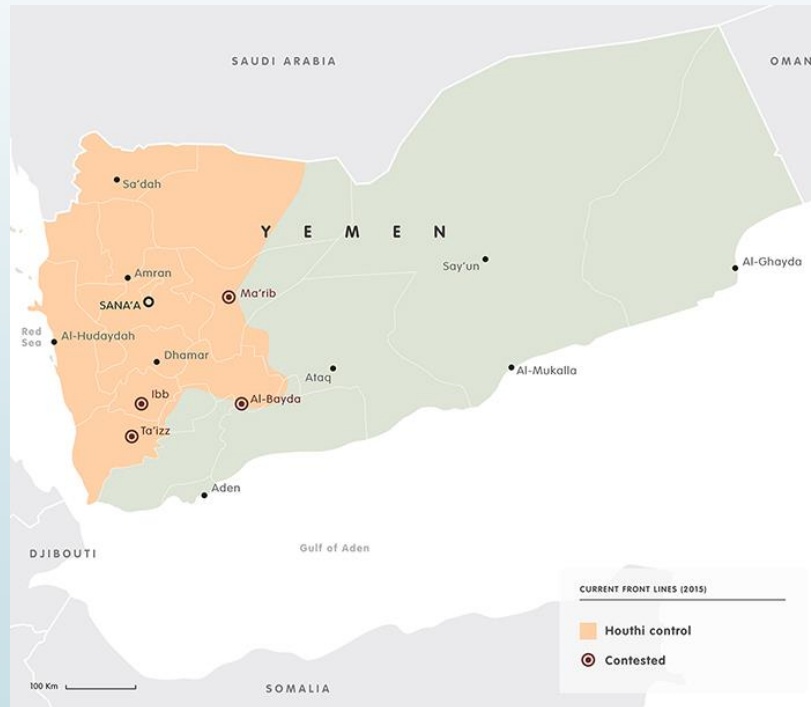


Yemen's Civil War: 2015- Present

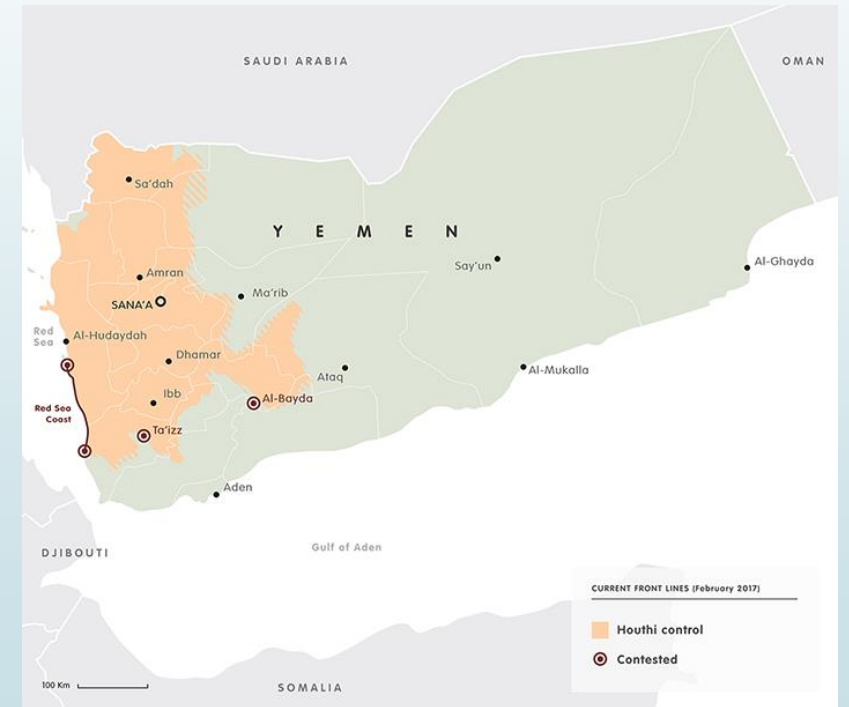
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Shirley Souryal

2015



2017



<http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/yemen>



Contents: A conflict map on Yemen

- ▶ Brief Summary of the conflict in Yemen
 - ▶ A chronological timeline
- ▶ Conflict map will incrementally unveil the parties and dynamics of the civil war in Yemen, from 2015- the present, in stages:
 - ▶ A brief introduction of the key parties
 - ▶ An introduction to the international linkages that support, directly or indirectly, the primary parties in conflict
 - ▶ Key issues and psychological factors of escalation
 - ▶ Select events and power dynamics
 - ▶ Observations and Analysis
 - ▶ Geographical maps highlighting various challenges
 - ▶ References



Yemen: A brief summary

The conflict in Yemen is not a single conflict but a “mosaic of multi-faceted, regional, local and international power struggles” resulting from the present circumstances and historical dynamics (www.ecfr.eu)

The current crisis in Yemen began in 2015. While the history of Yemen is riddled with battles between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebels, the civil war’s roots point to 2011, after an uprising that began January 27, 2011, forced then President Ali Abdullah Saleh to relinquish power on February 27, 2012, to Mr. Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, his deputy (www.bbc.com). Many Yemenis blame the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of Arab states, which was instrumental in brokering a deal in 2011, along with the US and UK, allowing Saleh to remain in power into 2012. Note: This same alliance later became involved in the war coalition in 2015, in support of Hadi’s government, against Saleh loyalists and the Houthis (Abdul Ghaffar, personal communication).

During the transitional period that began in 2012, Mr. Hadi’s government had to deal with a myriad of issues that had already existed in Yemen, “including attacks by Al-Qaeda, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of many military officers” to the previous president, “as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity” (www.bbc.com). The Houthis, a Zaidi Shia’ Muslim minority from the north, fought against former President Saleh for a decade, rejecting government repression, and poverty (www.pri.org). They took advantage of Mr. Hadi’s struggles and began controlling the Saada province.

By this time, many Yemenis who were frustrated with the government supported the Houthis, including southern secessionists, at one point. They later sided with Hadi's government, for a time. They aligned themselves with whichever party they believed would assist them in their quest of gaining recognition and, ultimately, secession. Their experience of relative deprivation, poor governance and inequality in the south mirrored that of the Houthis in the northern region (Abdul Ghaffar). In September 2014, Houthis entered the capital, Sanaa, and set up roadblocks. By January 2015, they had successfully controlled the capital and put President Hadi under house arrest, after having surrounded the palace. Soon afterwards, he fled to Aden, in the south, which was outside of Houthi reach (www.bbc.com).

Even though the Houthi territory is smaller in size, it has a greater population density than the Hadi government-controlled region in the south, which accounts for approximately 80% of Yemen's land (Abdul Ghaffar). The Houthis depended on Saleh and his loyalists for support and logistics in the conflict, but more importantly, they relied on his influence, which gave them power. Some Yemenis believe that Saleh had a hand in the Houthi takeover of Sanaa, because of the sudden nature of the event (Abdel Ghaffar).

By March 2015, Houthis and former President Saleh's loyal forces attempted to take control of the country, forcing President Hadi to go abroad. It was at this stage that a Saudi-led coalition, including eight other predominantly-Sunni states, began their air campaign against the Houthis, who they believed were being backed by Iran. This coalition received intelligence and logistical assistance from the United Kingdom, the United States and France. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State (ISIS), who already had a presence in Yemen, intensified their attacks, with ISIS focusing primarily on the north provinces and AQAP, predominantly in the south.

The coalition's air campaign and naval blockade magnified the humanitarian crisis already present in Yemen, resulting in over 7 million people on the verge of starvation. Since 2015, over 7000 civilians have been killed, 42,000 injured and over 3 million have been displaced (www.bbc.com). UN states 10000 casualties, and many others from indirect causes such as disease (www.ecft.eu).



Historical Background:

For 100 years, the country was split into two parts: Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the north, with Zaidi Shia' theocratic rule) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which reflected British rule, in the south (www.ecfr.eu). They were unified on May 22, 1990, but the divisions remained evident. For Yemenis, it was an emotional unification, rather than one that brought the country together politically and economically, highlighting the divisions between the northern market-oriented mentality and the communist south (Abdul Ghaffar, personal communication).

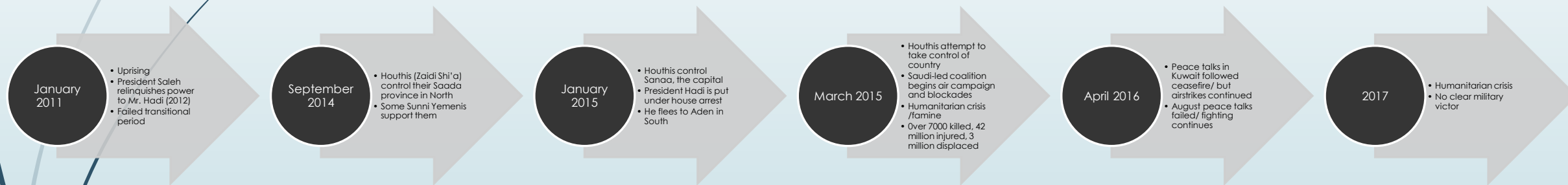
Yemen's value, throughout history, has been its location along the Red Sea, through which much of the gas and oil transport passes, along the way to Bab el Mandab Strait.

Yemeni identity was not marked by Sunni or Shi'a affiliation, as demonstrated by the fact that intermarriage was normal, as was praying at the same mosques. It was the rise of a political form of Islam that emerged (i.e. - The Muslim Brotherhood), and linked the Islah party with Zaidi Houthis. Also, Sunni/Salafism ideology in the northern Zaidi region raised tensions and was a key factor for the rise of Houthi movement (www.ecfr.eu).

Recent events:

While it is described as a proxy war, magnifying the regional, religious divide between Sunni and Shi'a, it may 'shift' to one of identity, with the Houthi's claim as having the right to power, not specifically as Shi'a, but as having a bloodline to the prophet. They call themselves Sada. It may become a tug of war between Hadi's push for unification, the secessionist's goal of separation and the Houthis mission to rule Yemen (Abdul Ghaffar).

Relevant events

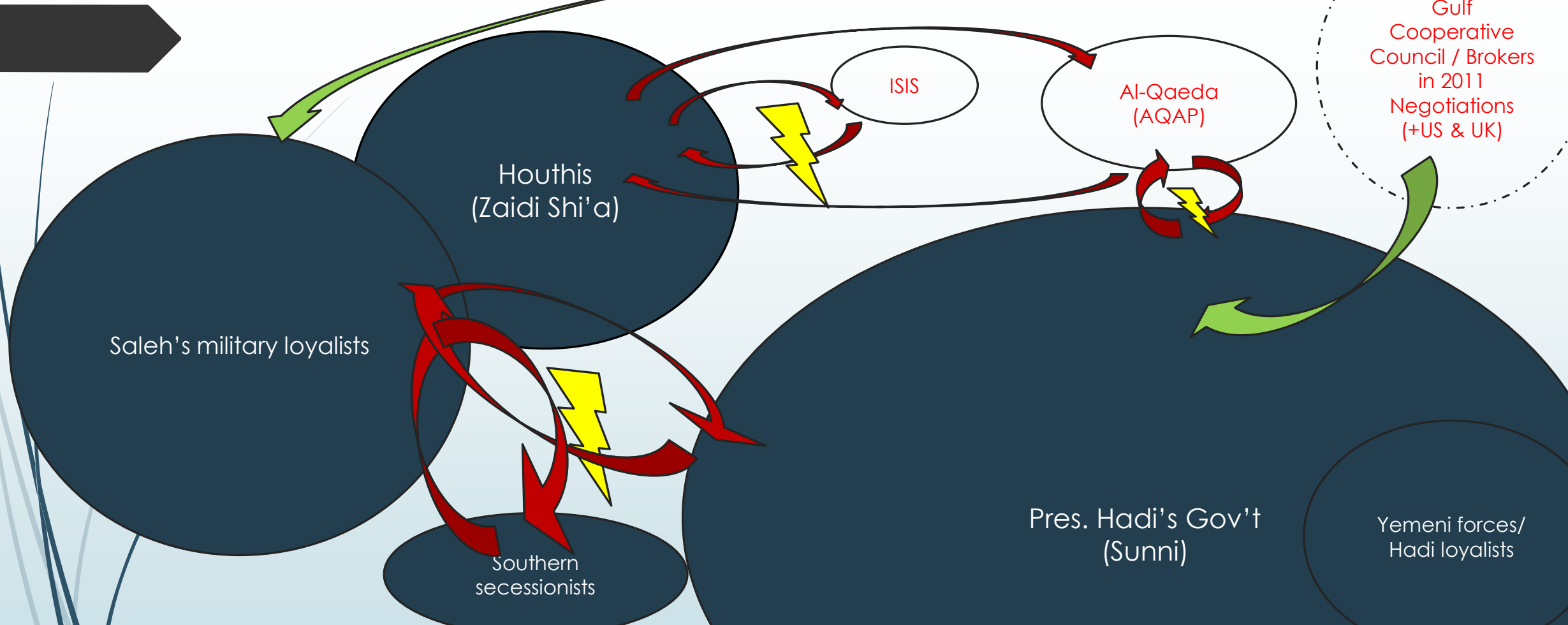


MILITARY SITUATION MAP - Control areas as of September 12.

- Former government, Houthi military, tribal allies
- Yemeni government forces backed by Saudi-led coalition
- al-Qaeda and tribal allies
- Tanker ships seized by Yemen on Sept. 14

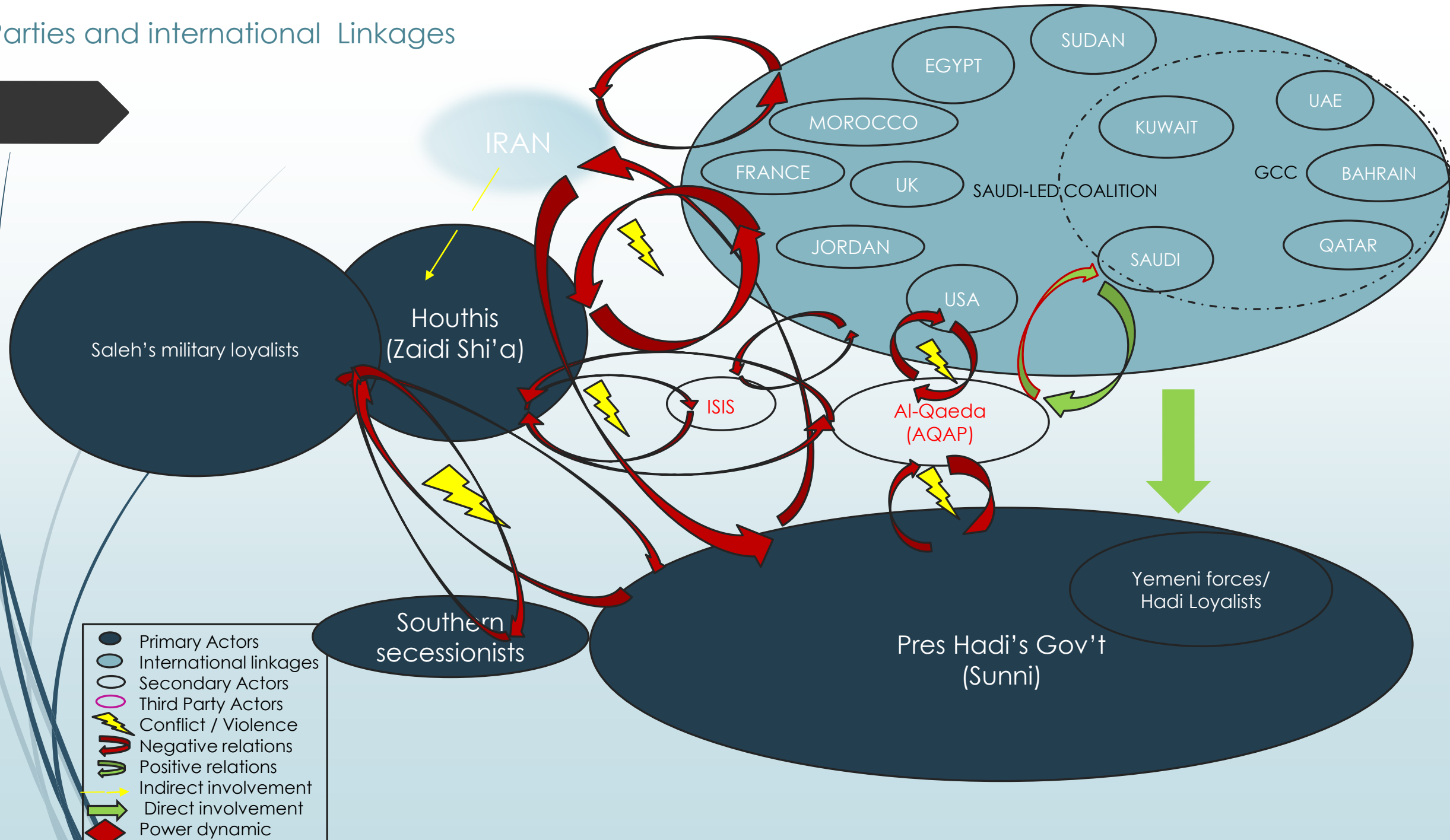


Introduction of Primary Parties in 2015

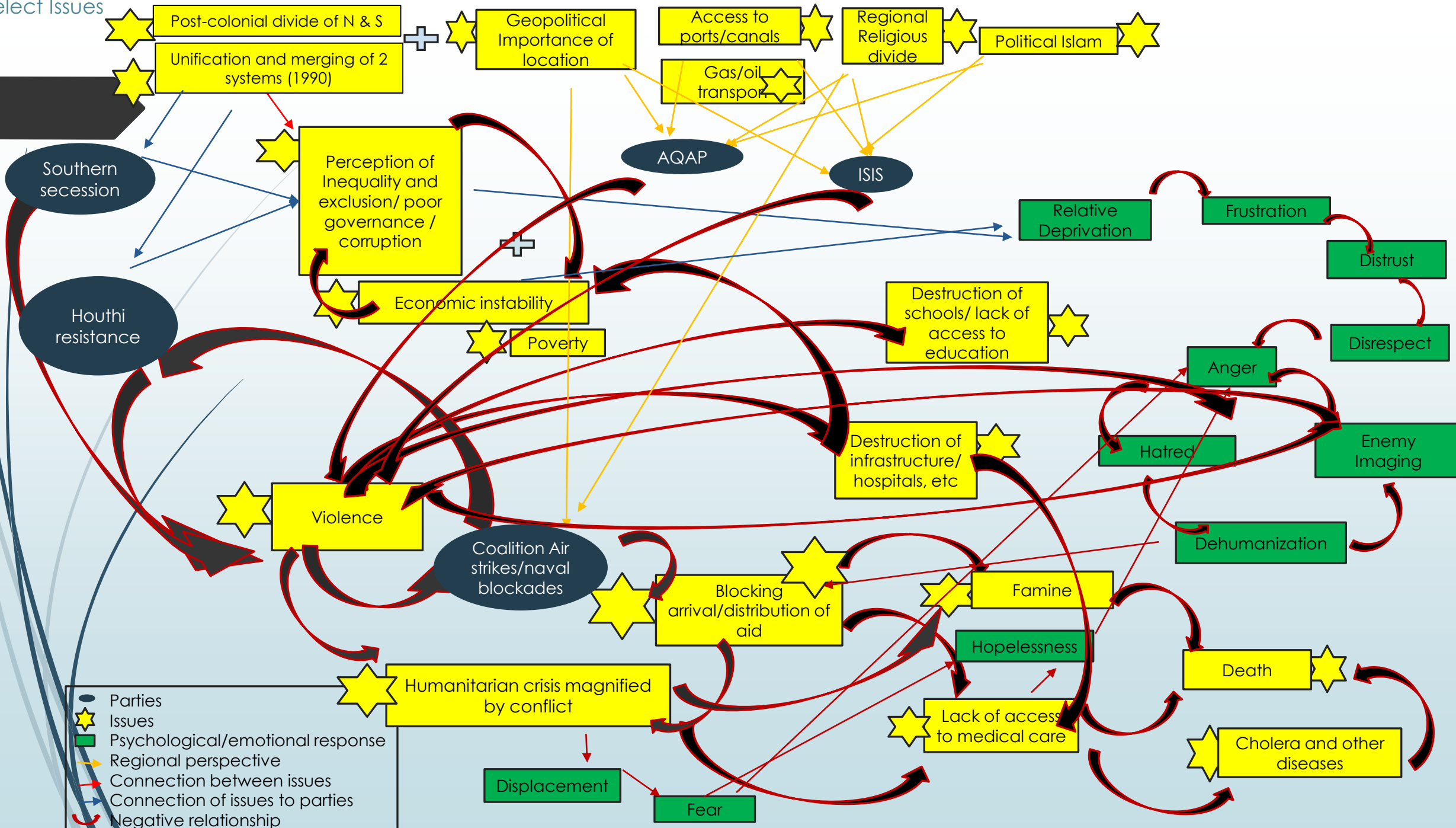


- Primary Actors
- Secondary Actors
- ⚡ Conflict / Violence
- ↔ Negative relations
- Positive relations

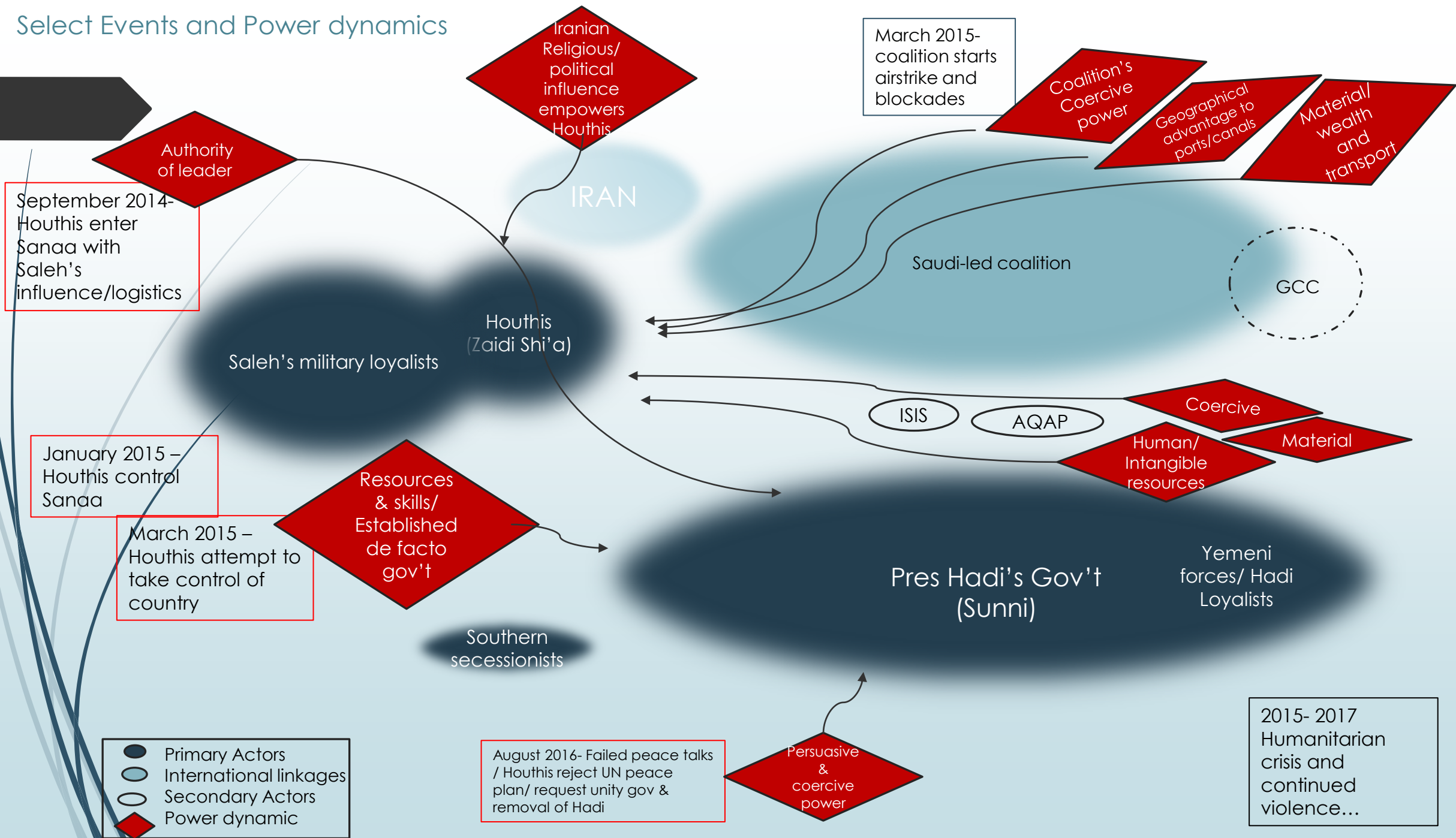
Parties and international Linkages



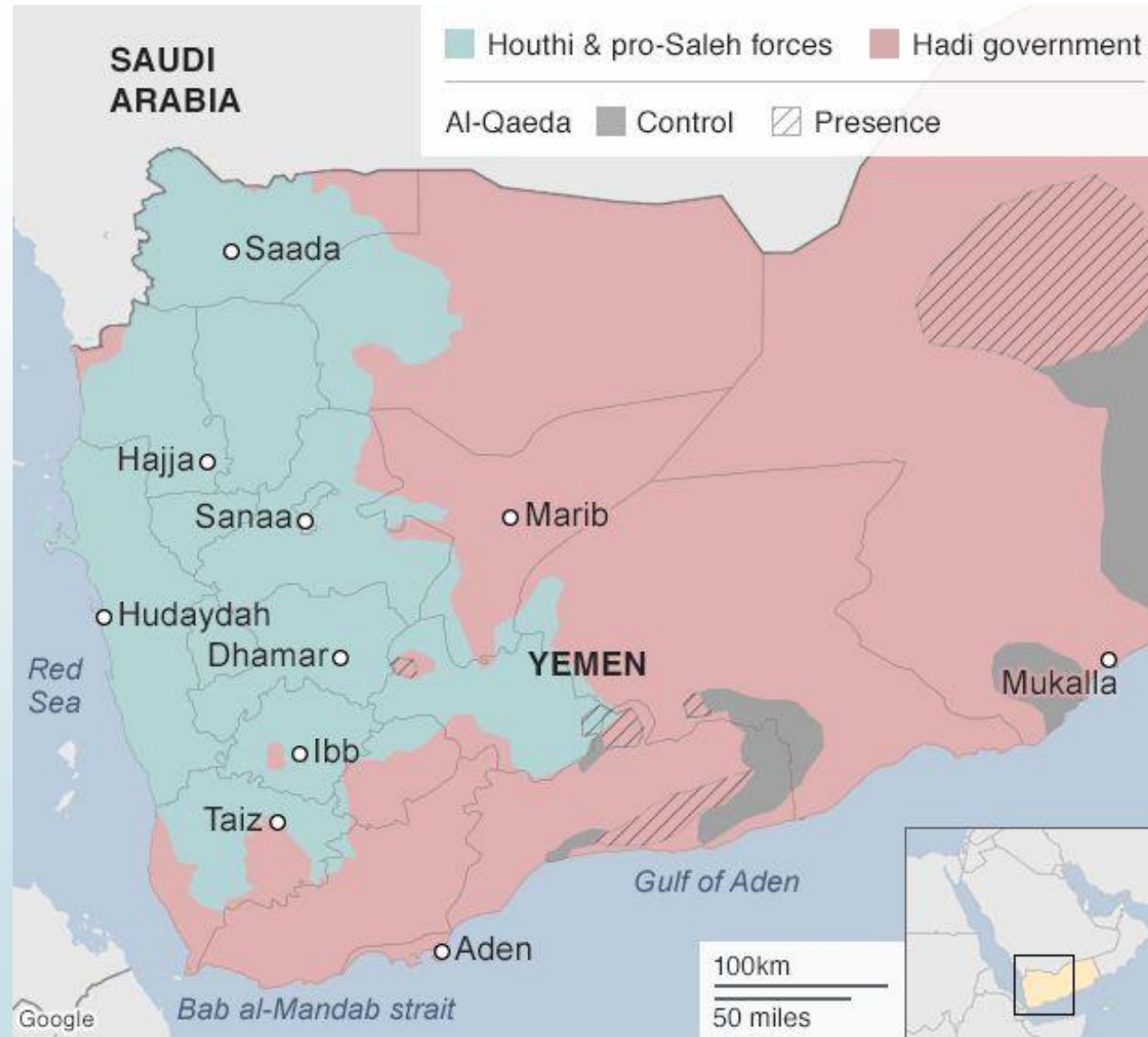
Select Issues



Select Events and Power dynamics



Who controls Yemen?



Source: Risk Intelligence (13 March 2017) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34011187> BBC

Observations and Analysis

Observations

- ▶ The hot-spot on the map clearly points to 'violence' as it involves all of the parties and touches on many of the issues in some form or another. Poor governance, inequality and corruption led to the perception of relative deprivation for Houthis and southern secessionists. There is tug of war between those who want to preserve the country's unity and those who want autonomy. The maps point out that the pursuit of power and governance, for several of the parties, has been driving much of the violence.
- ▶ Not a religious battle, per se. It is defined, as such, by Houthi minority, and the Saudi-led coalition, for their own interests (access/control).

Analysis

- ▶ The emotional and psychological impact of colonialism, and then unification (1990) created an 'unmendable' divide between the North and South. Given that a number of arrows on the map pointed to violence that stemmed from issues of the perception of inequality and exclusion, poor governance and corruption, I believe that fair and equitable access to good governance would help restore balance to the country. Not an easy task given the immense divide and the militant takeover of territories by ISIS and AQAP for their own objectives. The challenge becomes transitioning from coercive power to that of integrative/cooperative power. Using a systems approach that is adaptive, one can affect change and improve the political and economic environment in several arenas, including using power-sharing strategies that may stabilize the country, and potentially restore relationships that cross-cut society. For Lederach, "relationships are at the heart of transformation", since they are linked into the 'web' of interconnections that shape the context of the conflict. He recommends a transformational approach that begins by having a positive orientation toward conflict and envisioning the potential for constructive change. Additionally, one must view the immediate issues in the context of the relationship patterns, addressing issues of injustice by empowering people with access to governance and agency to affect change at all social levels: the interpersonal, inter-group and structural (Lederach).
- ▶ Regional, religious 'proxy war' between Iran (Shi'a) and Saudi Arabia (Sunni) is actually being fought over territory, access, and ultimately power/rule in Yemen. The inclusion of militant terrorist groups with varying objectives and ideologies adds to the complexity and makes the transformation toward constructive change more challenging. It is not as simple as changing the enemy-image of the other. Rather, it requires creativity, according to Lederach, who defines "moral imagination as the capacity to imagine and generate constructive processes that are rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence and yet transcend these destructive patterns." It requires a) the capacity to view even enemies in the web of relationships, b) the ability to embrace complexity, c) a commitment to the creative act, and d) an acceptance of the risk that accompanies violence (Lederach).

Observations and Analysis, continued

Observations

- Violence and destruction bred more violence and damaged the social fabric of the country.
- Yemen's location and geopolitical importance along the international gas/oil route is both its greatest asset and vulnerability.
- A severe humanitarian crisis is ongoing, leaving many on the brink of famine and death

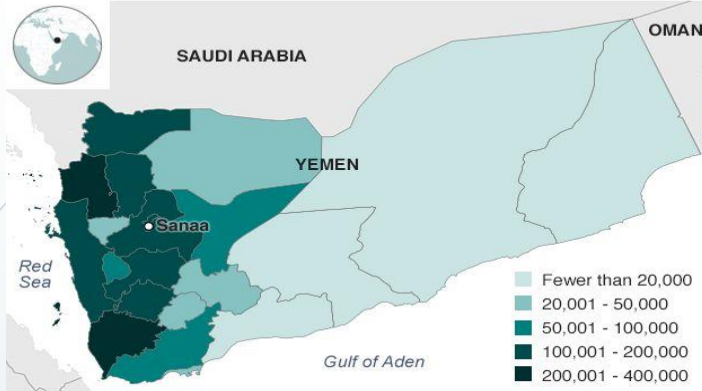
Analysis

- Bringing about an end to the violence, or Galtung's 'negative peace', (Miall) with movement towards positive peace is key. Restoring relationships is crucial to rebuilding Yemen, socially, psychologically, politically and economically. Recalling that Yemeni Shi'a and Sunnis used to pray in the same mosque and intermarry prior to the rise of political Islamic movements, it is possible to encourage cross-cutting social engagements and institutions, for example, by utilizing media, art/theater and education to emphasize and highlight the positive aspects of the Yemeni history and culture. First and foremost, addressing the horrific humanitarian crisis is paramount, and perhaps an excellent first step in restoring relations across enemy lines. Whether through the rebuilding of hospitals, or the establishment of mutual bereavement groups, is it possible to evoke compassion and humanize the enemy once again?
- The rise of political Islam and jihadist terrorists groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, may end up controlling the Bab el Mandab strait, through which flows much of the world's busiest transportation route. How can access to the ports/canals along the gas/oil route be used to further advance Yemen's future, politically and economically?
- Humanitarian aid must be given quickly and equitably. The dehumanization of Yemeni citizens is beyond reproach and must be rectified. Despite the fact that countless aid organizations have attempted to offer assistance, the ongoing violence and battles prohibits their effectiveness.

Yemen: In the wake of war...

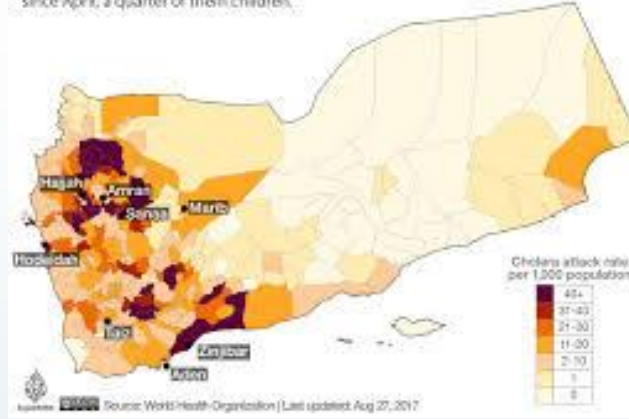
People forced to flee their homes in Yemen

Location of internally displaced people

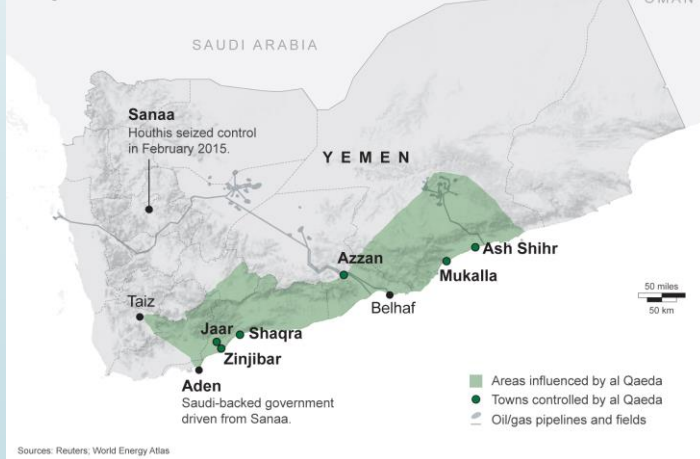


Cholera outbreak in Yemen

The "worst cholera outbreak in the world" has claimed more than 2,000 lives since April, a quarter of them children.



Al Qaeda in Yemen



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