

The War on Yemen Just Went from Bad to Worse for Saudi Arabia

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The UAE's large-scale military drawdown in Yemen is extremely disadvantageous to the Saudis' strategic objectives in the conflict and will likely lead to the Kingdom scrambling for a "face-saving" exit of its own.

Nobody's won the War on Yemen (except for maybe the Southern Transitional Council), but that doesn't mean that they lost, either, except for Saudi Arabia. The Ansar Allah ("Houthis") administer the most demographically and economically important part of the country even though they failed to take control of the state's entire territory, while the UAE obtained invaluable experience managing mercenary groups and also [acquired several regional bases](#) throughout the course of its campaign, to say nothing of the [rising South Yemeni proxy state](#) that they're largely responsible for creating. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, is less secure than it was at the onset of the conflict now that the Ansar Allah's military capabilities have evolved to the point of enabling them to [regularly bomb](#) the Kingdom's territory, and it's dangerously falling into the trap of "mission creep" by [seeking to replace](#) some of the withdrawn Emirati units with its own.

Saudi Arabia has hitherto eschewed any significant involvement on the ground in favor of more safely bombing targets from the air, but its ally's [military drawdown](#) is compelling it take a more direct role in the conflict. This is a mistake since the Kingdom cannot possibly hope to make progress in the war on its own if it was unable to do so when the UAE and the Emirate's much more numerous mercenary allies were fighting on the ground on Riyadh's behalf. It appears as though MBS isn't quite sure what to do in this scenario which seemingly caught him by surprise so he's reacting as expected and diving deeper into the quagmire instead of extricating himself from it. Nevertheless, it appears to only be a matter of time before his country realizes the inevitability of a "compromise" solution to the conflict, one which will probably recognize the de-facto restoration of North and South Yemen's independence through a "federalized" arrangement as [the most realistic outcome](#) of the war.

In any case, it's impossible to spin the war as a success for the Saudis since their defeat is visible for the entire world to see. The [world's largest weapons purchaser](#) was unable to dislodge a group of rebels from the neighboring state in which it traditionally wielded domineering influence for decades despite spending hundreds of billions of dollars attempting to do so. Its main ally, the UAE, has left it high and dry in pursuit of its own interests mainly having to do with restoring its reputation after it was besmirched through its leading involvement in what's since become the [world's worst humanitarian crisis](#). Saudi

Arabia is now forced to scramble for its own “face-saving” exit as well, though that might no longer be possible after the obviousness of its strategic defeat. Although some might still look to Saudi Arabia as the leader of the “Ummah” for reasons of religious symbolism, few would consider it the community’s geopolitical leader after the War on Yemen.

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