

Summary

Yemen is at risk of returning to full-scale war civil war according to the UN Special Envoy for Yemen. Rising tensions and an economic divide between the northern and southern regions of the country have led to an increase in military preparations and reinforcements. Clashes between Yemeni forces and Houthi militias have been observed along several frontlines across the country. Moreover, the exchange of strikes with Israel has the potential of escalating into a regional conflict as the situation continues to escalate.

Recent events and developments

On July 23, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg warned of a “devastating” regional escalation and the threat of the country returning to full-scale civil war. The Saudi-backed government and the Houthis failed to renew the cease-fire that expired in October 2022. Both sides have largely refrained from major escalatory actions, however, the conflict remains unresolved. An increase in military preparations and reinforcements, as well as clashes between Yemeni forces and Houthi militias along several frontlines, including Al-Dhale’, Al-Hudaydah, Lahj, Ma’rib, Sa’adah and Tai’z, have been reported. Grundberg has linked the public threats to return to full-fledged war to the exacerbating economic issues driven by a substantial drop in oil revenues and diminished customs revenues due to the redirection of imports from Aden to Houthi-controlled ports. Besides, the economic fragmentation between the Houthi-controlled North and the southern areas is leading to rising tensions. On top of this, the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war has heightened the risk of regional escalation as the Houthis stand firmly against Israel, launching long-range missile and drone attacks and targeting international shipping in and around the Red Sea. On July 19 a Houthi drone attack struck Tel Aviv. In retaliation, Israel has launched its first direct hit on Yemen on July 20, targeting the port city of Hodeidah. Hodeidah is Yemen's principal port and a vital entry point for up to 80% of fuel imports, food and other humanitarian aid.

Impact assessment

Yemen’s security is threatened on two fronts. Externally, the conflict with Israel has been escalating at alarming speeds. Domestically, the ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis and instances of violence provoked by advances of Houthi militias are fueling a potential return to full-scale civil war between the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and the Houthis. Israel’s attack may further damage the stalled peace process. As the Houthis are gaining popularity for their stance on the conflict, the group may become less likely to negotiate and take firmer action internally. Information Minister Moamar al-Eryani has accused the Houthis of using the Palestinian cause as a cover for their own expansionist agenda. The Gulf of Aden is a particularly unsafe location as Houthis have been consistently launching attacks from there targeting cargo ships. The attack on the port of Hodeidah has likely resulted in shortages of fuel, food, and other essentials, especially in the north of the country, and further attacks could exacerbate this. The local energy infrastructure has also suffered significant damage. This can in turn lead to civil unrest as locals struggle to access resources. Economic constrains have the potential to result in rising crime rates, including robberies and other forms of crime. Therefore, foreigners are at risk of becoming victims of harassment, robberies, and kidnapping due to their perceived wealth. Growing tensions, both internal and external, are almost certain to bring instability to the country.

Advice from Forth Global

- Avoid travel to Yemen as much as possible, especially in the north of the country.
- If travel is absolutely necessary, ensure that all employees travelling receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Ensure means to evacuate in the event of conflict breaking out.
- Avoid displays of wealth and contact with suspicious individuals and groups.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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