



Is There a Crack in the Houthi Movement?

OE Watch Commentary: A power struggle is brewing at the highest levels of leadership in Yemen's Houthi Movement, according to media sources from the Gulf. The first accompanying excerpt, from the UAE-based *SkyNews Arabia*, frames the conflict as pitting the Supreme Political Council and close confidants to the movement's leader, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, against a coalition aligned with some of the movement's most successful leaders on the ground, including Mohammed Ali al-Houthi (Abd al-Malik's cousin and head of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee) and Abu Ali al-Hakim (the most prominent Houthi military field commander). The conflict is alternatively framed as pitting Abd al-Malik and the party's ideological core (the "Saada Wing") against the more diffuse network of Houthi political and military allies, particularly but not exclusively in the Sana'a area (the "Tribal Wing").

The reports warrant some skepticism, given that media sources opposed to the Houthis are not usually objective in their reporting and have been predicting the movement's collapse for years. Still, potential cracks in the foundations of the Houthi edifice are consequential, and there are reasons to believe change is afoot within the movement. One hint comes in the form of a crackdown carried out by Houthi "Preventive Security" forces (al-Amn al-Waq'ī) against allies in the "Tribal Wing" suspected of mixed loyalties. Houthi Preventive Security forces first gained notoriety after being blamed for the death of longtime Yemeni president and erstwhile Houthi ally Ali Abdullah Saleh, in late 2017. The accompanying excerpted news report from Saudi Arabia's *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, published shortly after Saleh's death, claims that he was closely monitored and eventually assassinated by Preventive Security operatives. The article describes Preventive Security as a 3,000-man strong "secret multi-tasking security force" that includes experts in technology and communications, a special operations military unit, a recruitment and advocacy branch, and a propaganda wing. Preventive Security reports directly to Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, according to the article, and is the "Saada Wing's" main counterintelligence entity, monitoring "all movements of militia leaders" and providing Abd al-Malik with daily reports.

The seriousness of the brewing power struggle, according to the excerpt from the UAE's *al-Bayan*, has led the "Saada Wing" to further empower Yahya al-Shami, a veteran Saleh-era Yemeni military commander described as the Houthi Movement's "actual military leader." According to the article, al-Shami recently replaced Mohammed Ali al-Houthi on the Supreme Political Council, the first step in a plan that would eventually see al-Shami taking over the council's presidency from Mashat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Ansarullah Leader Abdel Malek Alhouthi.

Source: RuneAgerhus via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansarullah_Leader_Abdel_Malek_Alhouthi_\(01\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansarullah_Leader_Abdel_Malek_Alhouthi_(01).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

"...The conflict between top-ranking Houthi leaders for money, influence and power is between two conflicting wings..."

Source:

"Mashat-al-Houthi Conflict Portends War on the Streets of Sana'a," *SkyNews Arabia*, 31 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y6dzgcow>

صراع المشاط والحوثي يندر بحرب في شوارع صنعاء

The conflict between top-ranking Houthi leaders for money, influence and power involves two conflicting wings. The first is represented by Mahdi Al-Mashat and the director of his office, Ahmed Hamed, along with Yahya Badr al-Din al-Houthi, Minister of Education, and Interior Minister Abdulkarim al-Houthi. The second wing is led by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, along with intelligence chief Abu Ali al-Hakim, as well as a wide range of military and political leaderships in Sana'a and provinces under the control of Iranian followers. Sources close to the Houthi group said that the differences moved to the top ranks and have begun to escalate between the current Revolutionary Committee and the Supreme Political Council.

Source:

"Preventive Security' ... The Hidden Houthi Weapon," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 December 2017. <https://tinyurl.com/yyvhvoqn>

{الأمن الوقائي}... سلاح الحوثيين الخفي

Al-Sharq al-Awsat learned from security sources in Sana'a that the Houthis used Preventive Security, a secret multi-tasking security force which receives its orders directly from the group's leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi, to eliminate its former ally President Ali Abdullah Saleh...

The size of the force is estimated at 3,000 people, including experts in information technology and engineers specialized in communications, monitoring and analysis. It also includes a military unit trained for special operations, including raids, assassinations and explosives manufacturing. There is another unit tasked with recruitment, while another does advocacy work (cultural security) and functions, which according to the sources include the dissemination of the ideas of the group and its founder Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, as well as infiltrating the media and organizing courses, seminars and workshops, whether in Yemen, Beirut or Iran...

The sources explained that this multi-tasking security force represents the intelligence arm of the leader of the group. Its functions go beyond focusing on the group's adversaries to also include elements of the group itself, where it monitors all movements of militia leaders and provides daily reports to the leader of the group, including all the details of the performance of the militia...

Continued: Is There a Crack in the Houthi Movement?

Source:

عودة الصراعات إلى داخل «البيت الانقلابي» في اليمن

“The Return of Internal Conflict to Yemen’s ‘Putschist Camp’,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 18 July 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/y5kw957b>

While disputes between the Houthi leaderships in Sana’a are expected to widen and spread to other militia-controlled areas, the conflict within the movement, particularly between the so-called “Saada” and “Tribal” wings, remains the actual frontrunner...

The province of Amran was not immune to this conflict. The day before yesterday, local sources in the province found the body of a tribal elder, a pro-militia leader called al-Waruri who previously worked to help the group in the invasion of Amran and Sana’a with money and fighters, on a road in the al-Qafla directorate, Amran Province. Tribal sources described the incident as “indicative of a mysterious assassination campaign led by Houthi leaders in the province.” Local residents accused the Preventive Security forces of involvement in the assassination of al-Waruri, especially after news of a dispute between him and Houthi leaders...

In the meantime, informed sources in Sana’a said that since the beginning of this month, the Preventive Security forces began to carry out large-scale arrests of a number of Houthi leaders and supervisors, accusing them of treason. Local media quoted sources close to the militias as saying that Preventive Security arrested more than 75 leaders in a month, including supervisors and Houthi officers in the capital and the provinces of Sana’a, Dhamar, Ibb, Hajjah and Amran, after storming their homes. They were put in a special prison belonging to Preventive Security.

Source:

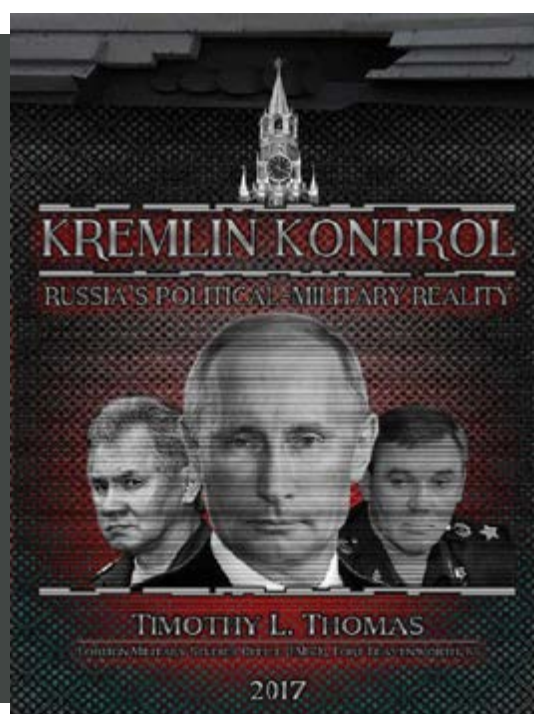
يحيى الشامي.. مهندس الانقلاب الحوثي يتقدم إلى الواجهة

“Yahya al-Shami... The Houthi Coup Engineer Comes to the Fore,” *al-Bayan*, 2 August 2019. <https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2019-08-02-1.3618582>

After failing to contain the conflict among its factions, the Houthi militia has pushed Major General Yahya al-Shami, the actual military commander of the militia who has been running things from behind for years, to the fore. At the same time, they reassigned the head of the so-called Revolutionary Committee, Muhammad Ali al-Houthi, to the Shura Council.

After chairing the so-called High Committee for Crises, which has managed clashes since the militia overthrew the government, al-Shami was appointed as a member of the so-called Supreme Political Council, which nominally administers areas under the militia’s control. This is in preparation for his taking over the council presidency, which is currently headed by Mahdi al-Mashat, the former chief of staff of the movement’s leader. At the same time, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi was removed from the council and appointed as a member of the Shura Council...

Before the invasion, according to military sources, al-Shami played a key role in planning the storming of Sana’a and the division of the city into security and military quadrants, as well as the distribution of armed cells in its neighborhoods in preparation for any possible confrontation. He supervised the command and mobilization of military operations, and led confrontations with forces supporting the late president in Sana’a in late 2017. Al-Shami brought in about 20,000 armed men and distributed them to the southern neighborhoods of the city. Al-Shami, who has emerged as a militia commander for decades, is credited with pursuing army officers he knew by virtue of his position, and establishing lines of communication with commanders of units in and around the capital to reassure them and dismantle these units by deploying staff and emptying them of their stockpiles and cadres.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>