the Red Sea; although France colonized Djibouti to control the sea[89], it was the British who had the upper hand by virtue of their control of Yemen's strategic points.

3.3 The Historical Experience

In most scholarly works, historical evidence was the core pillar in realizing the causational relationship between geography and politics. For Mackinder, geography was seen to have a pivotal role in making history. Indeed, he referred to the success of the Mongolian invasion as due to geographical opportunities.[90] On the other hand, Mahan based his geopolitical visions on the historical experience of the British Navy.[91] Similarly, Corbett also agreed with an approach that was mostly historical.[92] In like manner, in the current political scene, the historical experience provides an understanding of geopolitics and its contribution in shaping foreign policy, for example, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is inspired by the historical Silk Road.[93]

Therefore, besides the study of geographical configuration, the study of historical experience is also essential in realizing the influence of Yemen's geography in Red Sea geopolitics. Indeed, throughout history, Yemen has played an important role in Middle Eastern history, especially from a maritime point of view.[94] Amidst the different cases of successful sea control and denial is the British control of the Red Sea through controlling Yemen's strategic points and Egypt's utilization of Yemen islands and influence on Bab el-Mandeb to execute a blockade and deny the Israeli Navy in the Red Sea.

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[89] NASA, "Port of Aden, Yemen," NASA Earth Observatory 2016, May.
[90] Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)."
[91] Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*.
[92] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.40.
[93] Yiwei Wang, *The Belt and Road: What Will China Offer the World in Its Rise*(Beijing: New World Press, 2016), p.32-42.
[94] Stephen C. Pelletiere, "Yemen and Stability in the Persian Gulf: Confronting the Threat from Within,"(Pennsylvania U.S. Army College Strategic Studies Institute, 1996).

In the 18th-20th century, Yemen played a central role in the British control of the Red Sea, and the competition with their French counterparts. Throughout history, Yemen was a flashpoint between colonial powers that had commercial and strategic interests in the Red Sea.[95] Since the early 17th century, Britain sought to establish commercial relationships with Yemen through the British East India Company, establishing its first agency in 1618 in Mukha. On the other hand, France had a growing interest in the Red Sea and built ties with Yemeni harbor cities. In 1708 and 1709, the first French ships arrived at the ports of Aden and Mukha, respectively, and signed commercial agreements with the local rulers. As both France and Britain were competing over the domination of trade routes between India and Europe, the militarization of the Red Sea was inevitable, especially with the decline of the Ottoman influence.[96]

In 1797, Napoleon's army landed on Egyptian coasts, with the aim of expansion towards the Red Sea shores in order to control the global trade route to India. The British, aroused by the French ambition, occupied the Yemeni island, Perim island, in 1799, staying on the island for seven months to block any potential French movement.[97] As the French campaign failed and withdrew from Egypt, the British General, John Mori, whose troops were based in Perim, negotiated with Abdali, the Sultan of Aden, on the establishment of a British base in Aden. Although the negotiation did not conclude with an agreement, the British interest in the city harbor continued to increase, especially with the French efforts in the Red Sea that included an offer to buy Kamaran island from Yemen, driving Britain to increase its naval presence in the Red Sea.[98] Later, to assure their monopoly over the Red Sea trade, the British Navy occupied Aden city in 1839 to

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[95] Hind Fakhri Saeed, "التنافس البريطاني- الفرنسي على سواحل البحر الأحمر الجنوبية (اليمن)(١٧٦٢-١٨٠٢م)" [British–French Competition on Southern Red Sea Coasts (Yemen) (1762–1802).] *College Of Basic Education Researches Journal* 10, no. 4 (2011).

[96] Ibid.

[97] Zaka Hanna Kour, *History of Aden 1839-1872*(Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1981).

[98] Saeed, "التنافس البريطاني- الفرنسي على سواحل البحر الأحمر الجنوبية (اليمن)(١٧٦٢-١٨٠٢م) [British–French Competition on Southern Red Sea Coasts (Yemen) (1762–1802)]."

connect the British Eastern colonies with Islet. However, this dominance was threatened again when their French rivals sponsored the opening of Suez channel, increasing the significance of the Red Sea, which then became a continuous and short line of shipping to Europe, inducing a great game between the two hegemons. Britain responded by occupying Perim island again in 1857, building a base on it this time.[99] The occupation of Perim alongside Aden port city gave Britain the capability to gain and secure control of the sea.

Another historical experience is the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although Yemen is located far from the conflict focal points, it has been influential in the conflict through its control of the Red Sea. In 1971, an Israeli tanker was shot at Tiran strait, at the Northern end of the Red Sea, by a rocket launched from a gunboat in the vicinity of Perim island.[100] Furthermore, in the 1973 war between Egypt and Israel, the Egyptian fleet alongside its Syrian allies struggled against their Israeli opposition. The first few weeks of the war witnessed a series of decisive battles around Latakia and Tartus in Syria and Damietta in Egypt that included direct confrontation, and, for the first time in history, sea-to-sea missile engagement. The geography prevented both sides from gaining sea control, however, and besides, neither had the convenient manpower to succeed. Consequently, the Egyptians shifted their strategy from direct confrontation and decisive battles into attrition against Israeli lines of communication and supply. At that time, the Red Sea was uncommanded by either side, until the Egyptian Navy used the Yemen territories, including Hanish island, to force a commercial blockade against Israeli shipping at Bab el-Mandeb. For three months Egypt managed to cut-off Israeli trade in the Red Sea and even managed to sink their ships.[101]

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[99] Charles Rathbone Low, *The History of the Indian Navy (1613-1863)*, vol. 2(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[100] Anderson, "Bab El Mandeb".

[101] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.235-38.

The historical cases have one thing in common; the geography of Yemen and its impact on the Red Sea. Therefore, for any strategic player in the Red Sea, the control of Yemen's strategic points will grant absolute control or successful denial against any enemy.

3.4 Conclusion

While the Red Sea constitutes a geopolitical sub-system, states with geographical advantages and control of the chokepoints (straits, islands, and bases) could also influence the geopolitics of the sea. The study of the geography of Yemen illustrates that it has a favorable peninsular location, and a nearly compact shape that facilitates the integration between the coasts and the hinterland. Moreover, the plain coasts provide a large employment area, while the mountainous backing provides a strategic depth to the coasts and natural protection. Furthermore, Yemen's possession of islands in strategic points near the Southern entrance of the Red Sea grants it domination over the sea pathway, especially Perim island in Bab el-Mandeb. Accordingly, Yemen has the advantage over the states of the Horn of Africa in controlling the strait, and consequently, the Red Sea entrance. Indeed, as proven in historical cases, whoever controls Yemen will also control the Red Sea and/or deny any opponent from utilizing the sea waterways, which, in sum, proves that due to geographical factors, Yemen is a central actor in the Red Sea geopolitical scene.

CHAPTER IV: THE INFLUENCE OF GEOGRAPHY ON THE HOUTHI MARITIME INSURGENCY

Building on the findings of Chapter III, this chapter aims to analyze how the Houthi insurgency utilized the geography of Yemen and the Red Sea in their maritime insurgency. To this end, this chapter discusses the characterization of the Houthi movement as an insurgency, given the fact that maritime insurgencies are at most stemming from the development of a land insurgency. Thus, the chapter starts by introducing the emergence of the movement and the stages it had undergone towards militarization as well as the outbreak of the six wars from 2004-2010, and subsequently the current civil war. Given this background, this chapter sheds light on the battles on land, which have mostly been focused around the west coast region of Yemen, fronting the Red Sea, and how these have expanded to encompass the sea waterways. The chapter examines the operations carried by the militants in the Red Sea in order to realize its elements, common patterns, and potential causal relationships with reference to the assumption of the theoretical framework; thus, realizing the influence of geography as a factor of advantage for the Houthi insurgency against the superior coalition.

4.1 The Definition of Insurgency

Insurgency as a term is defined as a struggle to gain authority between non-state actors and the government in which the non-state actor consciously via several means attempts to destroy the legitimacy of the ruling authority on the expense of gaining or sustaining their own legitimacy.[1] The insurgencies usually have a dual nature, as political movements and military groups. Accordingly, their means can be classified into non-violent or political and violent military actions. In terms of the political aspect, the control

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[1] Bard E. O'neill, Insurgency and Terrorism, (Washington DC: Postmac Books Inc., 2005).The Nature of Insurgency

of the flow of information (propaganda) through media, meetings, and the Internet are among the first essential means that this group uses. Moreover, the insurgents intend to organize demonstrations and protests against the opposed regime to gain attention and mobilize the community for their cause. Likewise, supportive groups are also created via recruitment and training activities, as well as the provision of services to the people. On the other hand, the violent aspect of the insurgency includes the adoption of several forms of warfare, which include terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and conventional warfare. Meanwhile, the insurgency is usually on the inferior side of the conflict. Terrorism and guerrilla warfare are the most common forms of violence in insurgencies, yet in the long run, terrorism can harm the popularity of the insurgents, which leaves the guerrilla attack as the most common and efficient means.[2]

In several cases, the term insurgency has been interchangeably used with revolution.[3] However, the types of insurgencies largely vary in accordance with the agent, they intend to delegitimize. Thus, the types of insurgencies can be divided into eight categories: 1) Egalitarian insurgency, which intends to radically impose a new political and social structure based on equality; 2) Traditionalist insurgency, which adopts primordial values that are seen as sacred, and aims to restore a political system from the past, such as the Nationalists in Spain who fought the Republic to restore the Church; 3) Separatist insurgency, which is a revolutionary group seeking to withdraw from a nation-state to establish their own; 4) Utopian insurgency, which radically aims to change the world order and international system; 5) Pluralist insurgency, which is a violent movement that seeks to change the political system by advocating the liberty and freedom of individuals; 6) Anarchic insurgency, which aims to destroy a regime but not necessarily

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[2] Ibid.

[3] In classical cases insurgencies were revolutionary and anti-colonial movements that intends to overthrow a regime or a gain independence from a colonial power. See: Christopher S. Clapham, "Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies " in *African Guerrillas*, ed. Christopher S. Clapham(Melton: James Currey Publishers, 1998), p.7.

replace it; 7) Reformist insurgency, which intends to impose political reformation throw non-violent means; and 8) Preservationist insurgency, which unlike all insurgencies, is a radical group that uses violence against all parties that seek to change the political system, an example of this insurgency is the Klu Klux Klan (KKK).[4]

4.2 The Rise of the Houthi Insurgency

The Houthi or the Houthis[5] is a name that the media and the public gave to a Zaydi political group that carried out a coup d'état, based on the family name of its leader. Officially, the group calls itself Ansar Allah (the Supporters of God)[6], and define themselves as a modernization, religious, and liberation movement, which is a part of the nation and the national fabric of Yemen. The group argues that its current mobility is a reaction to the unjust policies against them and the accusations of heresy and agency to foreign powers. Moreover, it denies the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and accuses it with betrayal, futility, and the handing over of the country to foreign occupiers.[7] Besides the current definition of the Houthis as a revolutionary movement, other resources affiliated with the group define it in more ideological and cultural terms. For instance, a member of the group political council, Alejri, defined the Houthi group earlier, as a religious (prophetic) phenomenon and a socio-cultural movement that belongs to Islamic Revivalism, which intends to protect the whole Muslim nation from cultural and

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[4] O'neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*.Types of Insurgencies

[5] Both terms are used interchangeably in media and academia. The singular version is used to refer to the group as a whole, meanwhile the plural form is used to indicate the militants and people affiliated to it. the thesis may use both terms depending on the context of the discussion.

[6] April Longley Alley, "Yemen Changes Everything… and Nothing," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (2013).

[7] Abu Nasr Adel Al-Gherbani, interview by Researcher2018, December 12.

intellectual invasion by establishing a Quranic culture.[8,9] By the same token, in an interview with a Yemeni official TV, the former spokesperson of the General Forum of the Revolutionary Movements[10], Albukhaiti, provided a historical and ideological definition of the movement, claiming that the rise of the Houthi movement was an accumulative reaction to the marginalization and sectarian policies of the central government against the Zaydi sect since 1962.[11]

On the other hand, some academic resources define the Houthi movement as an educational movement that started in 1990 under the name Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen, which was confined to educational activities, inspired from the teachings of Zaydism, before it transformed into a military movement in 2004.[12] Yet, in a broader context, the establishment of the Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen movement and the rise of the Houthi transformation were holistically seen as a continuity and a development within political Zaydism (Zaydi revivalism), with the aim of reviving the political ideology that was adopted by the Zaydi monarchy that ruled the North of Yemen before the 1962 revolution.[13] Given these circumstances, generally, the Houthi movement is an ideological, political, and military movement. To analyze the rise of the Houthi movement requires the definition of its ideology and a study of its historical patterns since 1962 and its developments in the 1990s that led to its militarization and the outbreak of six wars.

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[8] Abd Al-Malek Alejri (٢/٢) الانتماء وحقيقة الهوية جدل ...الحوثيون" ،[The Houthis... The Identity Controversy and the Fact of Belonging (2/2)]," Middle East Online,2011, August 19, https://middle-east-online.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D-٨٦%٩%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-22.

[9] الله اشياء حرّاس" [The Guards of God's Affairs]," Abd Al-Malek Alejri Personal Blog,2011, https://alejri.wordpress.com./

[10] A forum affiliated to the Houthi movement

[11] Ali Albukhaiti, interview by Khalil Al-Qahiri2013, March 09.

[12] Mohammed Al-Daghashi, "Huthiyya as a Zaydiyya Sect: Ideological Foundations Pedagogical Peculiarities," *Islami Ilimer Dergisi: Zeydiyye Sayisi* (2011, Spring).

[13] Nabil Al-Bukairi, interview by Researcher2011, December 30.

Generally, political Zaydism is a traditionalist religious and political ideology, affiliated with the Zaydi sect, an offshoot of Shi'ism, which believes that the leadership should only be limited to the Imams, who are decedents of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), through his cousin Ali and his daughter Fatima. According to the tradition, the position of Imam is not gained by inheritance, but through fulfilling 14 conditions of illegibility, and whoever meets those conditions must claim leadership even by sword, and he must also be supported.[14] In Yemen, the rule of the Imams was introduced through Imam Yahya Bin Hussein Al-Hadi, who managed to expand his influence over some regions, establishing the first Zaydi state in Yemen in the 9th century.[15] Later, the ideology was adopted by several Hashemite dynasties that sought to control Yemen, leading to clashes among them in different cases.[16] However, in the context of contemporary Yemeni society, a distinction has to be made between Zaydism as a political ideology, and Zaydism as a religious sect adopted by the typical layman, who makes 30–35 percent of the Yemen population. Religiously, both Sunni and Shia have great tolerance towards each other, as they pray in the same *Masjid* (mosque) and intermarry each other.[17]

In 1918, amidst the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the monarch in the Northern part of Yemen declared their independence and the establishment of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom ruled by the Zaydi Imams, who were perceived to have been granted divine authority to manage both the secular and religious affairs of the people. In 1962, a revolution broke in the North of Yemen against the Zaydi monarchy, which concluded with the establishment of the Arab Republic of Yemen (ARY). The partisan of the overthrown Imamate found shelter at Yemen's mountainous far North, in Sa'ada

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Al-Daghashi, "Huthiyya as a Zaydiyya Sect: Ideological Foundations Pedagogical Peculiarities".
[16] Al-Bukairi.
[17] William A Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign," *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 4 (2015, Winter).

governorate.[18] Generally, the mountainous nature of the Yemen inland has been an ideal environment for non-state actors to grow. Indeed, more than 50,000 villages are located in the Yemen mountains, numbering a few hundred inhabitants[19], creating peripheral areas where tribes are semiautonomous entities that rule with their own laws and customs, and even allowing them to build alliances with each other to create tribal federations.[20] Consequently, this creates sub-identities that challenge the state identity and the allegiances of the society.[21] Under such circumstances, the supporters of the monarchical system have a fertile medium to revive their political activism. In 1992, Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen (The Believing Youth) was formed in Sa'ada; the group started organizing summer camps targeting 15,000 students. According to the claim of the of Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen leaders, Mohammed Salem Azzan and Abdul-Karim Jadban, the aim of the group was to politicize the Zaydi cause[22] or what is now referred to as the revival of political Zaydism.

The mid-1990s witnessed a turning point in Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen under the leadership of Hussein Al-Houthi, the son of a Zaydi cleric and the spiritual leader of the movement, Bader Eddin Al-Houthi,[23] who intended to transform Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen from a social and cultural movement to a political and militant one.[24] He began mobilizing tribal activism around Sa'ada, demanding recognition from the central government, as he saw that it had marginalized them.[25] President Saleh described ruling Yemen akin to 'dancing on the heads of snakes'[26] He saw the rise of Hussein Al-Houthi

[18] Dorlian, "The Ṣa'da War in Yemen: Between Politics and Sectarianism".
[19] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign".
[20] Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*, vol. 23(Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007). Also: Nadwa Al-Dawsari, *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen*, vol. 24(Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). And sea: Lewis and Rueschemeyer, *Security, Clans and Tribes: Unstable Governance in Somaliland, Yemen and the Gulf of Aden*, p.17-19.
[21] Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*.
[22] Freeman, "The Al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab Al Moumineen".
[23] Ibid.
[24] Al-Bukairi.
[25] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign."
[26] Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.5.

as an opportunity to counterweigh political oppositions. Indeed, Hussein Al-Houthi became a parliamentary member between 1993 and 1997, before enmity erupted between the President and Al-Houthi in the early 2000s.[27] Later, Hussein Al-Houthi started mobilizing demonstrations in the capital, Sana'a, opposing the government cooperation with the U.S. in the War on Terror.[28] The leader of Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen called Saleh a tyrant who wanted to please America and Israel by killing his own people.[29] This marked a decisive transformation of the movement into a serious opposition to the central government.

The simmering enmity between the central government and Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen, or the Houthis, became known to the public, subsequently leading to a series of six hostile confrontations erupting between 2004 and 2010. The first war took place between 22 June and 10 September 2004 and was confined to the Houthi territory, ending with an effective victory for the Yemeni army and the death of the movement leader, Hussein Al Houthi.[30] The conflict resumed on 19 March, and lasted until 11 April 2005. This time, the Houthi group managed to recruit fighters from other tribes, expanding the battles beyond their stronghold.[31] Yet, in the third war, 30 November 2005–23 February 2006, the geographical presence and tribal influence of the Houthi movement expanded even beyond the Sa'ada governorate, with thousands of recruits from other tribes joining them. Saleh responded by involving anti-Houthi tribes in the war. The fourth war, 16 February–17 June 2007, witnessed the first foreign apparent involvement, as Qatar mediated the end of the war and financed the reconstruction of Sa'ada, which eventually failed and led to the outbreak of the fifth war between the second of May 2008 until the

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[27] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign".
[28] Freeman, "The Al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab Al Moumineen."
[29] Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism*(New York: Springer, 2008), p.71.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State*(London: Saqi Books, 2017).

17th of July 2008. With this war, the Houthi fighters made significant progress and advanced into the Bani Hushaysh area near the capital, Sanaa.[32] The last and the longest round of confrontation happened on 11 August 2009 and continued for straight six months until 11 February 2010. In this round, the war turned into a regional dispute, as the Saudi army participated in the fights after the Houthi militants broke into Saudi boarders, as the Houthi claimed that the Saudis had been supporting the Yemeni regime in the previous wars.[33] During the six years of negotiations, the intermittent conflicts ended via tribal mediations and non-official agreements. Meanwhile, the government was not able to suppress the expansion of the insurgency, and the recurrence of war was thought to be a high probability.

Since the rise of the Houthi movement looks domestic in its essence, the creation of its foundation within the Yemen tribal society emphasizes that the regional aspects cannot be neglected. Saleh declared that most of the Houthi support came from local supporters who opposed the republic. Nevertheless, Iran had been involved in supporting the group as part of exporting their revolution to the region.[34] Indeed, the Iranian involvement in Yemen can be perceived from different angles. From a historical point, the Persian Empire has always aspired to the geopolitical imagination of the current Iranian leadership and aims to expand its influence to all regions that were once under the control of the Persian Empire at its zenith.[35] On the other hand, Yemen is part of the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical balance, to which Iranian officials declared that it would be a threat to their national security if it fell under Saudi control.[36] Iran interest in Yemen

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".

[34] President Ali Abdulla Saleh, 2009, March 28.

[35] For instance General Yahiya Raheem Safavi, advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei commented on Iran's influence in Lebanon to be the third expansion toward the Mediterranean sea: Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and Its Implications on the Regional Security*, p.24.

[36] Ahmad Majidyar, "After Iraq and Syria, I.R.G.C. Seeking to "Expand" Its Role in Yemen and Broader Region," Middle East Institute,2017, December 17, https://www.mei.edu/publications/after-iraq-and-syria-irgc-seeking-expand-its-role-yemen-and-broader-region.

began in the 1980s with their providing scholarships to Yemeni students to study in Iranian Universities, and Shiite religious schools in Tehran, Damascus, and Beirut in Tehran, Damascus, and Beirut.[37] Iran also invited Zaydi scholars and community leaders to visit Tehran to learn about the Islamic Revolution, including the most prominent personnel of the Houthi movement, Badr Eddin Al-Houthi, and his sons Hussein, the founder, and the current leader, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi.[38] Later, the Iranian support of the Houthi movement extended beyond cultural measurements, as Tehran was accused of smuggling weapons to the insurgents via the sea. A UN report published in 2015 suggested that Iran has been supporting the Houthi group with weapons since 2009.[39] The U.S. Navy seized an Iranian ship that was carrying weapons to the Houthis, and similarly, the Australian Navy published pictures of anti-armor weapons made by Iran that were confiscated near Yemeni coasts. Iranian officials did not deny these claims and stated that they stood for the oppressed. Among them was General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), who admitted that Iran provided the Houthis with military and spiritual advisory.[40]

All in all, in accordance with the definition of insurgency, the rise of the Houthi movement and its stages of development, its inclusion of political and military means, as well as its aim of overthrowing the regime, distinctly led to the classification of the group as an insurgency, which is indeed the preference of some sources as well.[41] Moreover, it is a fact that the rise of the group falls under efforts to revive the traditional ideology, political Zaydism, which ruled in Northern Yemen prior to 1962; thus categorizing the group as a Traditionalist insurgency.

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[37] Al-Qadhi, *The Iranian Role in Yemen and Its Implications on the Regional Security*, p.25.
[38] Ibid., p.38.
[39] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".
[40] Majidyar, "After Iraq and Syria, I.R.G.C. Seeking to "Expand" Its Role in Yemen and Broader Region."
[41] Freeman, "The Al Houthi Insurgency in the North of Yemen: An Analysis of the Shabab Al Moumineen".

4.3 Yemen Civil War

In the period post-Arab Spring, Yemen entered a transitional period, which witnessed a national dialogue for drafting a new constitution for the state. However, in January 2014, the Houthis started a hostile campaign in their territory before storming the capital in September 2014 with support from the Former President, Saleh. The tensions between the group and President Hadi swiftly escalated into a civil war with military intervention from regional actors in March 2015.[42] The war mainly occurred between two camps with several actors in each; the first was the insurgency, with Saleh and the Houthi militants allied with each other and supported by Iran. On the other hand, the government allied with the Southern Movement (Hirak), the Islah party, the Salafists and the tribal groups backed by an Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia.[43] Both sides competed over controlling the country, where the Western coast fronting the Red Sea seemed to be the most crucial theatre for both adversaries.

4.3.1 The Outbreak of the War and the Intervention of the Saudi-Led Coalition

In February 2011, a year after the end of the sixth war between Saleh and the Houthi group, Yemen witnessed widespread public demonstrations against the Saleh regime. Alongside other parties, the Houthis participated in the 'Youth Revolution' demanding for change to the regime. The demonstrations concluded with an initiative proposed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with support from the United Nations (UN). According to the initiative, Saleh must pass down his authority to his Vice, Hadi, who will run the country for a transitional period of two years beside a joint government equally formed between Saleh's party, the General People's Congress (GPC), and the

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[42] April Longley Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War," in *Politics, Governance, and Reconstruction in Yemen*(Project on Middle East Political Science (POMPES), 2018), p.9-14.
[43]Chatham House, "Yemen: Key Players and Prospect for Peace," in *Middle East and North Africa Programme Workshop Summary*(Chatham House, 2015).

oppositions. On the other hand, Saleh and his family would be given full immunity. Moreover, the initiative introduced a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) to encourage all political groups to discuss nine issues, including the issue of Sa'da and the six wars fought with Saleh's regime. Out of the 565 seats, 35 were dedicated to the Houthi delegates, who participated in the dialogue that took place in Sana'a in March 2013.[44] The NDC concluded in January 2014 with a document that was presented to the constitution drafting committee.[45]

However, the dialogue was built on shallow foundations and failed to establish a consensus because of the great discrepancy among the adversaries. By the time the NDC arrived at its concluding stage, the Houthis had started a war against the Salafis in Sa'ada, expanding from there to Arman governorate to the north of Sana'a, where they defeated troops aligned with General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar.[46] In September 2014, the Houthi militants captured the capital, Sana'a, with help from Former President Saleh.[47] The seizure of Sana'a was praised by an Iranian official, who said that Sana'a is now the fourth Arabian capital to fall under the rule of Tehran; within days, a daily flight line was established between Sana'a and Tehran, suspected to be carrying military advisers and weapons.[48] In January 2015, the NDC constitution drafting committee presented a new constitution proposing a federal system of six states.[49] The Houthis opposed the

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[44] The national dialogue team addressed 9 issues, which reflect the crises created by the policies related to the previous regime, which were: 1) the Southern issues; 2) The Sa'ada issue; 3) Transitional justice; 4) States building; 5) Good governance; 6) The reformation of the military and security institutions. 7) Special entities; 8) Rights and freedoms; and 9) Development. See: National Dialogue Conference," http://www.ndc.ye/default.aspx.

[45] "Doccument of the National Dialogue Conference," (Sana'a: National Dialogue Conference, 2015).

[46] General Al-Ahmar, currently the Vice President of Yemen since 2016, is a kinsman of the former president, Ali Abdulla Saleh, who served as the commander of the northwestern military district and the 1st Armored Division. He has led the operations against the Houthi insurgency in the Sa'da wars of 2004-2010, while in 2011 he split form the Saleh regime and joined the Arab Spring revolution. Also, Al-Ahmar is believed to have strong ties with the Islamists in Yemen, including the Salafists and the Islah Party (Muslims brotherhood). See: Salmoni, Loidolt, and Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*, p.93,126.

[47] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War."

[48] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".

[49] Constitution Drafting Committee, "Draft of Yemen's New Constitution,"(Sanaa: National Dialogue Confrence, 2015).

constitution and responded by kidnapping the NDC Secretary General, Dr. Ahmed Bin Mubarak, on 17 January, before releasing him a few days later.[50] On the other hand, President Hadi and his Cabinet were kept under the Houthis arrest. Hadi, alongside his Prime Minister, Khalid Bahah, declared their resignation, creating a great vacuum in the political scene.[51] On February 6, the Houthis announced the dissolving of the Parliament and the formation of a Governing council. However, on 21 February, Hadi fled to Aden and reclaimed his presidency, calling for action against the insurgency[52], which resulted in the collapse of the NDC and the start of a new cycle of civil war.

The Houthis advancement towards Sana'a was propagated in large part by their pragmatic alliance with Saleh. The previous President and his son, Ahmed, the former Commander of the Republican Guard, used their influence to persuade their loyalists in the army, security forces, and republican guard units to fight beside the Houthi insurgents.[53] Both, Saleh and Houthi, who fought six wars against each other, saw this alliance as an opportunity to reach their common and private objectives. Saleh saw the Houthis mobility as a dark horse that could eliminate Hadi's regime and thus regain power.[54] By the same token, the Houthis needed Saleh to increase their numbers as well as to equip themselves with weapons from army units affiliated with Saleh.[55] On the other hand, there were also common interests between the allies; both Saleh and the Houthis were unsatisfied with the power shifts brought about after the revolution, as the center of gravity was transferred from the North to the South. Moreover, they summarily denied the federal system for political and economic reasons. For instance, Saleh had always

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[50] National Dialogue Conference, "The Secretary General of Ndc Got Free," National Dialogue Conference,2015, January 27, http://www.ndc.ye/news.aspx?id=4042.
[51] BBC, "Yemen Crisis: President Resigns as Rebels Tighten Hold," BBC,2015, Jaunuary 23, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30936940.
[52] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign."
[53] Ibid.
[54] Micheal Young, "What Does Ali Abdullah Saleh's Death Mean for Yemen?," Carnegie Middle East Center,2017, December 05, https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/74916.
[55] Alattab.

sought to grasp the power and state institutions in his hand, which could have been diminished by the decentralization of the Federal System.[56] Similarly, the Houthis saw themselves as the legitimate rulers of Yemen by divine right.[57] Additionally, for them, the federalization of the state could bring more economic and political isolation to the poor mountainous region in the far North.[58]

The Houthi-Saleh troops then advanced to the South, with their campaign concentrated in the Western flank of the country, capturing Al-Hudaydah city and taking over its strategic Red Sea port. Besides that, the group managed to take over most of the strategic points along the West coast, including the Port of Midi to the North West of Yemen, Mukha Port in the South, and the coasts of Bab el-Mandeb and Perim island in the strait.[59] From there, they marched toward Aden, taking parts of the city where President Hadi and his government had fled.[60] On March 23, the encircled Yemeni government called the GCC to interfere in the conflict and to support the regime against the insurgents[61], before escaping to Oman.

Three days later, a coalition of 10 Arab states led by Saudi Arabia launched *'Operation Decisive Storm*' against the insurgency. The intervention included joint air raids carried by 170 aircrafts divided among coalition states as follows: 100 fighter jets from Saudi Arabia, 30 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 15 from Bahrain, six from Jordan, and six from Morocco.[62] The intervention was endorsed by several states including the U.S., which promised intelligence and support for the coalition. Similarly, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, and Turkey, were also on the supportive

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[56] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War."
[57] Al-Bukairi.
[58] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War".
[59] "The Percolating Proxy War in Yemen," *Strategic Comments* 23, no. 1 (2017).
[60] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".
[61] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign."
[62] Michael Knights and Alexandre Mello, "The Saudi-Uae War Effort in Yemen (Part 2): The Air Campaign," The Washington Institute,2018, August 11, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-saudi-uae-war-effort-in-yemen-part-2-the-air-campaign.

side.[63] The air strikes limited the mobility of the insurgency militants, but were not sufficient to restore the captured lands. Therefore, ground troops had to be deployed. In July 2015, the coalition unleashed *'Operation Golden Arrow'* in Aden, where over 50 ships were deployed bringing joint Yemeni and UAE troops to clear out the city beside the Southern Public Resistance as well as other forces aligned with President Hadi.[64] Map 4.1 shows the Houthi expansion in 2015.
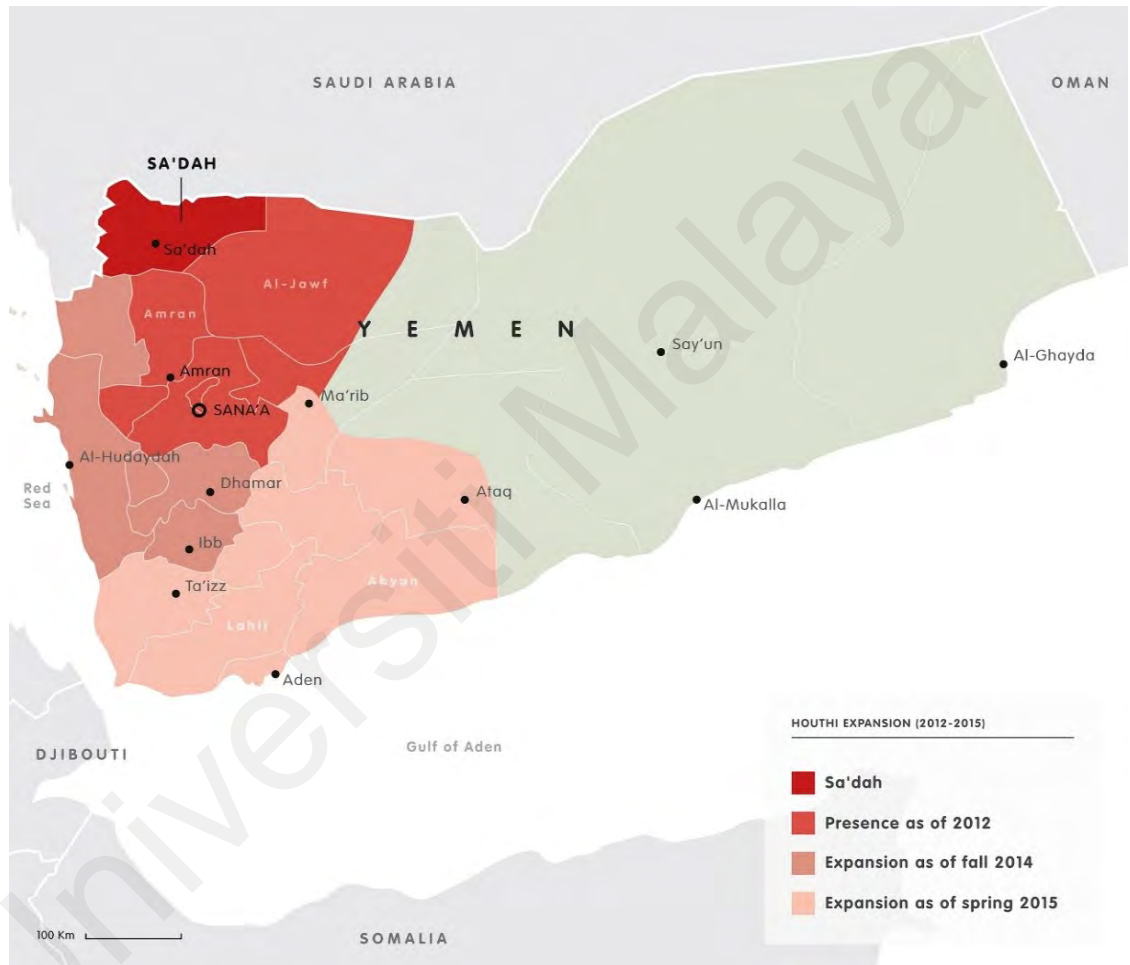
Map 4.1: The Houthi expansion in 2015*[65]*

[63] Rugh, "Problems in Yemen, Domestic and Foreign".

[64] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".

[65] European Council on Foreign Relations, "Mapping the Conflict in Yemen," European Council on Foreign Relations,2015, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen.

4.3.2 The Battles in the West Coast and the Red Sea Strategic Points

The launching of ground military operations shifted the war dynamics. In particular, the coalition, mostly UAE and Sudan[66] and the local allies[67] started recapturing territories from the insurgents, mainly focusing on the West coast. Indeed, the coastline fronting the Red Sea was perceived to be the most crucial territory in the conflict, as indicated in Chapter II, where the coast encompasses several strategic points fronting the waterways from which 8 percent of global trade passes, including the Gulf oil shipments[68], in addition to several islands in the waterways, which makes it a vulnerable passage for several states in the coalition, mostly Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the extended coastline served as a supply line for the insurgency; the possession of ports in the Western coast provided a stable source of income for the group. Besides, according to coalition claims, Iran was also smuggling weapons to the Houthi through the Yemeni ports at the West coasts.[69]

In October 2015, the battles over Bab el-Mandeb started. Within weeks the coalition and public resistance fighters managed to push the Houthi-Saleh militant from the strait region as well as recapture Perim island at the center of the Bab el-Mnadeb waterways.70 Yet, the battles over the strategic point kept on going for a year until the strait was secured with the restoration of Dobab 30 km north of Bab el-Mandeb. As well

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[66] Sebastien Roblin, "The Battle at Hudaydah: How Saudi Arabia Is Trying to Cut Off Houthi Rebels' Maritime Supply Lines," The National Interest,2017, June 27, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/battle-hudaydah-how-saudi-arabia-trying-cutoff-houthi-rebels-26380.

[67] The local allies include units from the Yemen army, fighters from the Southern Public resistance, Salafists, and local resistance at the areas of the battles. See: Chatham House, "Yemen: Key Players and Prospect for Peace."

[68] Mark Perry, "Chart of the Day: World Gdp and Suez Canal Traffic," American Enterprise Institute (AEI),2011, September 05, http://www.aei.org/publication/chart-of-the-day-world-gdp-and-suez-canal-traffic/.

[69] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean".

[70] Aljazeera, "Yemen: Houthis Claim Attack on Uae Military Vessel," Aljazeera,2016, October 02, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/yemen-houthis-claim-attack-uae-military-vessel-161001212236896.html.

as, Mukha strategic port city.[71] In January 2016, a joint Saudi-Yemeni force managed to swiftly recapture Midi port in Hajjah governorate, at the Northern part of the West coast.[72] With this loss, Al-Hodaydah was the left as the only accessible port for the insurgents.

Interestingly, the insurgency spilled over the sea waterways, as the militants started executing sporadic operations using unconventional tactics against coalition ships in the Red Sea. The first operation was run in October 2016, against a UAE vessel, using an anti-ship missile.[73] Thereafter, the insurgents executed several operations using various tactics such as drone boats, missiles, and naval mines targeting naval pieces, oil cargoes, and oil terminals and wharfs. Besides that, the Houthi insurgency also used the radars of the commercial ships in the ports under their control to survey the sea and attack their targets. The operations cast a serious threat to shipping in the Red Sea, especially in Bab el-Mandeb strait, raising global concerns. On the other hand, Iranian military generals openly praised the Houthi attacks, utilizing them to threaten Tehran's oppositions in the region.[74] Indeed, several resources suggest that the Houthis development of military presence in the waters was due to Iranian assistance.[75]

A turning point in the course of the war was the break in the fragile Saleh-Houthi alliance and the murder of Saleh in December 2017. Both allies had uneven contribution in the battles, as the Houthi militants endured most of the casualties, compared to Saleh who might have had a concealed goal of annihilating the Houthi militants in the battles before he takes over the power. However, the fact that Saleh left the lion's share for the Houthis allowed the insurgency to break in the military and security apparatus and to

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[71] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean".

[72] "The Percolating Proxy War in Yemen."

[73] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping."

[74] Michael Knights and Farzin Nadimi, "Curbing Houthi Attacks on Civilian Ships in the Bab Al-Mandab," The Washington Institute,2018, July 27 https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/curbing-houthi-attacks-on-civilian-ships-in-the-bab-al-mandab.

[75] NYA International, "Special Advisory: Naval Mines and Mbieds Off Yemen," in *Crisis Prevention and Response*(UK Protection and Indemnity Insurance Club (UK P&I), 2017, May 19).

establish strong tribal ties, consequently weakening Saleh's sphere of influence. The first spark of a potential breakup was the dispute over resource allocation, as the GPC denounced the Houthis misuse of the financial resources flowing to the North. Yet, the tipping point was in August 2017 when the GPC assembled a massive crowd in Sana'a, calling its supporters from all governorates to attend the celebration of the party's 35th anniversary. The massive rally was seen as a preparation for war against the Houthi movement that[76] seeded doubts of conspiracy between Saleh and the Arab coalition.[77] This led to the outbreak of confrontations between them in November. On December 2, Saleh gave a televised speech blaming the Houthis for the clashes and calling the military forces and Yemeni citizens to mobilize against the insurgent group.[78] However, on December 3, the Houthi militants encircled Saleh's house before killing him on December 4.[79] The impact of the fall of the Saleh-Houthi alliance was magnified as the remnant of Saleh's troops, under the leadership of his nephew, Brigadier General Tariq Saleh, shifted sides to fight beside the Arab coalition and Hadi loyalists against the Houthis.

The shift in the balance of power encouraged the coalition to advance to the Western coast. In December, the allied forces consisting of one thousand UAE and Sudanese land troops alongside the 'Giants Brigade' (Alamalika), a force of 15,000 soldiers from the public resistance[80] advanced with support from UAE Apache

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[76] Mutahhar Luqman "الظهور الجديد لطارق صالح.. وما يمكن أن يضيفه إلى مشهد الصراع – الراهن في اليمن ومآلاته المستقبلية"[The Appearance of Tariq Saleh.. its Contribution to the Current Conflict and Future Outcomes]," Almesbar Studies and Research Center,2018 ،May 02,
https://www.almesbar.net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-
%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD-
%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%83%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%86-%D9%8A./
[77] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War".
[78] General People's Congress (فيدو) "الزعيم صالح يوجه كلمة هامة لجماهير شعبنا اليمني"، [Leader Saleh Address Important Speech to the People (Video)]," Almotamar net- The Official Website of the General People's Congress,2017, December 02, http://www.almotamar.net/news/140859.htm.
[79] Alley, "Collapse of the Houthi-Saleh Alliance and the Future of Yemen's War."
[80] The Giants Brigade is a name given to the land force, which consisted of 15,000 soldiers divided under 5 divisions. The force was formed by merging several public resistance groups, the Salafists, Southern Resistance, and local fighters and volunteers. The force is led by Abu Zara'a Abd Al-Rahman Al-Muharammi, a Salafi figure, and considered as the main ally of the coalition in the battles along the Western coast. Anonymous, interview by Researcher2019, January 11.

helicopters and F15 and F16 coverage towards the boundaries of Al-Hudaydah to take Al-Khawkhah port at the Southern part of the city.[81] In April 2018, Tariq's forces took part in the campaign and were positioned in Mukha to reinforce the allies.[82] On the other hand, to counter the territorial losses, the Houthi militants attempted to penetrate the inland, forming a belt to avoid encirclement. Nevertheless, by May, the allied troops were fighting at the vicinity of Al-Hudaydah airport.[83] On June 13, the allied forces launched an air-land operation to recapture Al-Hudaydah.[84] By November, the Giant Brigade and the Yemeni government's official news agencies assured that their fighters had fought at the city neighborhoods[85,86], but the Houthis denied the news, claiming to successfully cut the lines of supply of the allies and that they had launched a Badr-1 ballistic missile against the coalition troops.[87] However, in his speech in November, the leader of Houthi movement, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, affirmed that territorial losses did not mean the end of the war nor would it drive the Yemenis to surrender; it would actually make fighting

[81] Sebastien Roblin, "The Battle at Hudaydah: How Saudi Arabia Is Trying to Cut Off Houthi Rebels' Maritime Supply Lines," The National Interest,2017, July 27, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/battle-hudaydah-how-saudi-arabia-trying-cutoff-houthi-rebels-26380.

[82] Maher Farrukh, "Yemen Frontlines: December 2017," Critical Threats,2017, December 14, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/yemen-frontlines-december-2017#.

[83] Maher Farrukh and Katherine Zimmerman, "2018, June 05," Critical Threats, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/2018-red-sea-coast-offensive.

[84] strategy page, "Yemen: Red Sea Security," Strategy Page 2018, June 14, https://www.strategypage.com/qnd/yemen/20180614.aspx.

[85] The Giants Brigades News Center, "ألوية العمالقة تتقدم في عدد من الأحياء الشرقية والجنوبية بمدينة الحديدة" [The Giants Brigades Marches Forward in Southern and Eastern Neighborhoods in Al- Hudaydah City]," Alamalika (The Giants Brigades),2018, November 12,
https://alamalika.net/site/2018/11/12/%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9-
%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-
%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1-
2/?fbclid=IwAR3DOX.

[86] Yemen Official News Agency(Saba News) "اشتباكات عنيفة بين العمالقة والميليشيات بالقرب من مستشفى ٢٢ مايو بالحديدة" [Violent Clashes Between the Giants and the Militia Around 22 May Hospital in Al- Hudaydah]," Saba News,2018, November 08, https://www.sabanew.net/viewstory/41105.

[87] Sabanet مسارات [The Armed Force، "القوات المسلحة تؤكد قطع خطوط إمداد قوات العدو بالساحل الغربي من أربعة مسارات" Reassures Cutting Enemy's Supply Lines from Four Tracks]," Sabanet,2018, November 08, http://www.saba.ye/ar/news513984.htm.
[Victories of the Army and the Popular "انتصارات للجيش واللجان الشعبية وخسائر في صفوف الغزاة والمرتزقة" And : Committees and Losses Among the Invaders and the Mercenaries]," Sabanet,2018, November 08, http://www.saba.ye/ar/news513899.htm.

against the enemy an obligatory duty.[88] Map 4.2 shows the decline of the Houthis' areas of control in Yemen in August 2018.

Areas of control in Yemen

Source: IHS Conflict Monitor, 9 August 2018

Map 4.2: Areas of control in August 2018[89]

Amidst the conflicting claims, the battles for Al-Hudaydah could be a decisive point in the war. For the Houthi group, the city port, which the second largest in Yemen, is the main economic resource and importing point, and the only harbor left under their control after having lost Mukha and Midi.[90] Given this scenario, the loss of Al-Hudaydah would

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[88] السيد عبد الملك يدعو إلى التحرك الجاد لمواجهة تصعيد العدوان ويؤكد: العدو منهار وسيفشل" Syed Abd Al-Malik Calls for Serious Movement To Counter the Invasion and Assures: the Enemy is Collapsing and Will Fail]," Almasirah TV 2018, November 07, https://www.almasirah.net/details.php?es_id=31209&cat_id=3.

[89] BBC, "Yemen War: Truce for Lifeline Port City of Hudaydah," BCC,2018, December 13, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46555059.

[90] Jawwas.

mean encirclement of the Houthi group in the isolated mountains of the North. For the coalition and Yemeni government, the recapturing of the city was essential to drain the Houthis' financial capabilities, and therefore their capacity to wage war. Additionally, the isolation of the group to the mountainous region could reduce their offensive capabilities, especially against Red Sea shipping. In December 2018, the combats halted, as adversaries were called to participate in a negotiation round in Stockholm. The negotiations concluded with an agreement that both parties should pull back their troops and remove all military manifestations from the city, and turn it into a neutral land under UN supervision.[91]

4.4 Houthi Maritime Attacks

For insurgent groups based near the sea, maritime activity is an essential factor for survival and efficiency, which includes maritime smuggling activities and the execution of maritime insurgency. Similar to land insurgency, maritime insurgency includes the utilization of guerrilla warfare at sea. Usually, both land and sea are combined to increase the overall efficiency and durability of the insurgency. Statistics indicate that an insurgency that operates on land and sea is 79 percent more likely to persist compared to an insurgency that only uses land operations. Consequently, the operations on land and sea are coordinated and mutually influenced.[92] This was seen in several examples of long-lasting insurgencies such as The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which has been active in Sri Lanka since 1972, with its maritime wing, the Sea Tigers, that had been operating from 1982-2009.[93] In the Yemeni case, since the outbreak of the war and the Houthis expansion over the Red Sea coasts in March 2015, reports indicate the potentiality of marine risk and a spillover of the insurgency to encompass the

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[91] "Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Isa," ed. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen (OSESGY)(Stockholm: United Nations, 2018).

[92] Griffiths, "Small Boats, Long Wars the Impact of Maritime Operations on Insurgency Duration".

[93] Molly Dunigan et al., *Characterizing and Exploring the Implications of Maritime Irregular Warfare*(Santa Monica: RAND 2012), p.69.

Red Sea waterways.[94] Indeed, in October 2016, the insurgents executed the first attack on ships on the Red Sea. Utilizing the Yemen coasts, the insurgents executed around 15 maritime insurgency operations until December 31, 2018, targeting warships and civilian shipping as well as infrastructures.

4.4.1 The Sequence of Operations

The Houthi maritime insurgency executed several operations in the Red Sea. Given the presence of other groups that were active in the region such as pirates and their attacks on the shipping lines of the Red Sea, the recording of the insurgents operations has to include the attacks confirmed by both parties (the Houthi insurgency and the targeted party).[95] On the other hand, if in some incidents, the parties have different claims on the success or failure of an attack, a testimony from a third party is included to verify the disagreement with the arguments.

The first attack by the Houthi forces was in October 2016, where the attacker targeted the UAE vessel HSV-2 swift in the waters fronting Mukha port, using an anti-ship missile, mostly Chinese-built C-802s, fired from land. The attack resulted in heavy damage to the ship such that it had to be pulled to port Assab in Eretria. Some analysts, including a U.S. defense official, claimed that the attack was carried out using shoulder-launched anti-tank missile fired from a fishing boat. However, it is most likely that the 120 km range C-802s missiles were supplied by Iran.[96]

The day of October 9, 2016, witnessed the second attack. This time, two cruise missiles were fired at U.S. Navy pieces, the USS Mason and the USS Ponce, sailing near Mukha in Yemen. The attack failed to hit the targets, as both vessels employed counter-

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[94] IHS Markit, "The Conflict in Yemen: Marine Risks," in *IHS Country Risk*(IHS, 2015, April 02).
[95] The research excluded two operations which the Houthi insurgents denied their responsibility for it and the accusing party failed to provide solid evidence.
[96] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping."

measures. Again, the Houthi insurgents carried out a second attempt against a U.S. destroyer on October 11; this time, the USS Masson replied with defensive firing to counter the attack.[97]

Yet, on October 13, claiming self-defense, the USS Nitze fired Tomahawk missiles at three radar installations in the Yemeni coast. The Pentagon Press Secretary, Peter Cook, commented on the incident, stating that, "These limited self-defense strikes were conducted to protect our personnel, our ships, and our freedom of navigation in this important maritime passageway. The Houthi insurgents attempted to respond with another operation on October 16, which was foiled as well.[98]

The fifth attack was conducted on January 30, 2017, where the insurgents used three remote-controlled, explosives-laden, small boats, also referred to as water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIEDs) to attack a Saudi frigate in front of Al-Hudaydah. According to the official Saudi Press Agency, the frigate managed to block two of the drone boats while the third successfully hit the back of the vessel, killing two of its crew members.[99]

On February 4, the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) reported that the Houthi militants were suspected to have laid mines in an area surrounding Mukha port.[100] However, other reports suggested that the Houthi insurgents had been releasing mines near Bab el-Mandeb since 2015.[101] The first-hit mine incident was reported on March 8,

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[97] Sam LaGrone, "Uss Mason Fired 3 Missiles to Defend from Yemen Cruise Missiles Attack," The US Navy Institute,210, October 11, https://news.usni.org/2016/10/11/uss-mason-fired-3-missiles-to-defend-from-yemen-cruise-missiles-attack.

[98] U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on U.S. Military Strikes against Radar Sites in Yemen," U.S. Department of Defense,2016, October 12, https://dod.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/972169/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-us-military-strikes-against./

[99] Saudi Press Agency, " عام / قيادة تحالف دعم الشرعية في اليمن: تعرض فرقاطة سعودية غرب ميناء الحديدة لهجوم إرهابي من [قبل ٣ زوارق انتحارية حوثية] General / Leadership of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen: A Saudi Frigate west of the port of Hudeydah was Attacked By Three Huothi Suicide Boats]," SPA 2017, January 30.

[100] NYA International, "Special Advisory: Naval Mines and Mbieds Off Yemen."

[101] Knights and Nadimi, "Curbing Houthi Attacks on Civilian Ships in the Bab Al-Mandab."

2017, when a fishing boat detonated a mine near Hajjah governorate at the North of Yemen, leading to the death of eight fishermen. Later on March 10, a vessel from the Yemeni coastal guard struck a mine in the vicinity of Mukha, with two crew members killed and eight left wounded. The Yemeni government claimed that the primitive mines were made in Iran and smuggled to the Houthis. Later, both the Saudi Royal Navy and Yemen Naval engineers successfully carried out minesweeping operations in the waters fronting Mukha and Al-Hudaydah coasts, according to a statement by the official spokesperson of the Saudi-led coalition, Major General Ahmed al-Assiri.[102]

Meanwhile, most of the Houthi operations were carried out from coasts near Mukha port, totaling four attacks since October 2016. The loss of the city in February 2017 did not reduce the ratio of their operations at the Red Sea. In March, the Saudis reported successfully blocking three drone boat (WBIEDs) attacks against a military vessel near the port of Midi at the North of Yemen.[103] According to analysts, the ability of the Houthi militants to conduct creative unconventional tactics was due to Iranian training and weapons support.[104]

The 9th operation was carried out by the Houthis in April. This time, the insurgents aimed to blow up an oil depot and distribution station that belonged to the Saudi national oil company, Aramco, in Jazan city, at the South of Saudi Arabia. According to media

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[102] NYA International, "Special Advisory: Naval Mines and Mbieds Off Yemen".

[103] Iman Mahmood, "كيف يهدد الحوثيون أمن الملاحة في البحر الاحمر؟" [How the Houthis Threat Shipping in the Red Sea]," 2018, July 27,
http://www.masrawy.com/news/news_publicaffairs/details/2018/7/27/1400708/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8.

[104] Kevin Truitte, "The Red Sea Insurgency: The Asymmetrical Houthi Threat to the Strategic Waterway," George Town Security Studies Review,2018, December 21,
http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2018/12/21/the-red-sea-insurgency-the-asymmetrical-houthi-threat-to-the-strategic-waterway./

agencies aligned with the Saudi-led coalition, the Saudi Navy managed to foil the attack that was carried out by a booby-trapped drone boat.[105]

On May 1, a second incident involving civilian victims occurred when a fishing boat struck a naval mine near Al-Hudaydah, killing one fisherman. Taher Al-Mikhlafi, the Director of the Yemeni National Association for Mine Action, stated that the boat detonated an acoustic mine, confirming that it was from Iranian origin. Meanwhile, the Saudi Navy reported to have recovered mines in the vicinity of the port of Midi.[106]

On June 14, 2017, a UAE vessel was attacked using missiles fired from the coasts in the vicinity of Mukha. The UAE official media agency, WAM, indicated that the ship was carrying medical supplies. The insurgents through their media broadcasted a video of the operation claiming to have successfully attacked a coalition battleship. According to Reuters, one of the vessel crew was wounded in the attack.[107]

In July, a drone boat attack occurred at Mukha port. According to the Arab coalition, the boat hit the wharf of the port, without causing any casualties among men or the ships.[108] However, the Houthis claimed to have successfully damaged an Emirati battleship at the port and had prevented it from landing weapons and troops.[109]

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[105] Alarabiya, "Video: Saudi Forces Destroy Houthi Boat, Foil Terror Plot in Jazan," Alarabiya,2018, April 25, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/04/25/VIDEO-Forces-destroy-Houthi-boat-attempting-to-breach-Saudi-maritime-borders.html.

[106] NYA International, "Special Advisory: Naval Mines and Mbieds Off Yemen".

[107] Reuters, "One Wounded in Missile Attack on Uae Ship Off Yemen, Spa Reports," Reuters,2017, July 15, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-ports/one-wounded-in-missile-attack-on-uae-ship-off-yemen-spa-reports-idUSKBN19604S.

[108] Sky News Arabic "ميليشيات الحوثي تستهدف ميناء المخا بـ"قارب متفجر" ،[Houthi Militia Targets Mokha Port Using Explosive Boat]," Sky News Arabia,2017, July 27, https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/968360-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%80%D9%82%D8%A7%D8.

[109] Aljazeera "الحوثيون يعلنون استهداف بارجة إماراتية بالمخا، "[The Houthis Announce Targeting a UAE Battleship in Mukha]," Aljazeera net,2017, July 29, http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2017/7/29/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-

Later in November, the coalition managed to launch a proactive attack on Houthi forces at Bawadi island in the Red Sea. The coalition believed that the forces were[110] preparing for speedboat attacks against shipping in the Red Sea.[111]

In 2018, the Houthis shifted their attacks to include attacks on commercial shipping aiming for commercial blockade. Indeed, in January 2018, the previous President of the Supreme Political Council, Saleh Al-Sammad, had warned that the Houthis would block shipping in the Red Sea if their invasion continued. In April, the insurgents attacked the 2 million barrels cargo 'Abqaiq' in the vicinity of Al-Hudaydah. The method of the attack was unknown, yet the damage was minor and the cargo managed to continue sailing under protection from the coalition navy. The Saudi Minister of Oil, Khalid Al Falih, assured that the attack did not threaten the oil supplies flowing through the Red Sea.[112]

However, in July 2018, two Saudi oil cargoes were attacked near Bab el-Mandeb using Mandab 1 missiles, which had been developed by the insurgents. The attack drove Aramco to announce the suspension of oil shipping in the Red Sea. Besides that, the development of attacks created concerns even for other countries, such a Kuwait, which expressed its concerns and intention to avoid shipping in the Red Sea.[113] On the other

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[110] Al-Wade'i, "البحر الأحمر جواد اليمنيين الرابح لوقف الحرب [The Red Sea Yemenis Winning Horse for Stopping the War]".

[111] Sky News Arabic البحرية الملاحة يهددون الحوثيون .. "إنفوغرافيك ،] Infographic: The Houthis Threatens Shipping]," Sky News Arabia,2017, November 12, https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/996083-
%D8%A7%D9%95%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%.

[112] Aljazeera الإمدادات على يؤثر لن النفط ناقلة استهداف :الفالح"،]Al- Falih: Targeting Oil Cargo Won't Impact the Supplies]," Aljazeera net,2018, April 04,
http://www.aljazeera.net/news/ebusiness/2018/4/4/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84%D8
%AD-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-
%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B7-
%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%A4%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%.

[113] Mohammed Al-Najjar السعودية عبر لترامب سليماني رسالة .. المندب باب صاروخ"،] Bab el-Mandeb Missile...
Sulimani's Message to Trump Through Saudi Arabia]," Aljazeera net,2018, July 27,
http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2018/7/26/%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%

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hand, the attack was resoundingly received by the Iranians, who stated that the Revolutionary Guard General, Qasem Soleimani, utilized the attack to pose a threat to the U.S., claiming that the Red Sea was no longer safe for the U.S. and that Iran was closer to them than they may think, also aiming at the Saudis that were also under Iranian fire.[114] Nevertheless, the Houthis announced the suspension of their operations in the Red Sea for two weeks, and, consequently, Aramco resumed its shipments.[115]

The last reported attack was in September 2018, in the vicinity of Jizan port in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Navy claimed to have foiled a drone boat attack that had targeted Jizan port at the South of Saudi Arabia.[116] On the other hand, the Houthi official media claimed that they had hit a Saudi Coastal Guard vessel, with a UN Security Council report confirming the insurgents' claim.[117]

On the other hand, there is a small margin of attacks, around three incidents, which the Houthi maritime insurgency either denied or did not claim responsibility for. For example, in May 2017, an attack on the oil tanker MT MUSKIE happened near Bab el-Mandeb, but the Houthis commented that the attack was fabricated, describing it as an

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%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-
%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8.

[114] "سليماني: البحر الأحمر لم يعد آمنا مع الوجود الأمريكي Russia Today (RT)]Suleimani:The Red Sea is Longer Safe with US Presence]," RT,2018, July 26, https://arabic.rt.com/world/959556-
%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-
%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%86-
%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7.#/

[115] "الحوثيون يوقفون الهجمات في البحر الأحمر لأسبوعين Reuters]The Houthis Stops the Attacks in the Red Sea for Two Weeks]," Reuters,2018, July 31,
https://ara.reuters.com/article/ME_TOPNEWS_MORE/idARAKBN1KL1Z3.

[116] "الحوثيون يهاجمون ميناء جازان بزوارق "مسيّرة Aljazeera]The Houthis Attack Jizan Port Using Drone Boats]," Aljazeera net,2018, October 30,
http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2018/9/30/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9
%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%A8%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8.

[117] Panel of Experts on Yemen, "Letter Dated 25 January 2019 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen Addressed to the President of the Security Council,"(New York: UN Security Council, 2019).

American game.[118] Similarly, on October 25, 2016, an attack was launched against the Spanish-flagged MV Galicia Spirit near Bab el-Mandeb. However, with no proof of it being caused by the Houthi insurgents, the Security Council commented on the incident to have been carried out by "unidentified forces".[119] Table 4.1 lists the operations data of the Houthis, while Figure 4.1 shows a graph of the Houthi operations per year.

Table 4.1: List of insurgency operations data[120]

Date of attack	Location of the attack	Nature of the target	Nature of the attack and weapons	Success and damage caused to target
October 2016	Near Mukha	UAE navy Vessel	Missile	Major damage to vessel body
October 2016	Near Mukha	U.S. destroyers	Missile	Failed
October 2016	Near Mukha	U.S. destroyers	Missile	Failed
October 2016	Near Mukha	U.S. destroyers	Missile	Failed
January 2017	Near Al-Hudaydah	Saudi frigate	Drone boat	Two crew members killed
March 2017	Near Midi	Saudi vessel	Drone boats	Failed
March 2017	Near Midi	Yemeni fishermen	Naval mines	8 were killed
March 2017	Near Mukha	Yemeni Coast Guard vessel	Naval mines	2 were killed, 8 were injured
April 2017	Jizan (Saudi Arabia)	Aramco station	Drone bombed boat	Failed
May 2017	Near Al-Hudaydah	Yemeni fisherman	Naval mines	A fisherman was killed
June 2017	Near Mukha	UAE vessel	Missile	Minor damage to vessel
July 2017	Mukha port	Port wharf /UAE battleship	Drone boat	Minor damage to the wharf and the vessel
November 2017	Bawadi island	Unspecified	Speed boats	Failed
April 2018	Near Al-Hudaydah	Saudi oil tanker	Missile	Minor damage to the tanker body
July 2018	Near Al-Hudaydah	Saudi oil tanker	Missile	Minor damage to the tanker body

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[118] Russia Today (RT), "الحوثيون: الهجوم على ناقلة نفط في باب المندب مسرحية أمريكية" [The Houthis: The Attack Against the Oil Cargo at Bab el-Mandeb is an American Play]," RT,2017, June 01, https://arabic.rt.com/middle_east/881411-%D9%86%D9%81%D9%89-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85-
%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%A9-
%D8%A5%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%88%D8.
[119] Panel of Experts on Yemen, "Letter Dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen Addressed to the President of the Security Council,"(New York: UN Security Council, 2017).
[120] The table was designed by the researcher by collecting data provided from the resources mentioned earlier.

4.4.2 Data of Operations
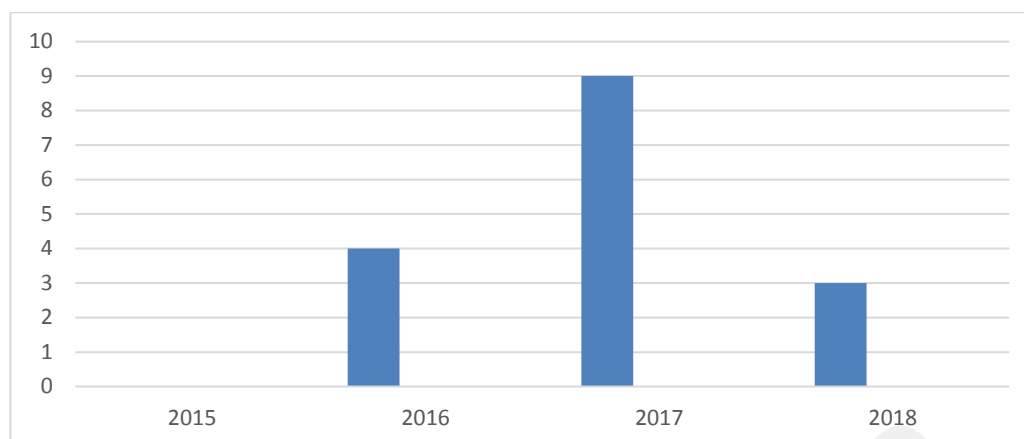
Figure 4. 1: Houthi maritime insurgency operations per year¹²¹

Meanwhile, the Houthi insurgency had taken over the Western coast of Yemen since 2015. Nevertheless, as Figure 4.1 shows, the maritime operations in the Red Sea only began towards the end of 2016, almost a year after the insurgents lost Bab el-Mandeb region to the Arab coalition and the Public Resistance.[122] Algherbani explained that their operations in the Red Sea came as a response to counter the coalition aggression.[123] Indeed, an important thing to note is the link between the territorial loss and the increase in the number of operations, where the maritime insurgency was intensified as a response to coalition advancement in the Western coast. The year 2017 saw the highest number of operations, while February 2017 saw the Houthis lose the strategic port of Mukha, which is the nearest port to Bab el-Mandeb and the narrow passage to the Red Sea.[124] On the other hand, in 2018, the Houthis executed only three operations, the lowest number so far, in line with the coalition campaign to recapture Al-Hudaydah.

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[121] Compiled by the researcher
[122] " The Percolating Proxy War in Yemen".
[123] Al-Gherbani.
[124] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen."
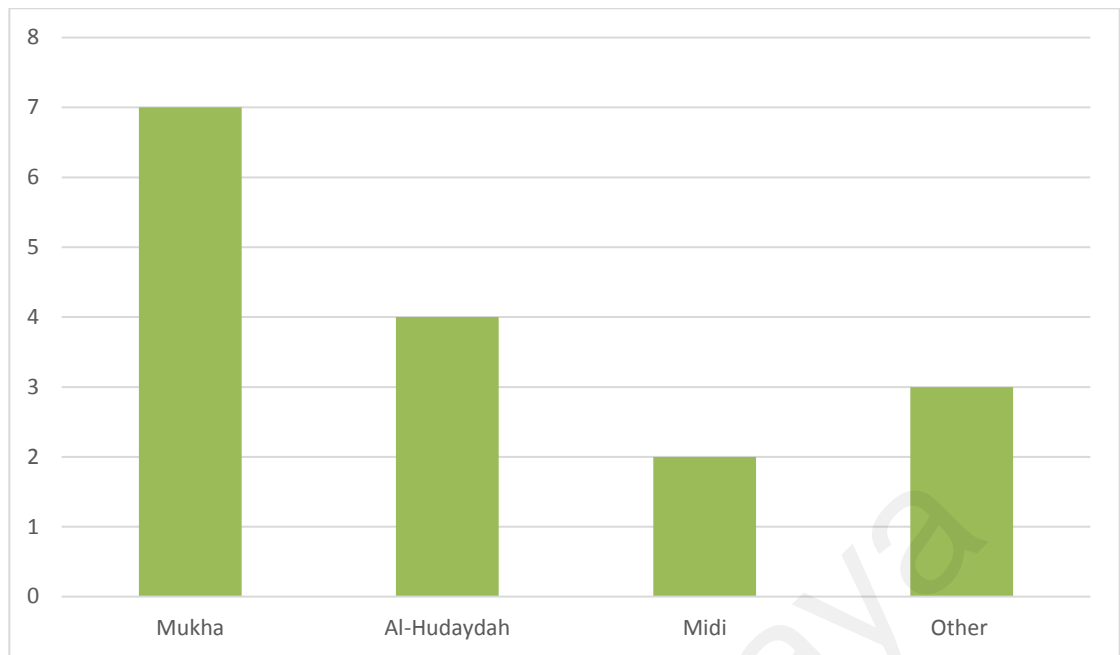
Figure 4. 2: Location of the attacks[125]

The graph in Figure 4.2 indicates that most of the operations occurred in the vicinity of Mukha, located at the Southern part of the West coast and the nearest to Bab el-Mandeb strait. Meanwhile, Al-Hudaydah came second with four operations executed in the waters fronting its coast. On the other hand, the least number of operations occurred in the vicinity of Midi port located at the North of Yemen. Equally, three other operations were executed in locations distant from the Yemeni coasts such as the attacks against Saudi ports and oil stations. An important point to address is that, out of the six operations in the vicinity of Mukha, two were executed after the Houthis lost the city and their main port in February 2017. Similarly, all attacks in the region of Midi port occurred after the coalition and the Yemeni army managed to recapture in January 2016.[126] This indicates the potentiality of carrying attacks from several points on the coast and not only from main bases. Figure 4.3 shows the type, frequency, and variation of tactics used by the Houthis.

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[125] Compiled by the researcher
[126]" The Percolating Proxy War in Yemen".
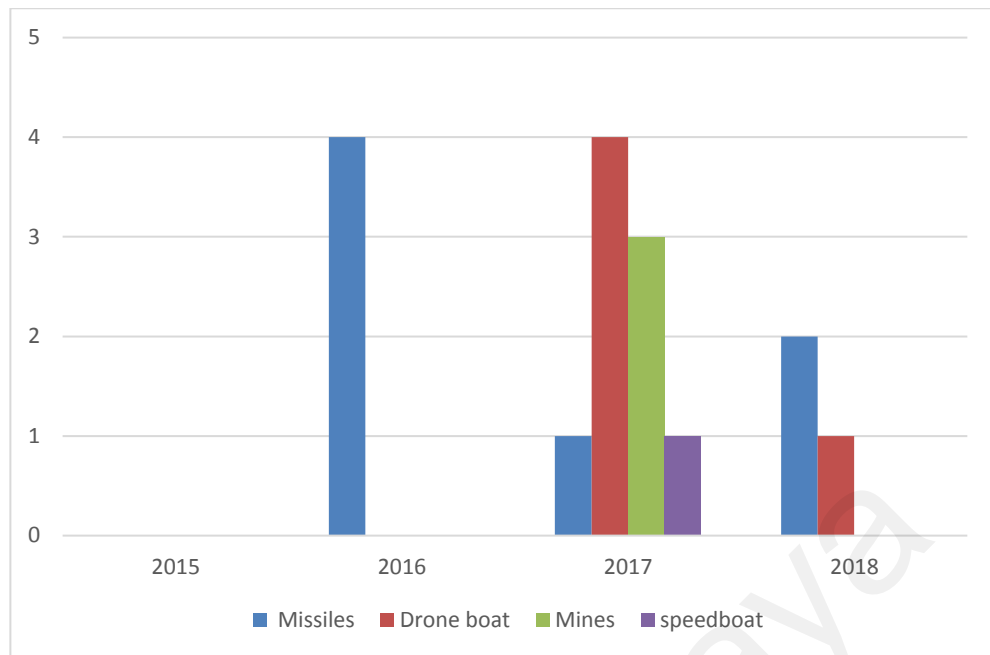
Figure 4. 3: Type, frequency, and variation of tactics[127]

In 2016, the Houthi attacks were confined to missiles only, and according to resources, the missiles used were mainly Chinese-designed C-208s and the locally manufactured Mandab 1. However, military resources in the resistance and in the Yemeni Army assured that the Houthis also managed to modify surface to air missiles (SAM) for use as surface to surface missiles (SSM), with a range of nearly 30 km.[128] In 2017, the insurgents started using a wider range of tactics and drone boat tactics in addition to reported cases of minelaying, with the group claiming the development of local-made weapons and ammunitions that had been used in the operations including mines, speedboats, WBIEDs, drones, naval mines, and even ballistic missiles fired on Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[129] Figure 4.4 shows the nature of the tactics employed by the Houthis according to location.

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[127] Compiled by the researcher
[128] Jawwas.
[129] Al-Gherbani.
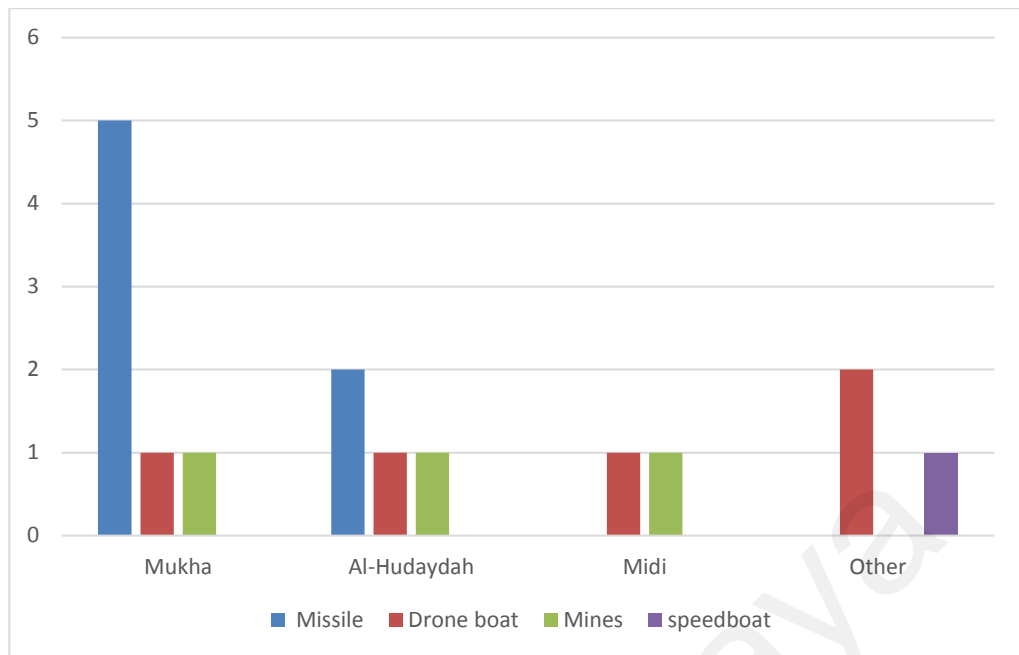
Figure 4. 4: Nature of tactics according to location *[130]*

In terms of the relations between the locations and the tactics, four out of six missile attacks occurred in the vicinity of Mukha and two near Al-Hudaydah, while no missile attack was reported near Midi port. On the other hand, the use of boats as attacking devices was more utilized in the Northern parts of the Yemeni waters, and in the attacks against Saudi facilities in Jizan. Meanwhile, mines were laid along the coast of Yemen from the waters fronting Mukha in the South up until Midi in the North. Moreover, the graph in Fig. 4.4 shows that in the Southern parts of Yemen's West coast, closer to Bab el-Mandeb, their fighters would attack ships from the ground using missiles, while to the Northern parts of the coast, the attacks would include cruising the waters, like speedboats and drone boats, indicating a link that must be further studied between the geographical location and the nature of the attack. Figure 4.5 shows the tactics frequency and success rate of the Houthi operations.

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[130] Compiled by the researcher
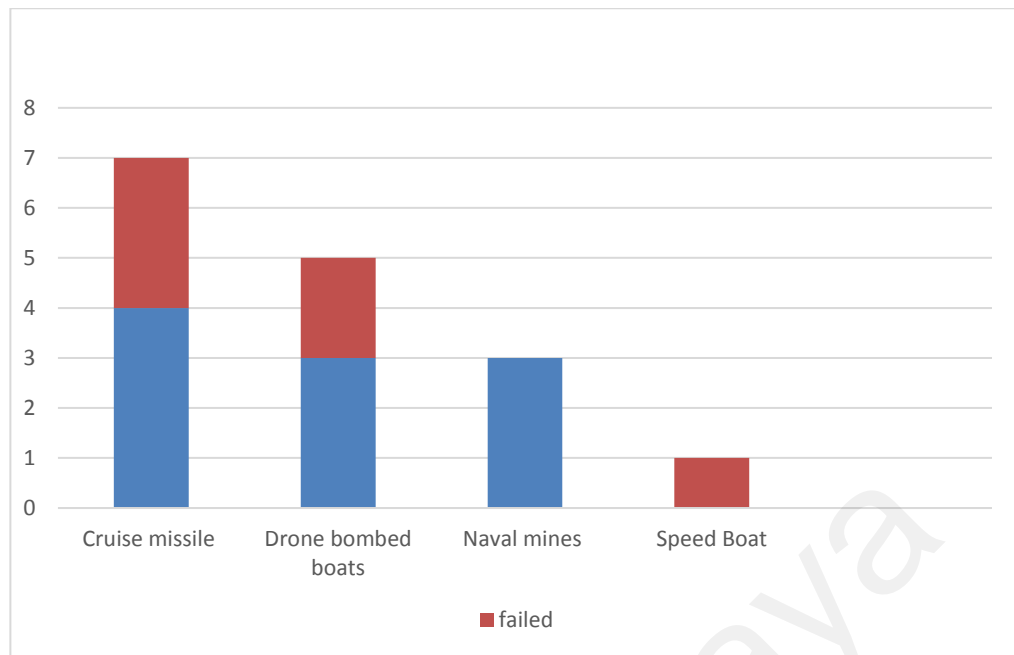
Figure 4. 5: Tactics frequency and success rate[131]

Missiles and drone boats are the most frequent tactics that the Houthi insurgency utilized. However, four of the six cruise missile attacks were executed in 2016.[132] On the other hand, only 3 incidents of naval mines had been reported. In terms of efficiency, missile attacks had a high success rate in two-thirds of the attempts, yet all cruise missile attacks against coalition targets achieved its goal, whereas the three foiled attacks were against the U.S. Navy. Given this scenario, missiles are therefore the most efficient tactic for the insurgents against the Saudi-led coalition. While for mines, regardless of the three successful attacks, it was difficult to measure the efficiency of the tactic; for instance, unlike direct drones and missiles, the success of mines requires the target to detonate them, making it difficult to measure their efficiency as a tactic. Moreover, mine utilization was very limited and the incidents were reported close to Yemeni coasts and not at the main shipping lines nor at Bab el-Mandeb strait. The nature of targets of the Houthis is shown in Figure 4.6.

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[131] Compiled by the researcher
[132] See figure 4.3
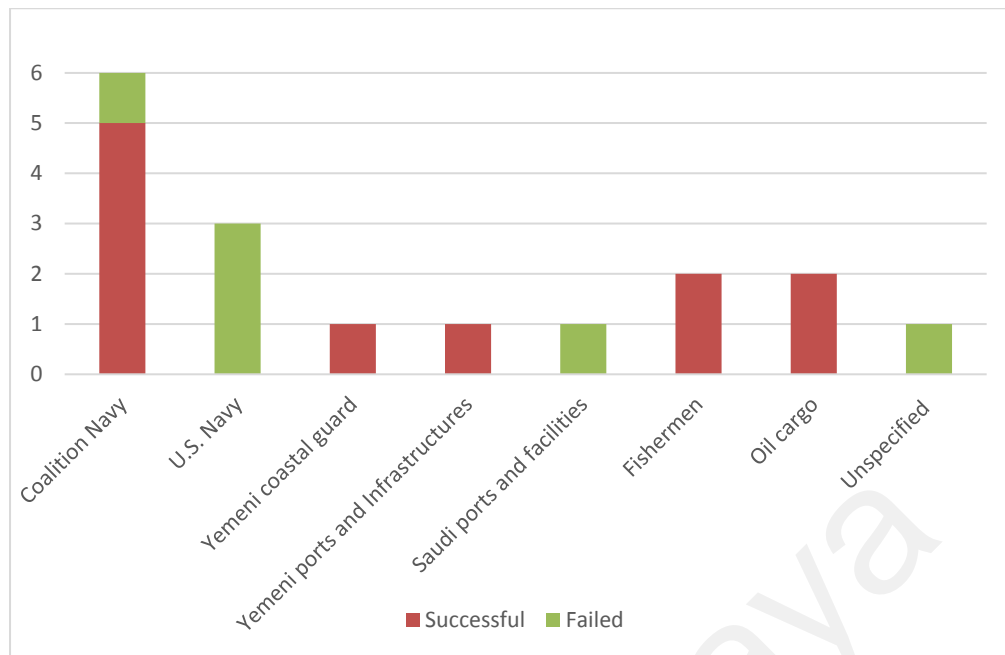
Figure 4. 6: Nature of target [133]

Notably, the Houthi maritime insurgency did not attack any international commercial ships, excluding the target parties involved in the war.[134] The Houthis' main target was military vessels in ten out of 16 operations. Except for three foiled attacks against the U.S. Navy, the insurgency achieved a more than 80 percent success rate against the coalition navy. Conversely, oil cargoes were the most vulnerable targets in the Houthi attacks, yet the insurgents executed only two operations against commercial ships. On the other hand, Saudi facilities were the most secure target and were able to foil two attacks in Jizan. Figure 4.7 shows the target country of origin.

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[133] Compiled by the researcher

[134] This comment was given on the basis of excluding the attack against the international oil tankers MT MUSKIE and MV Galicia which the insurgents denied and the international reports including UN security council referred to it as attacks by undefined party. See: Russia Today (RT), " الحوثيون: الهجوم على ناقلة نفط في باب المندب مسرحية أمريكية [The Houthis: The Attack Against the Oil Cargo at Bab el-Mandeb is an American Play]".

Panel of Experts on Yemen, "Letter Dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen Addressed to the President of the Security Council."
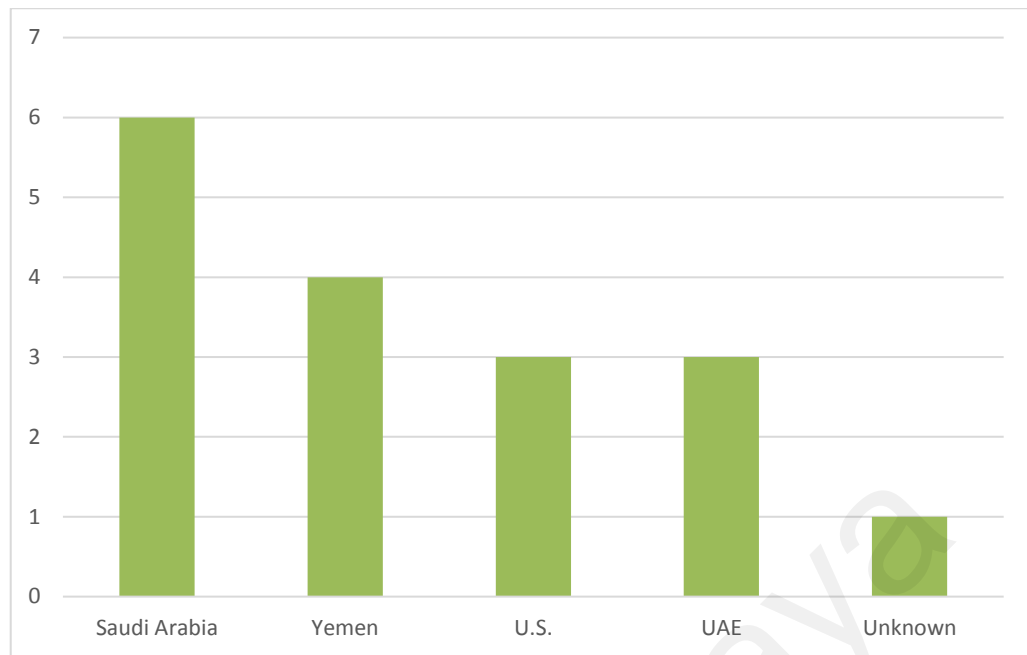
Figure 4. 7: Target's country of origin[135]

The graph in Figure 4.7 illustrates that Saudi Arabia was the most targeted, in 40 percent of the total operations, including the Navy, oil tankers, and facilities. Indeed, of all targets, the only incidents of attacks in the waters not fronting Yemeni coast were two attacks conducted in Saudi local waters against ports and facilities. Yemeni targets come second, in more than a quarter of the operations. However, two cases involved targets meant for civilians accidentally hitting naval mines.

4.5 The Role of the Geographical Factor and the Houthis Utilization of Geography in their Operations

From the overview of ongoing war in Yemen and the Houthi maritime operations, as well as the data from Fig. 3 to Fig. 9, there are two factors that must be addressed: 1) the asymmetry of capabilities between the insurgency and the superior allies; 2) the simple tactics and primitive weapons utilized by the insurgents. Within the imbalance of powers between the two sides, the geographical factor can shift the balance, taking into account the Red Sea as a narrow sea that is vulnerable to the impact of geographical

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[135] Compiled by researcher

fractions, as well as the influence of Yemen's geography in the Red Sea; thus bringing about challenges for the coalition and opportunities for the Houthis.

In general, sailing in the narrow passages of the Red Sea is not without some limitations. The first challenge the coalition navy and commercial shipping may confront is the necessity to reduce their speed. As mentioned earlier, in narrow seas, ships have to sail at 40 percent their usual speed.[136] Moreover, the factor of limited maneuverability adds insult to injury, making the ships more vulnerable to attack. Under these circumstances, the factor of position grants the insurgents the first advantage. Yemen's location at the sea exit and the South of Saudi Arabia makes the passage in front of Yemeni coasts an inevitable risk to the coalition navy. Yet, Yemen's access to Bab el-Mandeb and the narrowest parts of the Red Sea drives their advantage up even higher, as the strait region acts as a focal point, increasing the availability of targets.[137] Indeed, reviewing the locations from which the Houthis attacks were conducted shows that most of the attacks were focused on the vicinity of the Southern parts of Yemen's West coast, with five attacks around Mukha, while the number of attacks gradually decreased towards the North in which four operations were run near Al-Hudaydah at the center and only three around Midi in the North of Yemen's West coast.

Moreover, another issue posed by the sea's narrowness and Yemen's location is the short distance and its impact on surveillance, the lines of operation, and tactical aspects. For the coalition ships sailing in the narrow waterway fronting Yemen coastline, surveillance might be a challenge, especially with the presence of off-shelf islands and fishing boats. Conversely, for the Houthi militants, Yemen's closeness to international waterways in the Red Sea provides a better opportunity for them to monitor the coalition's ships. Moreover, it also provides a short line of operation, which allows the Houthis to

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[136] Vego, "On Littoral Warfare".
[137] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.187.

conduct swift and sudden attacks giving only a limited time to respond to the coalition ships. By the same token, the short line of operations, besides the limited depth of water near the coasts, increases the efficiency of small boats for the Houthis; these fast and highly maneuverable vessels are inexpensive and locally manufactured, usually made from fiberglass and non-metals, which makes them difficult to detect using radars, and because they sit low in the water, detecting them becomes even harder.[138] Out of the 15 Houthi operations, 40 percent were executed using boats, mostly remote-controlled (WBIED).

The advantage of the short line of operation was not only tied to the possibility of attacking by small surface boats, but also the successful attack on the coalition ships from land using anti-ship missiles. Similar to drone boats, missiles have been the most utilized tactic for the insurgency and the most successful against the coalition. Besides the C-208s missiles, the group managed to modify SAM as an SSM with a short range of around 30 km,[139] in addition to locally-manufactured cruise missiles.[140] Meanwhile, no sufficient data was collected from the precision of the missiles, whether the short distance worked as a factor of advantage in enhancing attack accuracy. Additionally, in the case of the 30 km SSM missiles, the short distance between Yemen's coasts and the waterways allowed the short-range missiles to become more effective. Verily, the missile attacks occurred in the narrowest parts of the Yemeni West coast, notably in the vicinity of the cities near Bab el-Mandeb, with 80 percent of the attacks occurring near Mukha, while no cruise missile attack was reported near Midi or the Northern parts of the West coast, where the waterway gets wider.[141] Another effective tactic was mine laying, given the ideal position

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[138] Murphy, *Small Boats, Weak States, Dirty Money: The Challenge of Piracy*, p.48.
[139] Jawwas.
[140] Al-Gherbani.
[141] See figure 4.4

of Yemen and its dominance over Bab el-Mandeb naval mines for executing distant blockade. However, the Houthi utilization of mines was very limited.

Another impactful factor is the configuration of Yemen's West coast; the coast provides several bases and areas of employment, mainly Mukha, Al-Hudayedah, and Midi. The strategic ports provided the insurgency with several effective points of engagement. Moreover, the nature of the plain coasts backed by high terrains made the entire coast a potential area of employment for the Houthi's unconventional tactics.[142] Indeed, the Houthis executed several operations near Mukha even after they lost the city port to the coalition and the Public Resistance. Likewise, the coalition regaining Midi port in January 2016 did not stop the Houthi attacks in the vicinity of the port. Therefore, the entire 730 km longitudinal coastline is a potential area of employment for the insurgency operations, which is very difficult for the coalition to monitor. Moreover, the extended coasts have served as channels for smuggling weapons to insurgents.[143] Given the above, for the coalition to secure the passage in the Red Sea waterways, control of the coastline is required, where fronting it are not only the bases and the strategic points. In fact, the Houthis operation in the Red Sea region near the port of Mukha was not inhibited until the coalition approached Al-Hudaydah, securing all the coastlines between the two cities. Additionally, the high terrain backing the coasts and overlooking the Red Sea waterways served as vantage points for firing missiles.[144]

Therefore, the influence of the geography of Yemen in the Red Sea on the Houthis' maritime insurgency was manifested in a range of opportunities for the group, providing them with the advantage of using limited arms tactics effectively to confront

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[142] Jawwas.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Bilal O Awad, "Insurgency in Yemen: Houthi and Insurgents Threats to Maritime Operations " (U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), p.27-28.

the superior coalition, which was more vulnerable to the attacks due to geographical challenges.

4.6 Conclusion

The Houthi movement can be classified as a Traditionalist insurgency based on the political Zaydism ideology. The insurgency underwent three phases of development, starting from the early 90s via recruitment, and then politicization in the mid-90s, to finally militarization in 2004. In 2014, the insurgency started a military campaign that developed into a civil war in 2015 with foreign intervention. As the Western coast was the most crucial part of the war, the land insurgency soon developed into maritime insurgency. Amidst the asymmetry of capabilities, the Houthis' utilization of the geographical factors allowed them to execute several operations using unconventional and simple tactics. For instance, the narrowness of the sea limited the ship speed and ability to maneuver, making them easy targets. Additionally, the location of Yemen near Bab el-Mandeb served as a focal point that increased the targets' availability. By the same token, the short distance between Yemen coasts and global shipping lanes created a short line of operation, which granted the insurgents the opportunity to swiftly attack the coalition navy, which had a limited time to detect and respond. Moreover, the short line of operation facilitated the utilization of unconventional tactics such as drone boat WBIEDs, and even attacks from land, which included the launching of locally-developed missiles. On top of that, the configuration of the Yemeni coast added another advantage; the nature of the plain coasts backed by the mountainous interior made the entire coastline an area of employment and facilitated the execution of operations, not only from the bases and harbors. In sum, by virtue of the geographical advantage, the Houthi maritime insurgency managed to rise and attack the coalition even without a navy.

CHAPTER V: THE IMPACT AND GOALS OF THE MARITIME INSURGENCY

This chapter examines the long-term impact and goals of the maritime insurgency. The discussion begins by exploring the wide range of the potential threats of the maritime insurgency given the nature of their operations. The discussion focuses on Saudi Arabia, as it is the most targeted party, in addition to the geographical location that had made Saudi Arabia the most dependent on the Red Sea compared to other states in the coalition (some with no access to the Red Sea). Additionally, the chapter explores the potential threats on the Horn of Africa because of its location as a counterpart to Yemen in Bab el-Mandeb and its involvement in the war as a base for the coalition. Considering the general perception of the potential threats, the discussion aims to narrow down the argument through identifying the limitations of the maritime insurgency, which will provide insight about the possible impacts that it has on the region. Finally, the chapter aims to analyze the synthesis of threats and limitations with reference to the theoretical framework to conclude the findings based on the objectives and goals of the maritime insurgency.

5.1 The Potential Threats in the Red Sea

5.1.1 Threat to Saudi Arabia

The insurgency targeted Saudi Arabia the most in 40 percent of its total attacks.[1] Moreover, an analysis of Saudi's geography indicates a natural encirclement. The country is characterized by a desert center, leaving the coastlines in both flanks as the vital connection points. Yet, its position fronting semi-closed seas (the Red Sea and the Gulf Sea) creates a permanent threat of blockade from any naval actions at the states located near the chokepoints. Amidst the Iranian threat in Hurmuz and the geopolitical rivalry extending over the Middle East, Saudi Arabia perceives the Red Sea as a buffer zone and

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[1] See chapter IV figure: 4.7

a bypass route, especially for oil exports. However, the Iranian presence in the sea has cast a threat to the Saudi geopolitical perception. Meanwhile currently, the rise of the Houthi maritime insurgency, which is seen as an ally to Tehran, makes the threat more concrete.

Saudi Arabia was founded by a political activity that started at the center of the Arabian Peninsula in Najd region and then extended to encompass large areas of the Arabian Peninsula. Yet, the country is challenged by its difficult geographical configuration and its naturally encircled location. Najd, where the capital Riyadh is located, makes the cradle of Saudi Arabia. The region is characterized by a difficult geography consisting of desert highlands, lying between Nafud Desert in the North and the Empty Quarter Desert at the South. Historically, this geographical pattern made Najd an area that is difficult to develop or inhabit; it was at the center of what Hodgson calls 'camel-based nomadism', and which Charles M. Doughty assured by saying that 'if God had not made the camel, Nejd, they say, would have been without inhabitants'. On the other hand, the topography of Saudi Arabia includes coastal plains at both flanks, fronting two strategic waterways, the Gulf Sea to the East and the Red Sea to the West.[2] However, both are fronting semi-closed seas that are accessible through strategic chokepoints that fall under the control of other states, which are Hurmuz strait in the Gulf, controlled by Oman and Iran. Similarly, Bab el-Mandeb in the Red Sea is controlled by Yemen while the states of the Horn of Africa and Suez channel dominated by Egypt. This creates a scenario of geographical encirclement.

In analysis of the geography of Saudi Arabia, there are several aspects in the relation between the desert interior and coastal exterior. First, in the midst of its isolation, the center of the Arabian Peninsula is dependent on the coasts as vital connection points.

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[2] Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate*, p.154.

Hence, the coasts are a vital element in Saudi Arabia's geography both economically and socially. The Eastern region possesses economic significance, as it is the location of oil fields and industrial zones that are exported mainly through the Gulf Sea. Meanwhile, the Western region, fronting the Red Sea, also known as Hijaz, has played a pivotal role in the history of Arabia, being the cultural and historical center, with the holy cities, Mecca and Medina, as well as the ancient Jeddah port located in that region. [3] On the other hand, the desert interior does not provide strategic depth for the coasts, as it fails to provide supply lines and has no food and water, which makes the coastline a highly vulnerable area, especially the Eastern coast fronting Iran on the other side of the Gulf Sea.[4] Meanwhile, the configuration of the Western coast fronting the Red Sea creates a natural defense line that mitigates the lack of a strategic interior. The coastal plains, also known as Tihama plains, extend for 1100 km along the Red Sea with a 60 km depth that is gradually reduced toward the Gulf of Aqaba at the Northern part of the sea. The plains are backed by the Sarwat mountainous chain that has a height ranging between 2700 meters and 900 meters above sea level.[5] These provide a depth that limits the interior vulnerability.

Since the Cold War, Saudi Arabia had had the objective of turning the 'Red Sea into an 'Arab Lake' to create strategic maritime depth.[6] Moreover, the rise of the Saudi-Iranian political tension in the Gulf waters and Iranian threats of closing Hurmuz pose a major threat to Saudi Arabia's oil exports, which drove the Kingdom to consider the Red Sea as a buffer zone and a waterway far from Iran's sphere of influence. Overall, the waterways play a pivotal role in the Gulf's global trade, most importantly, Hurmuz strait which is regarded as "the world's most important oil chokepoint". The strait is boarded

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[3] Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, P.377-78, 89-90.
[4] Thomas W Lippman, Alex Vatanka, and Thomas R Mattair, "A Reawakened Rivalry: The Gcc V. Iran," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011).
[5] Kingdom of Saudi Arabia General Authority for Statistics, "Statistical Yearbook of 2017 "(Riyadh2017).
[6] Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region*.

by Iran in the East and Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the West.[7] Being the main line for oil exports, the rise of the Iranian regime after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the intensions of spreading revolution created a serious geopolitical threat to the Gulf bordering states. Mostly, these took the form of multiple threats to close Hurmuz strait.[8] The first Gulf War of 1980-1988, between Iraq and Iran, witnessed tanker warfare and shipping blockade, further solidifying the threat. In the aftermath, Saudi Arabia attempted to avert the Iranian domination of Hurmuz and the threat of blockade by constructing pipelines to bypass the Gulf and Hurmuz strait.[9]

Diagonal pipelines were established from Saudi oil fields in the East to the coasts of the Red Sea with a capacity of 4.8 million b/d. Another pipeline crossed Iraq to the Turkish facilities in the Mediterranean. Similarly, a line flowing from Saudi Arabia through Iraq and then Syria to Lebanon with a capacity of 1.4 million b/d was constructed. However, both Turkey and Lebanon lines were closed post-Iraq invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the United States (U.S.) invasion of Iraq in 2003. On the other hand, the Iranian threat in the Gulf Sea escalated in August 2007, when General Yahya Ramin Safavi, Commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), openly stated that no ship or vessel may pass in the Gulf waters without being in the range of their surface-to-sea missiles that they had developed to cover all seas lengthwise and crosswise, respectively leaving the Red Sea as the only available bypass for the Iranian domination of Hurmuz strait in the Gulf.[10] The Saudi pipelines are illustrated in Map 5.1 below, while Map 5.2 shows Saudi Arabia's petrol infrastructure.

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[7] Shelala, "Maritime Security in the Middle East and North Africa: A Strategic Assessment".
[8] Ibid.
[9] Simon Henderson, "Energy in Danger: Iran, Oil, and the West," in *Policy Focus no.83*(Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008).
[10] Ibid.

Beyond oil security, the Saudi Arabia-Iran contest is a competition for regional hegemony, which encompasses different regions in the Middle East, including the Red Sea that became a crucial part in the Saudi-Iran geopolitical balance. The geopolitical vacuum in the Middle East after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 created a favorable situation for Iran to expand its influence in the region. States such as Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen became areas of contestation between Riyadh and Tehran.[11] Besides its influence in the Gulf, the Iranian expansion into the Levant established a sphere of influence that encircled the region in which King Abdullah II of Jordan defined in 2004 as the establishment of a 'Shiite Crescent'.[12] Yet, further off the sectarian terms, the competition is geopolitical in its essence, and represents a pure balance of power, while the sectarian sentiment is a tool for the competitors to expand their geopolitical influence.[13] Accordingly, the region of the Gulf of Aden and Bab el-Mandeb became a major piece in the regional competition.[14] Meanwhile, Iran has not yet gained a strong foothold in the Red Sea and the vicinity of Bab el-Mandeb[15], where the statements made by the Iranian leadership and their last moves indicate an increasing interest in the region. Indeed, the commander of the Islamic Republic of the Iran Navy (IRIN), Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, declared that Iran intends to establish a triangle of maritime influence that extends between the Straits of Malacca, Hurmuz, and Bab el-Mandeb.[16]

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[11] Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East," *The International Spectator* 48, no. 2 (2013).
[12] Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran and the Shiite Crescent: Myths and Realities," *Brown J. World Aff.* 15(2008).
[13] Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East".
[14] Fazal Firdausi, "Conflict in Yemen: A Sectarian Strife or Petro-Geopolitics?," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 7, no. 1 (2018, Jaunuary).
[15] Mountain.
[16] Commander Joshua Himes and US Navy, "Iran's Two Navies," *Middle East Security Report* 1(2011).

Map 5.1: Saudi oil pipelines[17]

Map 5.2: Saudi Arabia's petrol infrastructure[18]

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[17] Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Changing Gulf Balance and the Iranian Threat,"(Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS, 2016).
[18] Ibid.

Accordingly, the Red Sea, which was considered a safe passage for Saudi Arabia, has now become part of the security dilemma with which the Iranians desire to stamp their military presence. In 2004, Tehran established strategic ties with Eritrea, utilizing its isolation and tensions with its neighbors, Somalia and Ethiopia, outflanking Saudi Arabia.[19] Later in 2008, Iran conducted military operations in the vicinity the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, under the justification of countering piracy. Again in 2009, Iran sent military vessels to the Red Sea, which docked at Assab. Moreover, the Iranian militarization of the Red Sea basin extended beyond the presence of their Navy to arming groups loyal to them, as they have been suspected of smuggling weapons to the Houthi insurgency to utilize their presence in the Eritrean facility.[20] Yet, the civil wars and instability in several countries after the Arab Spring intensified the geopolitical vacuum, making for an even more favorable situation for Iran to expand its influence.[21] In fact, in 2011 and 2012, IRIN vessels passed across the Red Sea and through the Suez channel to the Mediterranean, raising Saudi's concerns.[22] However, the biggest Iranian military presence in the Red Sea was observed in April 2017 when Tehran sent 45 naval pieces to Bab el-Mandeb, under the claim of protecting their ships.[23] This shifted the Red Sea geopolitical stance from a buffer zone to an area of competition. Iran's joint exercises are given in Map 5.3:

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[19] Jeffrey A Lefebvre, "Iran in the Horn of Africa: Outflanking Us Allies," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012).
[20] Ibid.
[21] Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East".
[22] Theodore Karasik and Jeremy Vaughan, "Middle East Maritime Security: The Growing Role of Regional and Extraregional Navies," in *Policy Notes 41*(Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy 2017).
[23] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean."

Map 5.3: Iran's joint exercises[24]

Hence, the control of Yemen's Red Sea coast by a group linked to Iran is perceived as a major threat to Saudi Arabia. The rise of the Houthi insurgency in Yemen cannot be detached from the regional Saudi-Iran balance. Riyadh sees the Houthi group as a copy of the Iran proxy and a copy of Hizbollah in Lebanon.[25] As the group developed into a maritime insurgency, the first and foremost threat to Saudi Arabia is to face any naval blockade near Bab el-Mandeb. The Houthis declared their intention of conducting a blockade in the Red Sea, where Saleh Al-Smad, the former Chief of the Political Council declared that, if the assaults toward Al-Hudaydah continued, and political reconciliations reached a dead-end, then they will take strategic choices as 'no return point', including the

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[24] Himes and Navy, "Iran's Two Navies."
[25] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen."

blockade of shipping in the Red Sea.[26] The leadership of the movement saw the blockade of the Red Sea as a self-defense measurement and a valid option for military escalation against international aggression.[27] Given the geographical advantage, the Houthi militants may have the opportunity to execute a distant blockade, which can be achieved by minelaying near Bab el-Mandeb and the narrowest part of the Red Sea. According to reports, the Houthis have been laying mines near Bab el-Mandeb since 2015.[28]

While conducting a blockade might be considered as the last option for the Houthi insurgency, the actions taken by the Houthi militants against the Saudi Navy indicates the potentiality for the maritime insurgency to either attrite or neutralize the Saudi Navy in the Red Sea. The achievement of attrition requires that the insurgents damage the vessels passing parallel to Yemeni coasts. The Houthis have attacked the Saudi Navy in two occasions using water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIEDs), succeeding in one of the attacks against a frigate with reports of casualties being two of the crew.[29] Additionally, neutralization, which is the inactivation of the enemy fleet, could be achieved in some cases by deterrence in which the casualties from utilizing a waterway outweighs the expected benefits.[30] Again, this brings back the issues of Saudi halting shipping in the Red Sea due to the threat of attacks even without the Houthi execution of a blockade.

Another dimension in the Houthi maritime insurgency is trade warfare, particularly targeting oil exports in the Red Sea. The attacks on oil tankers can have a major impact on the oil market. For the Saudis, the continuation of the Houthi attacks has left them exposed to two inevitable losses, either to change routes, which means shipping

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[26] Aziz El Yaakoubi, "Yemen's Houthis Threaten to Block Red Sea Shipping Lane," Reuters 2018, Juanuar 10, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security/yemens-houthis-threaten-to-block-red-sea-shipping-lane-idUSKBN1EY2AP.

[27] Al-Gherbani.

[28] Knights and Nadimi, "Curbing Houthi Attacks on Civilian Ships in the Bab Al-Mandab ".

[29] See chapter IV table

[30] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.147-56.

through Hurmuz strait, or to take the risk of shipping in the Red Sea and bear the costs of insurance.[31] The success of the trade warfare can be observed from three levels depending on the ratio of attacks relative to the total number of ships passing through the Southern exit of the Red Sea. The first level was a hampering attack, which required the crippling of Saudi exports by 25–30 percent. The second level was interrupting trade, which was fulfilled by crippling Saudi exports by 60-80 percent. Meanwhile, if the ratio surpassed 80 percent, then it is said that the operation is a successful cut-off.[32]

Reports estimate that Saudi Arabia exports 500,000-700,000 barrels of oil per day through Bab el-Mandeb strait,[33] such quantities can be exported by a single oil tanker such as 'Abqaiq', which has the capacity of two million barrels, and which was attacked by the Houthis near Al-Hudaydah in April 2018.[34] Hence, hypothetically, a single attack on a tanker by the Houthi maritime insurgency has the capacity to cut off Saudi oil trade in Bab el-Mandeb. This is empirically backed by the fact that, on July 2018, the Houthi commenced a second attack on oil tankers that drove Saudi Arabia to suspend oil exports in the Red Sea.[35] Additionally, the threat of the Houthi blockade in Bab el-mandeb was modified by the possibility of it being conducted in conjunction with the Iranian blockade of the strait of Hurmuz. In fact, the Houthi's second attack on Saudi's oil tankers occurred only 20 days after the Iranian President, Rouhani, threatened to close the Hurmuz strait.[36]

Altogether, the nature of the operations and threats of the Houthi maritime insurgency inclines toward the strategy of sea denial. By definition, sea denial is

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[31] Rebecca Spong, "Growing Threats to Red Sea Shipping Routes Could Trigger a Devastating Regional Conflict, Analysts Warn," Arab News,2018, July 26, http://www.arabnews.com/node/1346106/middle-east.

[32] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.226.

[33] Gamal, "Saudi Arabia Halts Oil Exports in Red Sea Lane after Houthi Attacks ".

[34] Aljazeera, "الفالح: استهداف ناقلة النفط لن يؤثر على الإمدادات" [Al- Falih: Targeting Oil Cargo Won't Impact the Supplies]".

[35] Gamal, "Saudi Arabia Halts Oil Exports in Red Sea Lane after Houthi Attacks."

[36] Rauf Mammadov, "Houthi Attack in Strategic Shipping Lane Could Undermine Oil Markets," Middle East Institute 2018, 27 July, https://www.mei.edu/publications/houthi-attack-strategic-shipping-lane-could-undermine-oil-markets.

considered a form of 'guerrilla warfare at sea'[37], or in other words, a maritime insurgency. Therefore, like the insurgency on land, it consists of a series of low-intensity conflicts or sporadic hit-and-run attacks.[38] This has been a favorable strategy for inferior fleets in asymmetric warfare.[39] From the tactical aspect, navalists believe that in the context of narrow seas and with current development in missiles and drone attacks, the efficiency of unconventional tactics have dramatically increased such that it could be sufficient to successfully block an enemy,[40] especially if acting from a geographical advantage.[41] Given this scenario, the conceptual analysis of the potential threat of the Houthi maritime insurgency indicates the seriousness of the threats made by the group leadership in blocking Saudi's shipping in the Red Sea.

5.1.2 The threat to the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is one the most strategic regions in the international maritime route, yet it struggles with several internal flashpoints. In the war in Yemen, especially the maritime insurgency, the vessels and shipping of the states of the Horn of Africa were not in the target group of the Houthi attacks. However, the geographical adjacency created inevitable geopolitical influence. Hosting coalition military bases as well as allowing the use of their territories in military operations, the Horn of Africa got sucked into the war in Yemen. Consequently, being in the fire range of the Houthi missiles, it is likely that the insurgents may target the facilities from which the attacks were launched.

The Horn of Africa, which encompasses Djibouti, Eretria, Ethiopia, and Somalia,[42,43] has gained geopolitical significance due to geographical and economic

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[37] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.191.
[38] Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, p.98.
[39] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.65-66.
[40] Till, *Maritime Strategy and the Nuclear Age*, p.187-88.
[41] Black, *Naval Warfare* p.26.
[42] Robert Stock, *Africa South of the Sahara: A Geographical Interpretation*(New York: Guilford Press, 2012), p.27.
[43] Some references adopt a broader definition of the Horn of Africa to encompass Sudan and Kenya as well. See: Jeffrey A Lefebvre, "The Geopolitics of the Horn of Africa," *Middle East Policy* 1, no. 3 (1992).

factors. Geographically, the region serves as a connection point between three continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe, as it is located at the Southern entrance of the Red Sea near Bab el-Mandeb.[44] Likewise, the region overlaps with the Indian Ocean and the Middle East systems, and flanks the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula and links the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean.[45] Historically, it has played a pivotal role in the history of the Red Sea system and its intercontinental cultural and economic exchange.[46] Contemporarily, the Horn of Africa plays a vital role in international maritime shipping. For instance, as 90 percent of the external trade of the European Union (EU) flows through the sea, the bulk of trade flowing around African shores makes the Horn of Africa part of the EU geostrategic frontier and the geo-economic system.[47] Moreover, the potentiality of exploring natural resources and oil reserves in the sea belt promises economic investments that elevate its strategic importance.[48]

In spite of its geopolitical weight, the Horn of Africa is among the most fragmented regions in the international system with multiple flashpoints. The fault-lines in the region can basically be divided into internal and regional levels. At the domestic level, central governments in the Horn of Africa, except for Djibouti, are struggling to create legitimacy internally and have to endure the outbreak of civil wars and insurgencies, such as the Ethiopian civil war in which Eretria gained independence in the early 1990s. Similar to this case was the prolonged civil war in Somalia. Meanwhile, at the regional level, the Horn of Africa witnessed different inter-state wars between post-colonial fragile states of the region, which mostly consisted of territorial disputes such as the war between Somalia and Ethiopia over Ogden.[49] Additionally, the recent Eritrean-

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[44] Azman.

[45] Peter Schwab, "Cold War on the Horn of Africa," *African Affairs* 77, no. 306 (1978).

[46] Azman.

[47] David Styan, "All at Sea? Maritime Dimensions of Europe's Relations with Africa," *Insight on Africa* 8, no. 2 (2016).

[48] Azman.

[49] Elfatih Abdullahi Abdel Salam, "Conflicts in the Horn of Africa and Their Consequences on Sudan's Stability and Security," *Intellectual Discourse* 3, no. 1 (1995).

Ethiopian border also drew some disputes.[50] Consequently, a political division has dominated the region, which, in different periods, was utilized by international actors to turn the states of the Horn of Africa into proxy agents, such as the division in the Cold War.[51] Accordingly, the tensions in the region have been another factor that has pulled the interest of the international community to the Horn of Africa. This resulted in the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, where the global powers interfered in civil wars and peace building initiatives, such as in Somalia, as well as in countering the rise of the threat of non-state actors, such as the terrorist groups and pirates.[52]

On the other hand, both Yemen and the Horn of Africa are counterparts at Bab el-Mandeb strait, which creates a geopolitical interplay between the two fragile flanks of the strategic chokepoint. Indeed, the Red Sea played the role of a connection route between the two sides encouraging the flow of migrants, goods, and even terrorists. On the other hand, the sea represents a division line between the two political cultures at both flanks of Bab el-Mandeb.[53] Therefore, the Horn of Africa is perceived as a buffer zone in the Middle East conflicts in the vicinity of the sea.[54] Given this setting, for the Arab states fronting the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa acts as a strategic location. Therefore, the security of the Horn of Africa is considered a part of the Arabs' collective security.[55] This has driven the Arab states to increase their presence and involvement in the Horn, accordingly weakening the geopolitical role of the sea as a divider, with higher

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[50] Terrence Lyons, "Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa: U.S. Policy toward Ethiopia and Eritrea,"(Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

[51] Schwab, "Cold War on the Horn of Africa".

[52] Azman.

[53] Annette Weber, "Red Sea: Connecter and Divider: Disruption Waves from the Arabian Gulf to the Horn of Africa," (2017).

[54] Azman.

[55] Abd Al-Rahman Mohammad Abd Al-Qader Khojal, "الصراعات في منطقة القرن الأفريقي وانعكاساتها على الأمن القومي العربي [The Conflicts in the Horn of Africa and its Reflections on the Arab's Homeland Security]." (Alzaiem Alazhari University, 2011).

connectivity and interaction.[56] In the context of Yemeni-Horn of Africa security affairs, the spillover effect is even higher, mostly in the interaction among non-state actors and smuggling activates. For example, it is believed that the Al-Shabab Jihadi movement in Somalia was strongly linked to Al-Qaeda in Yemen. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda in Yemen merged with the Saudi branch in 2009 forming Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Shabab in Somalia was suspected to have paid allegiance to the newly emerged group.[57] On the other hand, the Horn of Africa also served as an active point for smuggling weapons to Yemen, including the Iranian armament of the Houthi insurgency.[58] Therefore, in the light of the geopolitical link and the counterparty of security threats, the current war in Yemen inevitably threatened the Horn of Africa.[59]

Given the perception of the Horn of Africa as an integrated part of the Arab collective security[60], in the current Yemen, the Horn of Africa has become part of the theatre of war, since the Gulf States intend to increase their military presence in the other flank of Bab el-Mandeb.[61] As the military intervention has taken place in Yemen, the states of the Horn of Africa declare their support for the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia. For instance, on April 7, 2015, the Somalian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdisalam Hadliye, declared that the Somalian government had given permission to the Arab coalition to use their territorial waters and airspace for their military operations.[62] Likewise, the Assab port in Eretria served as a military base to conduct a close naval

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[56] Alex De Waal, "Pax Africana or Middle East Security Alliance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea?," (2019).

[57] Almesbar Studies And Research Center, *Al-Qaeda in Yemen*(Dubai: Almesbar Studies And Research Center, 2015), p.27-34.

[58] Majidyar, "After Iraq and Syria, I.R.G.C. Seeking to "Expand" Its Role in Yemen and Broader Region ."

[59] Richard Reeve, "War in Yemen: The African Dimension,"(Oxford Research Group Briefings, 2015).

[60] Khojal, "الصراعات في منطقة القرن الأفريقي وانعكاساتها على الأمن القومي العربي [The Conflicts in the Horn of Africa and its Reflections on the Arab's Homeland Security]."

[61] Zeenat Hansrod, "East Africa: The Uae Expands Presence in the Horn of Africa," All Africa,2016, December 25, https://allafrica.com/stories/201612260013.html.

[62] Majidyar, "After Iraq and Syria, I.R.G.C. Seeking to "Expand" Its Role in Yemen and Broader Region."

blockade against Al-Hudaydah port.[63] The military base also served as a training and deploying facility for Yemeni local volunteers recruited by the Arab coalition.[64] Moreover, the UAE lent AH-64 Apache helicopters, as well as F-16E fighters to participate in the Western coast battles, flying from the Eritrean base.[65] Similarly, Djibouti allowed the collation to utilize its land for its military, and for its naval and air bases.[66] Map 5.4 shows the Arab coalition's military presence in the Horn of Africa.
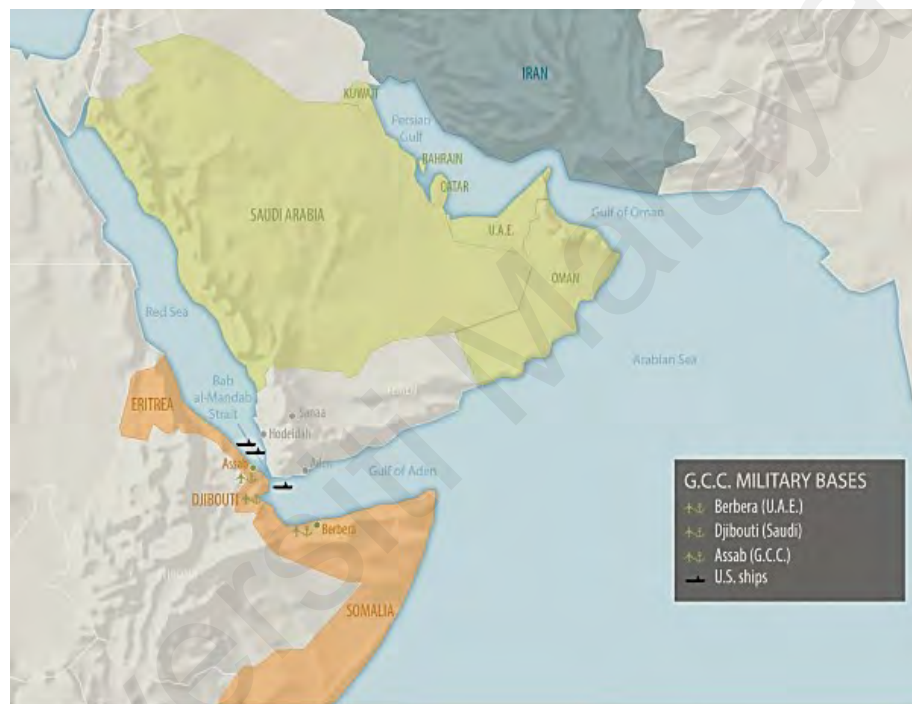
Map 5.4: Arab coalition's military presence in the Horn of Africa[67]

Since the Houthi insurgency has attacked bases and ports that belong to or are used by the coalition in Yemen and internationally, such as the port of Jizan in Saudi Arabia,[68] the facilities in the Horn of Africa are also potential targets for the maritime

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[63] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean".

[64] Deutsche Welle (DW), "Arab Gulf States in the Horn of Africa: What Role Do They Play?," Deutsche Welle (DW),2018, September 23, https://www.dw.com/en/arab-gulf-states-in-the-horn-of-africa-what-role-do-they-play/a-45602930.

[65] Roblin, "The Battle at Hudaydah: How Saudi Arabia Is Trying to Cut Off Houthi Rebels' Maritime Supply Lines."

[66] Gerald Feierstein and Craig Greathead, "The Fight for Africa: The New Focus of the Saudi-Iranian Rivalry," in *Policy Focus*(Middle East Institute, 2017).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Aljazeera, "الحوثيون يهاجمون ميناء جازان بزوارق "مسيّرة" [The Houthis Attack Jizan Port Using Drone Boats]".

insurgency. The Houthi attacks against ports, oil depots, and maritime facilities have, in all cases, been carried out via WBIEDs.[69] The drone boat attacks are still an attainable tactic for the insurgents to use against the facilities utilized by the coalition in the Horn of Africa. This tactic was used only against vessels, whereas cruise missiles were the most used tactic by the Houthis, including C-802 anti-ship missiles. This weapon has a range of 120 km and can be used effectively to attack targets in the Horn of Africa, especially the port of Assab, which is the main base of the coalition.[70] Moreover, as part of the land warfare, the Houthi insurgents have shown the capability to fire ballistic missiles towards targets in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, including their air bases and military sites.[71] Hence, the Horn of Africa is also in the Houthis' range of fire. Map 5.5 shows the range of fire of the C-802 missiles used by the Houthis.

Map 5.5: The range of C802 missiles[72]

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[69] See chapter IV figure 4.6.
[70] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping."
[71] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".
[72] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping ".

Besides that, as it can be exposed to potential attacks, the continuity of the maritime insurgency in Yemen could lead to the militarization of the Horn of Africa, adding insult to injury for the divided region. For Saudi Arabia, the Horn of Africa is a security measure, where the Saudi involvement in the region dates back to the 1960s, in which the Kingdom attempted to secure the sea by confronting the threat of communism. The Saudis became involved in the Ethiopian-Somalian conflict, supporting the Somali President, Siad Barre, in exchange for not allowing the Soviets to establish a military base in Somalia. Similarly, Riyadh supported the Eritrean Muslim freedom fighters in their war against Ethiopia[73] in addition to spreading Wahhabi ideology, and financially supporting the likeminded Islamist groups.[74] By the same token, Iran sought to enlarge its footprint in the Horn of Africa, through the establishment of Iranian ties with Somalia, Djibouti, and Eretria and the demonstration of the Iranian Navy in the Red Sea.[75] In 2006, Iran and Eritrea established bilateral relations, which developed at a fast pace. In May 2008, the Eritrean President, Issaias Afwerki, paid a Presidential visit to Tehran to meet with President Ahmedinejad and Supreme Leader Khomeini. In addition to the bilateral agreements, the visit concluded with a mutual statement that both states "share very close stances on different regional and global issues". Later in 2009, the Iranian Navy conducted military operations in the Gulf of Aden against piracy from the Eritrean port of Assab.[76] Likewise, the Iranian President visited Djibouti in December 2010, reaching a military agreement with the country, which granted Iran military activity near Bab el-Mandeb.[77]

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[73] Majidyar, "After Iraq and Syria, I.R.G.C. Seeking to "Expand" Its Role in Yemen and Broader Region."
[74] Ibid.
[75] Lefebvre, "Iran in the Horn of Africa: Outflanking US Allies."
[76] Ibid
[77] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean".

The war in Yemen would intensify the militarization of the Horn of Africa, putting the states into a critical situation of falling into the trap of the Saudi-Iran contestation. The battles along the Yemeni Western coastline and the Houthi maritime insurgency made the Horn of Africa an ideal base for the coalition's lines of operation; not only in combating and foiling the maritime attacks, but also for monitoring the Yemeni coasts, and to conduct a close blockade on the ports controlled by the Houthi insurgents.[78] For the same reason, the Horn of Africa served as the best point for Iran to smuggle weapons to the Houthi insurgents.[79] In response to the war, Djibouti showed solidarity with Saudi Arabia and cut its ties with Iran.[80] On the other hand, Saudi Arabia with the (UAE) had been eyeing Djibouti for a foothold in Bab el-Mandeb that could serve their objectives in the war in Yemen in 2017;[81] Saudi Arabia and Djibouti reached an agreement to establish a Saudi base in the country.[82] Meanwhile in Somalia, the 2017 presidential election was won by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who is believed to be inclined towards Turkey and Qatar; thus changing the stance of Somalia from solidarity with Saudi Arabia into a neutral position. The country went as far as taking a strong position against Saudi allies in the coalition, accusing the UAE of violating the sovereignty of Somalia.[83] Conversely, the Eretrian stance was ambiguous and seemed to be playing both sides. In the meantime, it hosted the coalition military base in Assab from which their operations were carried out, and the country is still considered one of the closest states with Iran in the region.[84]

The division and variation of reaction of the states of the Horn of Africa could be catalyzed by the pre-existing flashpoints. The crucial role of the Red Sea amidst the

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Hokayem and Roberts, "The War in Yemen".

[80] Alieu Manjang, "Beyond the Middle East: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Horn of Africa," *International Relations* 5, no. 1 (2017).

[81] Karasik and Vaughan, "Middle East Maritime Security: The Growing Role of Regional and Extraregional Navies".

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ismail N. Telci, "A Lost Love between the Horn of Africa and Uae,"(Doha: Al Jazeera Center for Strategic Studies, 2018).

[84] Manjang, "Beyond the Middle East: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry in the Horn of Africa."

maritime insurgency conducted by the Houthi fighters pushes the states in the Horn of Africa towards reduced hostility against each other. In a sense, similar to the division in the region during the Cold War, the Saudi-Iranian contest had introduced a system of alliance and enmities in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, a shift in the alignment of a state in the Saudi-Iranian contestation would be perceived as a direct threat to the regional competitors, which could induce involvement in the domestic affairs to ensure support for their partisan groups, which could give rise to non-state actors and insurgencies in the Horn of Africa. Indeed, Somalia enjoyed some financial aids from Iran, and accused Tehran of supporting the insurgents.[85] Given this scenario, the Yemeni scenario could potentially reoccur in the Horn of Africa. In sum, the militarization of the Red Sea waters due to the Houthi maritime insurgency and the contest between the Saudi blockade and Iranian smuggling activities could lead not only to the hostility on Yemeni coasts as contestation, but also to the African flank as well.

5.2 The Limitations

The geographical factor grants the Houthi maritime insurgency the capability to pose a regional threat. While the Houthi threat ranges from sea denial and cut-off trade, an assessment of their pace of operations shows several limits to the maritime insurgency.

The first limitation is the frequency of operations and its impact on the efficiency in fulfilling these potential threats. Although the Houthi fighters managed to execute several sporadic attacks against various targets, their ratio is very low, with a total of 16 operations executed in more than three years. For instance, comparing this ratio with the Somalian pirates, the group had executed more than 160 hijacking attempts in 2011 only.[86] Given this scenario, the quantity of the operations carried by the Houthi insurgents

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[85] Ibid.

[86] Statista, "Number of Actual and Attempted Piracy Attacks in Somalia from 2008 to 2018," Statista,2019, https://www.statista.com/statistics/250867/number-of-actual-and-attempted-piracy-attacks-in-somalia./

is considered to be ineffective.[87] The low number of operations can be a result of the decline in support from Iran and its inability to smuggle larger quantities of weapons to the insurgents,[88] especially with the coalition presence in the Horn of Africa and their attempt to execute a close blockade and monitor the coasts.[89] On the other hand, it is likely that Tehran, from its experience in the Gulf war against Iraq, did not see naval blockade or sea denial as effective strategies in the long term. This could have influenced their support and intensity of the maritime insurgency.[90] However, the Houthis assured that the number of operations that they had executed does not indicate their inability or inefficiency, claiming that it is a relative matter and that the intensity of the attacks could be escalated if necessary.[91]

Still, at the operational level, the maritime insurgency confronts some challenges. While the leadership of the group has claimed their willingness to conduct a naval blockade as a last option,[92] the execution of such a strategy has challenging prerequisites. Historically, distant blockade has been an attainable option for the inferior side with a geographical advantage in asymmetric naval conflicts, mostly executed through minelaying in the narrowest parts of the sea. Again, the utilization of mines in the Houthi maritime insurgency was inefficient, so it is unlikely that the insurgents will increase their minelaying activity. Given the international importance of the Red Sea, the use of mines, which is an indiscriminate weapon, could lead to several accidental explosions of international ships, provoking an international response against the Houthi insurgents similar to the Somalian pirates.[93] Similarly, the attacks against tankers could impact the oil market with escalations that would also impact several beneficiaries. For example,

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[87] Assoc. Prof. Dr. Adam Leong Kok Wey, interview by Researcher2018, November 26.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Al Maashi, "From Security Governance to Geopolitical Rivalry: Iran- Gcc Confrontation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean".
[90] Wey.
[91] Al-Gherbani.
[92] El Yaakoubi, "Yemen's Houthis Threaten to Block Red Sea Shipping Lane ".
[93] Wey.

within hours after the Saudis announced the suspension of oil shipment in the Red Sea, the oil market witnessed an increase in demand, increasing the price of crude oil to 69 USD.[94] Consequently, this event could trigger an international reaction as well. Additionally, the increased attacks against civil and commercial shipping could cause the Houthi group to be classified as maritime terrorists. In a sense, their operations could be considered a criminal activity and not an act of war or self-defense as per the insurgents' claim.[95]

The third limitation of the maritime insurgency is the decline of land operations and territorial losses. Granted the fact that a maritime insurgency aims either to back or to be backed by an insurgency on land, as well as the coordination of the operations, the decline of the Houthi insurgency in the Western coast[96] would negatively impact their ability to execute maritime operations.[97] The effective geographical zone of the Houthi maritime insurgency has been confined to the waters fronting the coastline from Mukha to Al-Huydaydah, with two-thirds of the operations executed in both vicinities.[98] The coalition troops and the local allies reached the brink of Al-Hudaydah in December 2017, recapturing the coastline between Bab el-Mandeb and the city, including the entire coastline of Mukha, causing the number of attacks to drop massively from eight in 2017 to only three attacks in 2018.[99] Moreover, the persistency of territorial losses also impact the geographical advantage of the insurgency, where the more the insurgents are pushed toward the Northern parts of Yemen's Western coast, the wider the sea waterway

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[94] Spong, "Growing Threats to Red Sea Shipping Routes Could Trigger a Devastating Regional Conflict, Analysts Warn."

[95] According to the definition from an operational level, maritime insurgency and terrorism are similar in several tactical aspects including the nature of their attacks and the methods of execution, while the major difference is in their group of target where insurgents will mostly attempt to attack governmental and military shipping, while terrorists are likely to prefer civilian and commercial targets see: Møller, *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism and Naval Strategy*.

See chapter vi for the chronology of the battles of the western coast

[97] David T. Cunningham, "The Naval Blockade: A Study of Factors Necessary for Effective Utilization." (U.S. Army Commander and General Staff College, 1987).

[98] See figure 4.2

[99] See figure 4.1

becomes; therefore, extending the line of operation to potentially negatively impact the efficiency of their non-conventional tactics.

First and foremost, the ability of the insurgency to attack from land is highly reduced. According to the data, the range of the cruise missiles possessed by the Houthi fighters ranges from 120 km to 30 km.[100],[101] Missiles have also been the Houthis' most used tactic, with the majority of the attacks occurring in the vicinity of Mukha, totaling five out of seven attacks, which the insurgents lost, while the remaining two attacks occurred in the vicinity of Al-Hudaydah. Consequently, losing the Southern parts of Yemen's Western coast, the closest to international waters, the capability of the maritime insurgency to use cruise missiles could be confined only to ships sailing close to Yemen's flank of the Red Sea. By the same token, the successful drone boat attacks also occurred in the same effective region, i.e. the vicinity of Mukha and Al-hudaydah. Even though drone boats have the capability of sailing and reaching further compared to missiles, the extension of the line of operation reduces the impact of surprise, giving the defender better opportunity for early detection and response.[102] Yet, losing Al-Hudaydah, which is the current frontier of battles, means losing the center of gravity for the maritime insurgency.[103]

On the other hand, attacking the bases in the Horn of Africa could bring more harm than benefit to the Houthi insurgency. The region hosts strategic bases for several international powers, namely the U.S., France, Italy, Japan, and China, with the presence of military troops from Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), Spain, and India. Similar to backfires of blockade and minelaying, attacking the coalition troops at the Horn of Africa is a provocative action that allows foreign powers to intervene against the Houthi

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[100] Stratfor, "A New Threat to Red Sea Shipping."
[101] Jawwas.
[102] Vego, "On Littoral Warfare."
[103] strategy page, "Yemen: Red Sea Security."

insurgency.[104] Indeed, the Houthi insurgents attempted to attack U.S. destroyers on three occasions, but the attacks were not only foiled but were also countered with U.S. Tomahawk missiles launched at Houthi locations at the Yemen coast.[105] Moreover, a war across the flanks of Bab el-Mandeb induces militarization of the passage and turning it into suspicious waterways, which are usually commercial, such that the navies avoid sailing in.[106] Therefore, this casts a threat to global trade, which again could drag other powers to the sea such as Russia and the EU. Hence, it is unlikely that the insurgency will expand its range of attacks to the Horn of Africa.

In sum, for the Houthi maritime insurgency to fulfill the potential threats, there are several limitations that might be difficult for them to overcome. The ineffective number of operations undermines the capability of sea denial. Moreover, for the insurgents, to intensify minelaying may invite international intervention; similarly, if they decided to target oil tankers. Furthermore, the decline in the land insurgency and the losses of strategic points on the coast have impacted the efficiency of their unconventional tactics. On the other hand, their inclination towards avoiding the involvement of international powers limits their possibility of attacking bases and facilities in the Horn of Africa.

5.3 The Impact and Strategic Objectives of the Maritime Insurgency

Unlike conventional wars, one challenge when analyzing the strategic objectives of an insurgency is the absence of a link between the quantitative inputs and the desired outputs. Given this setting, the key to understand maritime insurgency is to perceive it as an indirect warfare that does not aim for a decisive victory but for a series of objectives

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[104] Wey.

[105] U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on U.S. Military Strikes against Radar Sites in Yemen."

[106] In some cases, the presence of threat in a waterway can deny ships from sailing in it see: Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.167-71.

that serves the main objective of the insurgency. In analyzing the Houthi maritime insurgency, the quantity of operations does not indicate the capability for conducting a blockade nor a denial, yet the quality of the operations may fulfill certain objectives if it goes over the span of time. Thus, balancing the potential threats of the maritime insurgency alongside its limitations could provide insight into tangible impacts, and therefore the strategic objectives of the insurgency.

Hypothetically, war can be classified into three levels—political (strategic), operational, and tactical—differentiated thorough the size of the theatre of war and the military power deployed. A maritime theatre of war is divided into different theatres of operation, with different operational objectives for each. By the same token, each theatre of operation is divided into areas of operation, which encompass several combat zones or sectors with several tactical objectives.[107] However, in asymmetric warfare, in which the inferior may prefer unconventional and guerrilla tactics, space and time are dynamic variables, and there is no fixed battlefield nor direct combats. Thereupon, the link between the intensity of the conflict and the objectives will hardly be present, as all levels of war may overlap.[108] Although it is considered a low-intensity conflict, or mostly covert war fought by guerrilla fighters executing unconventional tactics, this conflict could be applied to all levels of war.[109] In contrast to the conventional classification of war, Asprey classified war into quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative war is fought by conventional means at large scale to achieve the biggest volume of losses to the enemy. A qualitative war aims for the highest political objectives with the least force deployment. Thus, it is selective in terms of time and space and focuses on attacking the most valuable targets; consequently, achieving high impact with the least power projection.[110] Given

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[107] *Operational Warfare at Sea: Theory and Practice*(Oxon: Routledge 2009), P.41-45.
[108] Ibid., P.16.
[109] Ajey Lele, " Asymmetric Warfare: A State Vs Non-State Conflict," *OASIS*, no. 20 (2014, December).
[110] Robert Asprey, *War in the Shadows*(New York William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), p.753.

these definitions, the analysis of the impacts and objectives of the Houthi maritime insurgency should focus on taking a balanced approach of the threats and limitations, which will be assessed by the factors discussed in the theoretical framework.

Firstly, the intermittent operations over an extended period of time indicate that the Houthi maritime insurgency intends to turn the Red Sea into a region of "disputed control", making it an unsafe waterway for their opposition. In this way, the Houthi insurgents will be able to prevent the superior coalition from exercising control over the Red Sea or to execute an effective naval blockade that will contain the strategic points captured by the insurgency. In fact, the UN Security Council Resolution 2216 gave the right to the coalition led by Saudi Arabia to prevent and block the shipping of weapons to the Houthis and to inspect any suspected cargo,[111] which the coalition aimed to apply by maintaining their presence near the Yemeni coasts, but given the geographical configuration of the coasts, the monitoring task is difficult. Consequently, for the Houthi insurgency, the presence of the coalition navy near Yemeni coasts and in the Horn of Africa is a major threat in two aspects. First, it is a direct military threat to their strongholds along the strategic coastline. Second, it is a threat to their lines of supply and smuggling networks.

The success of disputing control, usually adopted by the inferior side, depends on "sporadic warfare", "strategic diversion", and "defensive minelaying". In the phase of sporadic attacks, the insurgents aim to engage with the opposition at a favorable space and time through unconventional tactics; therefore, weakening the superior navy over a long span of time.[112] Meanwhile, the insurgency does not possess any naval capabilities,

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[111] Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention," in *Congressional Research Service* (Washington DC: Library of the Congress, 2017).
[112] Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.155.

so the bite and bleed strategy is an effective means to exhaust the coalition and impact its naval presence over a long period of time.

Another method of "disputing control" is the "strategic diversion" against the Saudi and coalition navy. Similarly, this strategy is conducted whenever there is a huge disparity in capabilities between adversaries. Therefore, the inferior side attempts to prevent the enemy from concentrating their forces, instead forcing them to stretch their navy to cover a wider range of the theatre of war; therefore, eliminating their capability to achieve a decisive outcome, and making their units more vulnerable to attacks. Another purpose of strategic diversion is to exhaust the enemy's economy and morale.[113] For the Houthi insurgency, the extended Western coast of Yemen and its nature as plain coasts backed by high terrains allowed for the transformation of the waters all along the Western coast into a theatre of war; thus, enabling the execution of several attacks from different points along the coastline from the vicinity of Bab el-Mandeb at the tipping point at the South, all along till Midi at the Northern parts of the coast. Consequently, this limits the offensive capabilities of Saudi and the coalition navy due to the overextended theatre of operation, as well as reducing the efficiency of their blockade, since the task of the navy is not only confined to the ports and bases but also the prevention of any maritime activity along the whole Yemeni Western coast.[114]

By the same token, the utilization of mines in the Houthi maritime insurgency, on a limited scale, in the vicinity of the strategic points, can be classified as "defensive minelaying". The key point of differentiation between the offensive and defensive mines is the position of the mines; offensive minelaying is executed usually in the waterways, especially at the chokepoint, and at a large scale to deny the enemy from sailing in the water, or for the objective of conducting a distant blockade. On the other hand, defensive

[113] Ibid., p.215-18.
[114] Alattab.

mines will act as shields that are laid in the vicinity of the strategic points and shores.[115]

For the Houthi mines, their locations i.e. in the vicinity of bases in Midi, Mukha, and Al-Hudaydah, can be seen as barriers that prevent the vessels from approaching critical points on the Western coast and support the coalition's land assaults either by direct participation in the battles, executing a combined arms campaign, integrating the battleships in the air-land operations, or deploying fighters or logistics. Indeed, the naval pieces that have not or have been suspected to participate in the battles were unharmed while passing through the waterways fronting Yemen's coasts.[116] Thereupon, the first objective of the maritime insurgency is to turn the Red Sea into a dispute zone and prevent the coalition from gaining command of the sea or executing a blockade. Hence, the limited attacks against Saudi commercial shipping aim to not impact the flow of trade, but to create a sense of insecurity in the waterways.[117]

The second objective of the maritime insurgency is to back the insurgency on land. Indeed, studies indicate that insurgencies that combine land and maritime operations of 79 percent are more likely to endure, owing to several factors. First, the utilization of sea routes as supply lanes for logistics and smuggling of weapons and ammunitions secure the persistence of the insurgency.[118] Moreover, low-intensity conflicts and the execution of intermittent attacks at sea can be carried out as a support for insurgency on land through several tactical operations.[119] Reflecting on the Houthi insurgency, the Western coast represents the main artery of their campaign, as it is utilized as a supply line for smuggling weapons, goods, and logistics, as well as an economic source via revenues from the controlled ports, mostly Al-Hudaydah.[120] The maritime operations broke out after the

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[115] See chapter II, 2.5.3b

[116] Awad, "Insurgency in Yemen: Houthi and Insurgents Threats to Maritime Operations."

[117] Wey.

[118] Griffiths, "Small Boats, Long Wars the Impact of Maritime Operations on Insurgency Duration."

[119] vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea: Theory and Practice*, p.35.

[120] strategy page, "Yemen: Red Sea Security."

insurgents started losing their strongholds along the Western coast. Indeed, sources related to the Houthi movement indicated that the maritime insurgency came as a response and self-defense to counter the aggression carried by foreign invaders that aimed to control Yemen's strategic Western coast.[121] Amidst the coalition's march in the Western coasts, the expansion of the theatre of war to encompass the waterways, and the high threats it brought could have shifted the priorities and strategy of the war, forcing the coalition to expand over a stretched theatre and different frontiers. This could also be seen as a means of applying a strategic diversion, which strengthens the perception of the maritime operations as a supportive measurement for land insurgency.

Besides the physical objectives, the maritime insurgency could have psychological impacts as well, through raising the fighters' morale. The primacy of the psychological factors has been addressed by many thinkers throughout history, including strategists on conventional warfare. For instance, Clausewitz saw morale as a force that mobilizes the masses, and exerts over the physical factors, explaining their interplay with the sword as a metaphor, where physical factors of war are the hilt, and psychological factors represent the sharp blade.[122] To a greater extent, insurgencies have been highly impacted by psychological factors. Indeed, in several insurgencies throughout history, the morale and mindset of the fighters were decisive in overcoming any physical incapability, where the leader of an insurgency would be concerned about the thoughts of his militants.[123] In the maritime context, a great threat to the inferior side is the extension of defense over a long period of time, leading to a drop in the fighter's morale.[124] Similarly, the pressure imposed by the superior party could bring the same unwanted psychological

[121] Al-Gherbani.
[122] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), P.183-89.
[123] T. E. Lawrence, "Science of Guerrilla Warfare," in *Strategic Studies a Reader*, ed. Thomas G Mahnken and Joseph A. Maiolo(New York: Routledge, 2014).
[124] vego, *Operational Warfare at Sea: Theory and Practice*, p.22.

impacts. Accordingly, an inferior actor should aim for some minor tactical successes.[125] Given this setting, the operations carried by the Houthi insurgents and the statement made by their leadership are a part of the war propaganda and are an act of showing-off for the sake of raising the morale of their fighters.[126] This is also supported by the statement made by the supreme leader of the insurgency, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, in which he addressed the fighters that territorial losses should make them more committed to their sacred duty.[127] On the other hand, the maritime insurgency could also have negative psychological impacts on the coalition and its allies. Historically, strategists saw that an extended war would negatively impact the morale of the attacking force.[128] Given the act of strategic diversion, the insurgents aim to extend the war's time and space, which counters the coalition's aim for a decisive and quick victory.

Granted the above, beyond the military gains, the maritime insurgency ought to be impactful on the political level as well. The disruption of navigation safety and the disputing of control strategy through attacks from sea and amphibious assaults are in many cases seen as a form of coercive diplomacy.[129] An alternative to conventional war and large-scale decisive battles, coercion is a political-diplomatic strategy that stresses on the psychological aspects in which the will of the adversary is influenced under the threat or the limited use of power.[130] The strategy of coercion comprises deterrence and compellence. Deterrence is a passive act of coercion, which aims to prevent the adversary from taking any action through the threat that the costs will outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, compellence is an active form of coercion that includes the use of power to

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[125] *Naval Strategy and Operations in Narrow Seas*, p.218.

[126] Wey.

[127] Almasirah, "السيد عبد الملك يدعو إلى التحرك الجاد لمواجهة تصعيد العدوان ويؤكد: العدو منهار وسيفشل [Syed Abd Al-Malik Calls for Serious Movement To Counter the Invasion and Assures: the Enemy is Collapsing and Will Fail]".

[128] Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*(New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), p.107.

[129] Till, *Seapower*, p.189.

[130] Jack S. Levy, "Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy: The Contributions of Alexander George," *Political Psychology* 29, no. 4 (2008, August).

force the adversary to take action.[131] In the context of the Houthi maritime insurgency, coercion has a dual purpose; first, compelling the coalition to stop the assaults; and second, deterring the international powers from participating in the war.[132] Figure 5.1 illustrates the components of naval diplomacy.
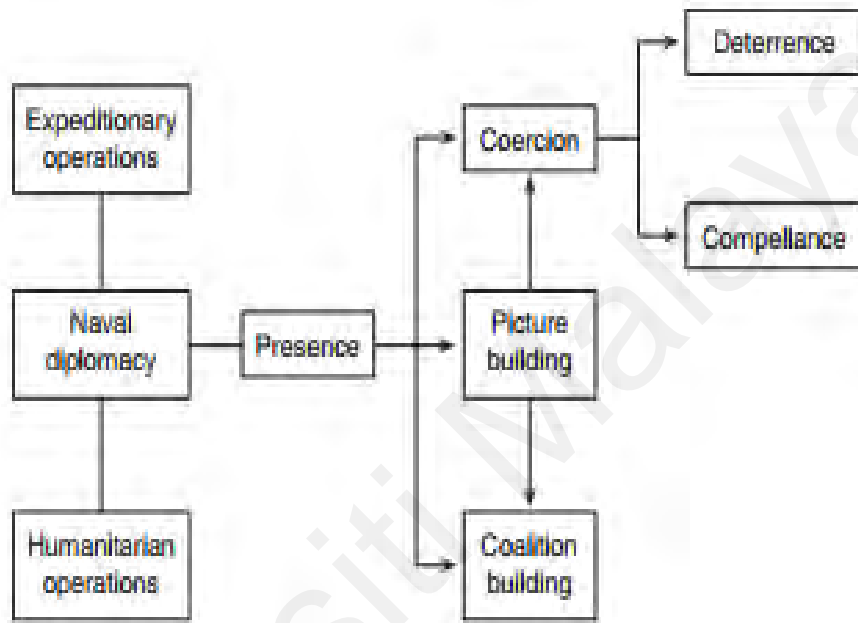
Figure 5. 1: Naval diplomacy components[133]

Amidst the pressing coalition units on the Western coast, the exploitation of the Red Sea vulnerability, especially for Saudi Arabia, through the execution of several operations accompanied with threats declared by the leadership of the insurgency,[134] may create a desirable outcome for the insurgency. Different from attacking enemy lines of communication during wartime, the use of power in maritime strategic coercion may take the form of attacks mainly against military vessels and harassment of commercial shipping,[135] which is identical to the Houthi operations. Thereupon, the maritime

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[131] Till, *Seapower*, p.256.
[132] Wey.
[133] Till, *Seapower*, p.257.
[134] El Yaakoubi, "Yemen's Houthis Threaten to Block Red Sea Shipping Lane ".
[135] Till, *Seapower*, p.215.

insurgency has a strategic dimension of compelling Saudi Arabia, alongside the Arab coalition and the Yemeni government, to stop their military campaign and to accept the status quo on the Western coast.[136]

At the international realm, the insurgency aims to ensure that international powers do not directly interfere in the war and that they maintain limited support of Saudi Arabia and the coalition, especially the U.S. under Trump's administration. Accordingly, the execution of maritime operations aims to send a clear message to the international powers about the potential of the insurgents and their willingness to escalate the tension in the strategic waterways of the Red Sea; therefore, deterring the international powers, to keep their stance on non-participation.[137] Meanwhile, the difference in capabilities is huge because international shipping enjoys a relatively safe passage, and makes participation in the war an unnecessary bargain where the harm likely outweighs the benefits even if with a small-scale insurgency.

Besides, another aim of the coercion is to create a threat that would drive the international community toward pressing Saudi Arabia and the coalition to stop the war. Indeed, an analysis published in the website of the insurgency's official channel referred to the Red Sea as the dark horse that would end the war. The analysis indicated that the threats made by the previous President of the Supreme Political Council, Saleh Al-Sammad, made him the biggest winner in the political dialogue with the United Nations (UN) envoy. It added that Al-Sammad's statement was an invitation for the international community to take initiative in securing its interest, indicating the intention to invest in the international balance of power in the Red Sea, especially with the Chinese expansion to the sea, and the detachment of the EU from the U.S. policy in the Middle East after

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[136] Wey.
[137] Ibid.

Trump's stance from the nuclear deal with Iran.[138] Indeed, in December 2018, the UN organized a negotiation round, which was hosted by the Kingdom of Sweden, in which the parties (the Houthi insurgency and the Government of Yemen) discussed a halt to the combats and the state of Al-Hudaydah port. This concluded with a mutual agreement on an immediate ceasefire and the retreat of the combating troops from Al-Hudaydah, which should become a neutral zone under UN supervision.[139] The Stockholm talks vividly illustrate the presence of a political dimension in the maritime insurgency.

5.4 Conclusion

In the final analysis, the outbreak of the maritime insurgency has cast serious potential threats to several stakeholders. In particular, Saudi Arabia is the most threatened party, given its geographical encirclement, and the empirical fact that it is the most targeted by the insurgent operations. The threats range from attrition of the Saudi Navy to trade cut-off and sea denial. On the other hand, the impacts of the insurgency could extend to the Horn of Africa, given the geopolitical interplay with Yemen and the direct involvement of the region in the war by hosting coalition forces. Nevertheless, there are several limitations that undermine the maximization of the insurgency's threats, such as the low rate of operations, and the decline in land insurgency. On the other hand, it is evident that the Houthi insurgents intend to keep global powers from interfering in the war, thus it will avoid any provocative attacks or indiscriminate tactics such as excessive minelaying. This also undermines the possibility of their attacking the Horn of Africa, as it hosts the bases of several global powers. Accordingly, it is perceived that the insurgency, as a qualitative approach to war, aims for long-term impacts through different levels of warfare. On the first basis, it was found that the maritime insurgency aims to

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[138] Al-Wade'i, "البحر الأحمر جواد اليمنيين الرابح لوقف الحرب [The Red Sea Yemenis Winning Horse for Stopping the War]".
[139] "Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Isa."

turn the Red Sea into a "disputed control" region through a strategic diversion of the coalition forces, defensive mining, and intermittent attacks. Besides, as there is a declining insurgency in the West coast battles, the maritime insurgency could aim to support land insurgency instead. From a psychological perspective, the maritime insurgency could fulfill the objective of restoring fighters' confidence and raising their morale. Likewise, at the political level, the maritime insurgency could become a tool for coercive diplomacy that compels the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and deters the international community.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The evidence of Yemen's stamp on the history of the Red Sea and the construction of its identity, perceived in the name of the sea (the Sea of Yemen) and the its Southern entrance (Bab el-Mandeb), indicate a geopolitical significance that ought to be extended to the contemporary scene of the Red Sea sub-regional system. Nevertheless, the current status of Yemen as a poor and failed state has confined the geopolitical perception of Yemen to merely a peripheral state that may impact the flow of natural resources from the Gulf States. The domination of the assessment on the basis of the stability of governance has led to a lack of studies on the geographical factors that have granted Yemen influence over Red Sea geopolitics. However, some resources, mostly Yemeni authors, have attempted to touch on this issue, exploring certain geographical features of Yemen and the geopolitical interplay between Yemen and the Red Sea politics. Yet, these researches lack a solid frame of analysis, focusing on historical contexts; thus, failing to establish a causal relationship between the geographical configuration of Yemen and its influence in the Red Sea. On the other hand, from an empirical point of view, the rise of the threat of non-state actors from Yemen has emerged as a geopolitical influence in the Red Sea system, manifested through the spillover of security threats and maritime terrorism. Granted the above, the rise of the Houthi maritime insurgency provides a novel case study that merits more analysis.

This dissertation aimed to study the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and its utilization by the Houthi maritime insurgency. To this end, the research aimed to fulfill three objectives; first, to study how geographical factors, embodied in the nature of the Red Sea as a narrow sea and the configuration of Yemen, grants Yemen influence over Red Sea geopolitics. Second, to analyze how the Houthi maritime insurgency utilized these factors as a source of power in their asymmetric conflict against

the superior Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia. The third objective is to examine the impact and objectives of the maritime insurgency.

To achieve the objectives and to answer the derived research questions, the research adopted a geopolitical frame of analysis, namely the study of the casual relationship and the influence of geography on politics and strategy. Within the various contributions to the field, this dissertation focused on Vego's work "Naval Strategy and Operation in the Narrow Seas", a book that extensively discussed the unique geographical features of narrow seas and the opportunities and challenges it may cast on actors; thus, providing an effective frame of analysis for the geographical influence of Yemen on Red Sea geopolitics and its exploitation by the Houthi maritime insurgency. The study utilized Vego's assumptions on the impact of the geographical factors, such as location, shape, configuration of coasts, and islands, to assess the geography of Yemen in the Red Sea, further providing insight on the influence that geography grants to Yemen over the Red Sea geopolitical scene. Similarly, Vego explained the opportunities and challenges created by the geographical factors that have been illustrated earlier and their influence on the efficacy of unconventional tactics, which provides further insight into how the Houthi insurgency has taken advantage of the geography of Yemen in the Red Sea to execute their maritime operations; for instance, how the location of Yemen fronting Bab el-Mandeb has increased the targets' vulnerability. Similarly, the short line of operation due to sea narrowness made unconventional tactics such as drone boats and missiles highly impactful. Last but not least, the framework discussed the various objectives of maritime warfare and operations, providing an effective frame for analysis of the objective of the Houthis based on the scale and quality of their operations.

Given the above setting, this dissertation adopted a qualitative research method, namely a case study design. The data was collected from primary sources such as official news agencies of the involved parties, official documents and statements, and semi-

structured interviews. Besides, the research also obtained data from secondary sources, which include books, books chapters, journal articles, think-tank reports, websites of specialized agencies, and news agencies. The collected data was then carefully labeled and indexed and later divided into categorized themes, which were analyzed using the theoretical framework. The study confronted some challenges such as the lack of written literature on the subject of study, secrecy of information due to the ongoing conflict, reluctance of personnel in being interviewed, as well as the presence of biases in the primary sources. Nevertheless, these limitations were mitigated through approaching several personnel for semi-structured interviews, widening the scope of data collection, searching in Arabic sources, and applying source triangulation.

This dissertation started by analyzing the geography of Yemen in the Red Sea to establish the causational relationship between geography and Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics. In this context, the research found that, in global maritime transport, the Red Sea region is one of the most important passages that links the East and the West. The sea has attracted external actors and has been a major piece in their great games. Yet, in the post-Cold War era, regional actors became the main players in the arena, emphasizing the regionalization of the sea and giving rise to the local actors. Given this background, the sea region, therefore, constitutes a geopolitical sub-system, in which the politics of the states will be impacted by the dynamics of sea politics and vice versa. Amidst the variation in the nature of players, the political variables continuously change. Yet, the control of the sea also has decidedly natural factors, which denote that states with certain geographical features have the opportunity to impact the politics of the sea, in particular, the states around Bab el-Mandeb strait.

Therefore, being a Red Sea state, Yemen has strategic importance to the maritime trade route. Moreover, its geographical configuration elevates its importance, as it grants it the capability to influence the shipping lines in the region, especially the Red Sea

shipping line. The location of the country on a peninsula and its shape that is nearly compacted creates a natural opportunity for it to influence the sea. Moreover, its extended coasts provide a large area of deployment, besides the backing terrains that act as a natural defense line for the large coastline. The presence of several bases and natural harbors provide a line of communication, and the coastal plains facilitate movement through land along the strategic points.

Another factor is the islands, which serve to expand the territorial waters of Yemen, grant it surveillance over the Red Sea shipping lines, providing a natural defense line and a strategic depth to the land. The advantage of the islands goes beyond defense measurements; it also provides Yemen with potential bases that can be used for aircrafts, navy, and even land troops, contributing to the Sea Lines of Communication. Yet, the most important is Perim island, located at Bab el-Mandeb strait, granting Yemen superiority over the strait.

The empirical evidence supports the hypothetical analysis on the strategic importance of Yemen and its influence on Red Sea geopolitics. Historically, controlling the strategic positions in Yemen, either by colony or by agreement, has allowed the utilizer to control and secure command over the Red Sea, such as Britain in the 18th-20th century, or to deny the opposition, such as Egypt in the Arab-Israeli war 1973. In short, in the Red Sea system, whoever controls Yemen, controls Bab el-Mandeb and whoever controls Bab el-Mandeb controls the Red Sea, subsequently reflecting the essential geopolitics of the sub-regional system.

Realizing the causal relationship between the influence of geography and Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics, this dissertation aimed to explore how the Houthi maritime insurgency had exploited these geographical advantages. To this end, the discussion started by defining the Houthi movement as an insurgency followed by a study of their development until its rise and escalation into the current civil war prior to the analysis of

the maritime aspect of the insurgency. Given this background, the research found that the Houthi movement is a continuity and development of the political movement that aims to revive political Zaydism (Zaydi revivalism), which started in the early 1990s. The movement aimed to politicize the Zaydi sect and revive a political ideology that was adopted by the monarchies that ruled Northern Yemen before the establishment of the Republic in 1962. Additionally, the leadership had to be confined to the Imams who rule by virtue of divine right. The movement started by establishing Al-Shabab Al-Moumineen movement (The Believing Youth), which started by recruiting youths in educational camps. The politicization and mobilization of the movement occurred in the mid-1990s under the leadership of Hussein Al-Houthi, who was the first to openly oppose Saleh's regime. Later, he militarized the movement, leading to the outbreak of six wars between the adversaries in 2004 that ended in 2010, albeit without any official agreement or peace negotiations. In a sense, it is found that the Houthi movement could identically he categorized as a Traditionalist insurgency.

After the Arab Spring, Yemen entered a transitional period as part of the peace initiative introduced by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which included a national dialogue between the different political parties. However, amidst the political vacuum after the Arab Spring and the weakness of the transitional government, a great discrepancy among the parties was evident, and the incompatibility of their visions and interests and the presence of enmities would therefore lead to a clash. Indeed, Saleh and the Houthis opposed the federalization of the state, creating an alliance that started a hostile campaign with the closing of the National Dialogue Congress (NDC) early in January 2014, before the Houthi fighters stormed the capital, Sana'a, in September, escalating the situation into a full-blown civil war.

The West coast makes the most crucial part of the war. Fronting the Red Sea's narrow passages and Bab el-Mandeb strait, the strategic points along the Yemeni

coastline have been a major theatre of war for Houthi campaign. Given its impact on the geopolitics of the Red Sea system and the movement in its waterways, the Houthis' control of the Western coast was seen as a serious threat to the regional powers, which perceived the insurgency as an Iran proxy. Consequently, the war in Yemen escalated into a regional conflict with direct military intervention from the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia in March 2015. The coalition operations started as heavy air raids against the insurgency, but shortly encompassed land troop operations in conjunction with different local resistance forces advancing in the Western coast against the Houthi strongholds. Yet, the presence of the Houthi fighters along the coastline fronting the Red Sea led to the spread of the insurgency into the waterways in October 2016. Indeed, the integration of land and sea operation has been an evident feature that has proven efficient in several insurgencies located at coastal regions.

The study found that, in the asymmetric confrontations that the insurgents conducted, over 16 operations using unconventional tactics utilized the geographical factors of Yemen and the Red Sea. The configuration of the sea itself forced sailing navies and ships to reduce their speed by 60 percent; thus, limiting their maneuverability and surveillance to render them vulnerable to targets. Yet, the position of Yemen at Bab el-Mandeb strait and the narrowest parts of the sea maximized the insurgents' advantage. Another geographical advantage is the short line of operations, which created the opportunity for the Houthi fighters to conduct swift attacks with limited time for detection and response of the coalition naval pieces. Moreover, the short line of operation also increased the efficiency of the unconventional tactics, not only the utilization of small boats, but also the attack from land using cruise missiles and even locally-made weapons. Adding insult to injury for the coalition is the configuration of Yemen's West coast, which is characterized by extended coastal plains backed by mountains. Thus, the entire coastline represents a potential employment area for the insurgency and points of

operations, including the smuggling of weapons. Consequently, for the coalition and its local allies, recapturing a strategic base in the West coast will not halt the insurgent operations in its vicinity, which requires the clearance of the entire coastline. Meanwhile, its extensiveness makes it very difficult to monitor from sea or even from air. In sum, by utilizing Yemen's geography, the Houthi insurgency managed to create a balance of power in their asymmetric conflict against the superior coalition, allowing them to conduct maritime insurgency and naval operations without having an actual Navy.

In addition to the tactical impacts of the operations carried by the insurgents in the Red Sea, the dissertation investigated the strategic objectives and political goals of the maritime insurgency. The analysis indicated that, of all the stakeholders, Saudi Arabia had to endure the heaviest consequences of the maritime threats. Firstly, the Kingdom's geographical configuration creates natural challenges. The country is characterized by a desert center that is difficult to develop and coastal flanks that represent the channel of exports and connection points, but with some vulnerability. Indeed, the desert interior fails to provide any strategic depth for the coastal regions, added to the fact that the coasts front semi-closed seas, the Gulf Sea and the Red Sea, further exposing the encirclement to increased vulnerability. Thereupon, the escalations of the security dilemma with Iran made the Gulf Sea a threatened waterway, especially with Iranian threats of blocking shipping at Hurmuz strait. Thus, driving Saudi Arabia toward the Red Sea, which represents a buffer zone and a bypass route establishing diagonal pipelines from the oil fields at the west of Saudi Arabia to importing facilities in the Red Sea. Henceforth, the policy of Saudi Arabia aimed to keep the Red Sea as an "Arab Lake" and influence the domestic political scene of the states located at the strategic locations in the Red Sea. However, since 2004, Iran started to gain a foothold in the Red Sea through establishing ties with the Horn of Africa states, even by conducting naval operations.

Yet, the rise of the Houthi insurgency in Yemen was perceived as a greater threat to Saudi Arabia, especially with the insurgents taking control of the strategic points in Yemen's Western coastline fronting the Red Sea. These threats were made concrete as the insurgents started executing maritime operations mostly focusing on Saudi targets. Indeed, the Kingdom was attacked the most by operations targeting the Saudi Navy, commercial shipping, and even ports and facilities. In this sense, the initial analysis indicated the insurgent' multi-dimensional threat that could potentiality attrite Saudi shipping, cut-off trade, and at its peak, execute a naval blockade and deny Saudi Arabia from sailing in the Red Sea.

On the other hand, another consequence of the war in Yemen is the transformation of the Horn of Africa from a buffer zone in the Middle East crisis into part of the conflict. With the Arab coalition operation being executed from military bases in the Horn of Africa, the Houthi insurgents had attacked the facilities in previous occasions, where the bases had been utilized by the Saudi led coalition becoming a potential target, given that the Horn of Africa is within the range of the Houthi missiles as well as the possibility of drone boat attacks. Moreover, the activities of the maritime insurgency could also bring indirect impact to the Horn of Africa, mostly in the Saudi-Iranian regional contestation. While both states see the Horn of Africa as a vital part of their strategies of the Houthis in the Western coasts of Yemen and the Red Sea, this could lead to the militarization of the region, division of the states with reference to their alignment, as well as the rise of non-state actors as the regional hegemons to support their partisans in the non-affiliated states.

Amidst the indications of the potential threats, the analysis of the limitations undermines the possibility of such threats. Firstly, the ratio of operations carried by the Houthi insurgency was ineffective. Indeed, to successfully execute a distant blockade, more mines have to be laid in the vicinity of Bab el-Mandeb strait. However, such a

procedure could lead to indiscriminate cases of detonation, which could trigger international response against the insurgents. For the same reasons, a commercial cut-off of the Saudi oil exports would also be an unfavorable choice for the maritime insurgency since this would impact the price of oil and in turn the exporters. Another limitation is the deterioration of the insurgency on land and the territorial losses, especially in the coastline extending from Bab el-Mandeb to the brinks of Al-Hudaydah from which the insurgents executed most of their operations (the centers of gravity on Yemen's Western coast), which impacted the line of operation, limiting the capability of attacking from land, as well as the efficiency of drone boat attacks. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the attacks against the facilities in the Horn of Africa will be carried out, since this would only provoke the international powers with bases and/or military presence in the Horn of Africa. Additionally, the outbreak of a cross-Bab el-Mandeb conflict would certainly threaten the passage through the strategic chokepoint, which will drive other parties to target the Houthi strongholds.

Considering the above, this study found that the keys to realizing the long-term impacts and strategic objectives of the maritime insurgency are: the classification of the insurgency as a qualitative form of warfare in which the impacts are not measured by quantitative power projection or the balanced assessment of the potential threats and limitations with reference to the theoretical framework discussed earlier. Henceforth, the impacts and objectives of the maritime insurgency are: first, to turn the sea into a "disputed control" region and an unsafe waterway; therefore, preventing the Saudi-led coalition from conducting a blockade or exercising sea control under the always-present threat. The insurgency aims to achieve this through the strategic diversion of the coalition navy by stretching it over a large theatre of operation, enabling the concentration of power in addition to the insurgents' execution of intermittent attacks as well as the defensive use of mining.

Another objective of the maritime operations is to back the insurgency on land. Studies have proven the high correlation between operations at sea and land through smuggling and the extension of the theatre of operation to encompass the sea as well. For the Houthi insurgency, the strategic points along the Western coast, ports, and bases represent the centers of gravity, as they act as supply lines for logistics, smuggling points, and as a source of income. Therefore, a territorial loss of their strongholds on the coast will lead to isolation and encirclement of the insurgency. Accordingly, the maritime insurgency could aim to back the insurgency on land. Indeed, this is evidently supported by the fact that the expansion of operations towards the Red Sea coincided with the coalition's advancement in the Western coast, and the decline of the Houthi strongholds. In turn, supporting the statement made by the leadership of the insurgency.

On the other hand, the improbability of sea denial and blockade could also denote that the maritime insurgency and their threats also have psychological dimension, in which the aim is to use it as propaganda for war and as a means to boost the morale of their fighters. Indeed, as a form of qualitative war, morale and psychological factors form the core pillar of insurgencies. Truly, the pressure cast by the coalition's assaults and the decline in land insurgency could have impacted the morale of the Houthi fighters. This could also be deduced from the statement of the supreme leader of the movement in which he encouraged the combatants to not be weakened by the losses on the Western coast.

By the same token, it is apparent that the maritime insurgency has political dimensions as well, as it is a tool of coercion diplomacy. Given the vitality of the Red Sea in global maritime routes, the "disputed control" of the sea, and the presence of threats near its Southern exit, could all force pressure on the coalition, mainly on Saudi Arabia and the international community, which can act in three ways. First, it could become a tool to compel the coalition to stop their raids. Second, it could deter the international powers that relatively enjoy safe passage on the sea from taking part in the war. Third, it

could enforce the international community to take a more lenient stance regarding the insurgency and to press the Government of Yemen and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. Again, the Houthi insurgents have always perceived the Red Sea as the dark horse for holding their grip on political negotiations, as supported by the fact that the first threat of blockade was declared in line with the visit of the United Nations (UN) team to Yemen, which continued in the form of political talks in Stockholm between the insurgency and the government.

In sum, the study found that geography grants Yemen influence over Red Sea geopolitics due to its location at the tipping point of the Arabian Peninsula, its nearly compacted shape, its extended coastline fronting the Red Sea's narrowest parts, the configuration of its coasts characterized by plains backed by high terrains, its possession of dominating islands, and its advantage over Bab el-Mandeb strait. In a nutshell, the influence of geography on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics is manifested by the fact that whoever controls Yemen would also gain the ability to command the Red Sea or deny sailing in its waters.

Exploring the utilization of this influence in the Houthi maritime insurgency, the study found that, regardless of the asymmetry of capabilities, Yemen's geographical advantage allowed the Houthi insurgents to execute naval insurgency without a navy. Indeed, the narrowness of the sea forced larger ships to slow down, making them vulnerable to attacks, similar to Bab el-Mandeb, which acts as focal point to increase target availability. Moreover, the short line of operation has made unconventional and primitive attacks efficient, while the configuration of Yemen's coast has provided several deployment areas that are difficult for the coalition to monitor; consequently, balancing the asymmetric conflict.

On the other hand, by exploring the long-term impacts and objectives of the insurgency, this study found that the maritime insurgency aims to turn the Red Sea into a

'disputed control' waterway through strategic diversion, defensive mining, and intermittent attacks, in addition to backing insurgency on land. On the other hand, the insurgency has a psychological effect in boosting fighters' morale, especially after the decline in the West coast battles. Meanwhile, at the political level, the maritime insurgency can be seen as a strategy of coercive diplomacy aiming to compel the coalition led by Saudi Arabia to stop their assaults, deter the international powers from taking part in the war, and force the international community to press Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni Government, especially in the midst of preparations for political talks.

Additionally, the dissertation put forth a novel case study, where its discussion and findings open up the opportunity for future studies. In the midst of the gap in the studies on Yemen's influence on Red Sea geopolitics, this dissertation establishes a causal relationship between the geographical configuration of Yemen and Red Sea geopolitics, providing a solid foundation for future studies regarding Yemen's geopolitical significance beyond merely a stereotypic analysis. By the same token, this dissertation contributes to existing knowledge on the Red Sea sub-system, which has not been given enough focus in previous literature. More comprehensively, the case study of the Houthi insurgency against the superior coalition led by Saudi Arabia indicates the role of geography as a power factor in asymmetric conflicts, further providing insight that can be utilized to understand why great powers struggle against insurgencies and why there is a potential deficiency in the counter-insurgency manuals; in sum, proving geopolitics as an effective frame of analysis. By the same token, most of the studies focused on piracy and maritime terrorism with less emphasis on maritime insurgency, which the thesis studied in depth. Figure 6.1 summarizes the findings of this thesis.
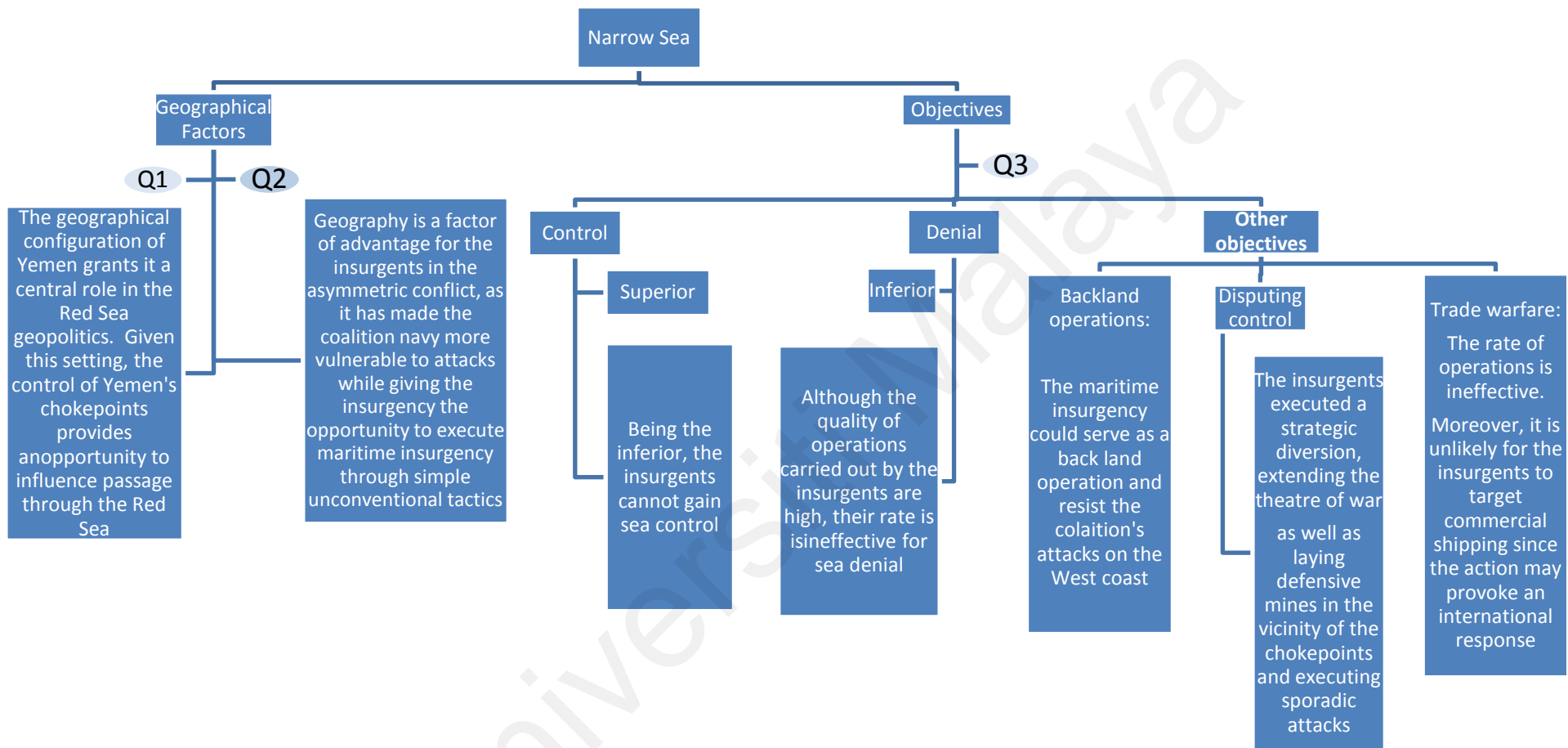
Figure 6. 1: Summary of thesis and thesis findings

Narrow Sea

Geographical Factors

Objectives

Q1

Q2

Q3

Control

Denial

Other objectives

Superior

Inferior

Backland operations:

Disputing control

Trade warfare:

The geographical configuration of Yemen grants it a central role in the Red Sea geopolitics. Given this setting, the control of Yemen's chokepoints provides anopportunity to influence passage through the Red Sea

Geography is a factor of advantage for the insurgents in the asymmetric conflict, as it has made the coalition navy more vulnerable to attacks while giving the insurgency the opportunity to execute maritime insurgency through simple unconventional tactics

Being the inferior, the insurgents cannot gain sea control

Although the quality of operations carried out by the insurgents are high, their rate is isineffective for sea denial

The maritime insurgency could serve as a back land operation and resist the colaition's attacks on the West coast

The insurgents executed a strategic diversion, extending the theatre of war as well as laying defensive mines in the vicinity of the chokepoints and executing sporadic attacks

The rate of operations is ineffective. Moreover, it is unlikely for the insurgents to target commercial shipping since the action may provoke an international response

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Colonel (Staff). Alattab, Fikry. He is the Head of the Department of Moral Guidance at the Higher Military Academy in Yemen. Colonel Alattab is an expert on Yemen's Red Sea geopolitics and strategic and military depth of Yemen in the Red Sea, having written a dissertation on the Geography of Yemen in the Red Sea as part of the requirement for fulfilling the Higher Command and Staff Course. The interview was conducted on February 2018, (via phone).

Al-Bukairi, Nabil. He is a Yemeni author and researcher who is also the Director of the Arab Forum for Studies in Sana'a and the Chief Editor of Moqarabat periodic journal, Mr. Al-Bukairi is also an expert on the political Islam ideologies and non-state actors in Yemen, and has written several articles on the Houthi insurgency as well as a book chapter on the ideological background of the movement. In addition, he has written columns in Arabic newspapers and websites such Al Jazeera.net. He has been invited as a main speaker on Yemen in conferences in Jordan and Turkey. The interview was conducted on December 30, 2018, (via whatsapp).

Al-Gherbani, Abu Nasr Adel. He is a leader in Ansar Allah (the Houthi movement) and a member of the Association of Yemen Scholars. Al-Ghrbani occupied the position of the Deputy of Scholars unit in Ibb Governorate in central Yemen. The interview was conducted on December 12, 2018, (via whatsapp).

Al-Hamzi, Wafaa. She is a Yemeni academician and an expert in Marine Law and Red Sea legal affairs who served as a consultant for the Yemen Ministry of Transport for 18 years. Academically, Dr. Al- Hamzi researched the areas of the legal status of Bab el-Mandeb, the legal conception of Yemen's territorial waters after the unification, and the historical and legal status of Yemen's islands, which were published in Arabic and international journals. The interview was conducted on December 30, 2018 (via email).

Anon #1. He is a founder and a leader of the public resistance in Yemen. In the current civil war, he served as a field leader for the resistance troops in the battlefields, as well as a delegate of the public resistance in mediation talks with the Houthi insurgents. The interview was conducted on January 11, 2019, (via whatspp).

Azman, Muhammad Danial. He is a faculty member of the Department of International and Strategic Studies in the University of Malaya, Dr Muhammad Danial is an expert on East African affairs. He also published several articles on the Somalian conflict, as well as transitional justice, and peace-building in Africa published in Intellectual Discourse, and the Malaysian Journal of International Studies. He was consulted in this study as an expert in the political and security affairs of the Horn of Africa. The interview was personally conducted on December 11, 2018, in Kuala Lumpur.

Brigadier General Jawwas, Mohammed. He is A leader in the Southern Public Resistance, that participated in the battles along the Western coastline against the Houthi insurgency, Jawwas was also interviewed by several TV channels including Russia Today, Al Jazeera, and Alarabiya, as a military expert and strategist to provide comments and analysis on the current conflict in Yemen. The interview was conducted on October 26, 2018, (via whatsapp).

Mountain, Thomas. He is an independent journalist based in Eretria, and an expert on East African and Red Sea geopolitics, Mountain has written more than 150 articles over the past 12 years of his settling in the Horn of Africa. Mountain was also invited by several Western and international media channels and TV channels as an analyst and commentator on East African affairs. The interview was conducted on July 25, 2018, (via email).

Wey, Adam Leong Kok. He is the Head of the Department of Strategic Studies in the National Defense University of Malaysia, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Leong also lectures at the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College (MTAT), and has published numerous articles on strategy, special operations, underwater warfare, and naval strategy in The RUSI Journal, Comparative Strategy, and the Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs. For this study, Dr. Wey was interviewed as an expert in naval and irregular warfare. The interview was conducted personally on November 26, 2018, in Kuala Lumpur.

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