



About GTTAC

The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center (GTTAC) was created by Development Services Group, Inc., and our partner TraCCC of George Mason University to support our work for the U.S.

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Statistical Information for the Country Reports on

Terrorism. Data used in this report are from the GRID.

Views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the United States government.

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What Is the Houthi Movement?

Origins

The Houthis, officially Ansar Allah (meaning “supporters of God”), originated in the early 1990s in Yemen as a revivalist movement led by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. The group emerged in response to perceived marginalization and discrimination against Zaidi Shias by the Yemeni government. The Houthi movement gained prominence during the Saada insurgency that began in 2004, marked by confrontations with Yemeni authorities and their Saudi Arabian allies. The death of Hussein al-Houthi that same year led to the leadership passing to his brother Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who has since become the face of the movement.

Ideology

The group adheres to Zaidi Shia Islam, a branch of Shia Islam distinct from the Twelver Shia branch predominant in Iran. The group's ideology is rooted in a combination of religious revivalism and opposition to perceived injustice. The Houthis seek to address socioeconomic grievances, establish a just political order, and resists what it views as external intervention and influence, particularly from Saudi Arabia and the United States. While primarily a sectarian movement, the Houthis' rhetoric has evolved to incorporate broader nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments.

Capacity

The Houthi movement has demonstrated military prowess, particularly in guerrilla warfare and asymmetric tactics. The group's control over Yemen's mountainous terrain provides strategic advantages, allowing it to launch effective hit-and-run attacks. The group is capable of carrying out drone and missile attacks that target not only Saudi Arabia, the kingdom bordering its North, but also the United Arab Emirates and Israel. And it has targeted commercial shipping in the Red Sea. Ansar Allah has showcased its resilience by withstanding military interventions, including the Saudi-led coalition's air campaign since 2015. The movement's ability to mobilize support and navigate complex tribal dynamics has contributed to its enduring influence. GTTAC has been monitoring Houthi activity since 2018. In that time our GRID data has recorded more than 2,000 Houthi perpetrated incidents with over 6,300 people killed. While several groups, including Al-Qaida and ISIS affiliates are active in Yemen, GRID data shows that three quarters of all incidents in the country are attributed to the Houthis.

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Common Tactics

The Houthis employ a range of tactics, including ambushes, hit-and-run attacks, sniper attacks, and the use of improvised explosive devices. Ansar Allah also has engaged in missile and drone strikes, targeting military and civilian infrastructure, including in Saudi Arabian territory. Control over key ports has enabled the group to impose blockades and influence the flow of goods in the region. The Houthis' tactics often involve exploiting local grievances and tribal affiliations to garner support.

Funding

The exact sources of the Houthis' funding are challenging to ascertain. However, the group is believed to finance its activities through a combination of local taxation, control over key economic sectors, and external support, mostly from Iran. The Houthis have been accused of diverting humanitarian aid and engaging in illicit activities to fund their operations.

International Relations

The IRI's actions have drawn condemnation from the US and its allies, who view the group as a terrorist organization linked to the Iranian government. Iran, on the other hand, maintains its support for the IRI's stated goals of resisting US presence in the region, further straining relations between Iran and the West.



Houthi Movement Timeline

Early Years (1992–2003)

1992: Husayn Badreddin al-Houthi establishes the "Believing Youth" movement, focusing on religious revivalism and a critique of perceived marginalization of Zaidi Shias.

1994: Zaidi Shia uprising fails, tensions simmer between the movement and Yemeni government.

2002–03: Clashes erupt between Houthi fighters and Yemeni forces after al-Houthi criticizes the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Yemeni government's cooperation with it.

First Saada War (2004–06)

June 2004: Yemeni government arrests al-Houthi, triggering armed insurgency in Saada province.

September 2004: Al-Houthi is killed in battle; his brother Abdul-Malik al-Houthi takes leadership.

2005-2006: Intense fighting between Houthi rebels and Yemeni government forces.

February 2006: Ceasefire agreement reached, but tensions remain high.

Second Saada War (2007–10)

2007: Renewed clashes between Houthis and Yemeni government after ceasefire breaks down.

2008–09: Several ceasefire attempts fail, fighting spreads to neighboring provinces.

February 2010: Another ceasefire agreement brokered; Houthi rebels agree to withdraw from occupied territories.

Arab Spring and Rise to Power (2011–15)

2011: Houthis support anti-government protests during the Arab Spring, demanding broader political participation.

2014: Houthis join forces with Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh against his successor Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Arab Spring and Rise to Power (2011–15) Continued

September 2014: Houthi rebels capture Sanaa, the Yemeni capital, Hadi flees the country.

February 2015: Saudi Arabia launches military intervention in support of Hadi, marking the start of the full-blown Yemeni Civil War.

Yemeni Civil War (2015 to Present):

2015–17: Intense fighting between Houthi rebels and Saudi-led coalition forces across Yemen.

December 2017: Houthis assassinate former President Saleh, accusing him of betraying their alliance.

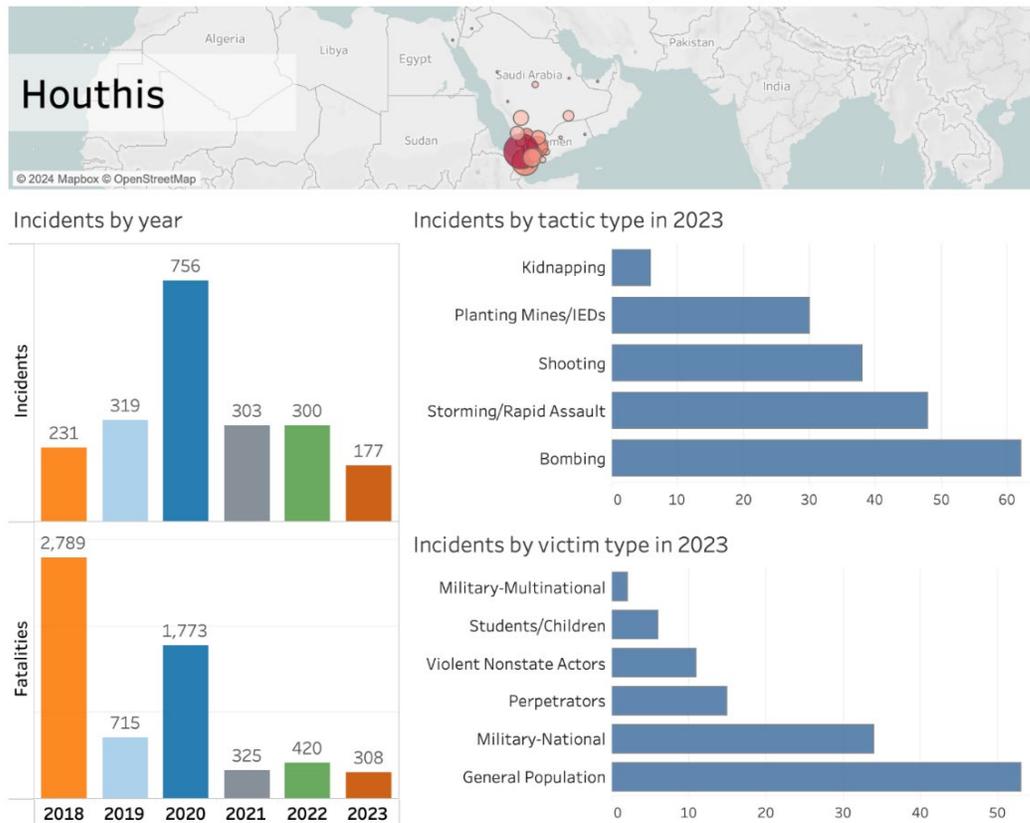
2018–2020: Stalemate in the conflict, humanitarian crisis deepens with millions displaced and facing famine.

January 2021: U.S. designates Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization - later revoked.

2022: Limited ceasefire agreements hold in some areas, sporadic fighting continues. Houthis launch drone and missile attacks against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

October 2023 to Present: The Red Sea Crisis. Reacting to the conflict between Hamas and Israel, the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and in coordination with other Iranian-backed groups in the region, the Houthis attack trade ships and naval forces in the Gulf of Aidan. They also launch missile and drone attacks on southern Israel.

Figure 1



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Note: GTTAC data collection for Yemen and the Houthis is still incomplete for 2023.