

# Yemen's southern upheaval creates new risks, opportunities for Israel

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 31.12.2025

The seizure of territories in southeastern Yemen by the Southern Transitional Council, backed by the United Arab Emirates, constitutes the most significant territorial shift in Yemen since the UN-brokered ceasefire of 2022, with far-reaching implications for the country's internal balance of power.

The STC's move to take control of key districts in southern Yemen underscores the competition and the divergence of interests between Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen, as each seeks to shape the country's future in line with its national and regional priorities.

In the absence of agreed understandings, the situation has now sharply escalated. Saudi Arabia has announced the launch of a military operation in southern Yemen aimed at repelling STC forces. According to documentation from the port of Al-Mukalla, some 550 kilometers east of Aden, coalition aircraft led by Saudi Arabia struck two vessels arriving from a UAE port, seeking to destroy military equipment onboard. Following the strike, the Saudi-backed internationally recognized Yemeni government called on the separatist forces to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the Hadramawt and Al-Mahra governorates in southern Yemen.

At the same time, the recognized government, which retreated from Aden following the council's advance, issued a decree declaring a 90-day state of emergency across Yemen and announced its intention to impose a 72-hour closure of all ports and border crossings. Against this backdrop, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the UAE's actions as "highly dangerous," warning that they threaten Riyadh's national security and Yemen's stability, and made clear that Saudi Arabia would not hesitate to take steps to neutralize the threat.

What does this mean for Israel?

## Houthi attention diverted away from Israel

The strengthening of the STC and its campaign of territorial expansion in southern Yemen ostensibly serves Israel's interests. A challenge to Houthi rule in Yemen could benefit Jerusalem by diverting Houthi attention away from Israel

toward the domestic arena, while also creating an opportunity to erode the Houthis' areas of influence and control. Early signs of criticism from senior Iranian officials toward the UAE, alongside belligerent rhetoric from Houthi media outlets against the STC, reflect the positive potential the council may hold for Israel.

The rise of the STC as a powerful and stable military force could generate momentum for a significant ground campaign against the Houthis, should this objective be placed at the top of the organization's priorities. Even absent such a campaign, the council's control over strategic points in the south and east of the country - particularly the ports of Aden and Al-Mukalla along Yemen's southern coastline - could enhance oversight of global trade routes in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, contribute to efforts to interdict arms smuggling to the Houthis, and weaken them accordingly.

That said, a prolonged struggle within the anti-Houthi camp could divert valuable resources needed for operations against the rebels, fracture the already fragile front arrayed against them, and thereby facilitate their further entrenchment. In this context, Israel has an interest in preserving a potential channel for rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, and a deepening rift between the UAE and Saudis complicates the prospects for trilateral cooperation, under American auspices, among all three.

Thus, the tangle of challenges and intra-Sunni frictions in the Yemeni arena requires Israel to exercise caution. At present, it appears advisable for Jerusalem to wait for greater clarity regarding developments on both the military and political fronts, refrain from taking sides, and focus instead on initiatives that advance shared interests with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

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