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Huthis' missile escalation against Saudi Arabia

For Saudi Arabia, it is more and more difficult to isolate the country from the security implications of the war in Yemen. In the last couple of months, the Huthis' launch of ballistic missiles against Saudi soil has increased in frequency, number and range.

Between 11-23 April, the Yemeni Zaydi Shia movement-militia was able to hit the kingdom nine times: Riyadh (11th of April), Jizan (Saudi Aramco plant, 11th and 12th of April), Najran (16th of April), Jizan (Saudi Aramco plant, the 18th, 20th, 22-23rd of April), Najran (27th of April). Saudi officials declared that all the missiles were intercepted by the Saudi air defence system (Patriot PAC-2 missiles).

Since June 2015, the Huthis have launched more than 100 missiles against Saudi Arabia, according to Riyadh. Between 25-26th of March, Ansarullah [the Partisans of God, the military organisation of the Huthis] launched seven missiles on Saudi soil to mark the third anniversary of the start of the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen, hitting Riyadh (with three missiles), Jizan, Khamis Mushayt and Najran. In that occasion, an Egyptian resident was killed by the missiles' debris, and two others were injured. On 30 March, an Indian resident was also injured in Najran.

This phase of the Yemeni crisis presents an undeniable escalation of the missiles attacks against the kingdom, including Riyadh. Two recent developments suggest that this trend is likely to continue in the medium-term, posing severe security implications for the whole region.

On April 19, the number two of Huthis' leadership, Saleh Al-Sammad, was killed during a Saudi airstrike in Hodeida [*L'Orient Le Jour*, "Assassinat du chef politique des Houthis, menaces de vengeance", 23rd of April 2018]. Al-Sammad was the chief of the Ansarullah's Supreme Political Council: he represented the "political wing" of the Huthi movement and was one of the engineers of the pragmatic alliance with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's tribal network. Due to Al-Sammad's death, the "military wing" of Ansarullah, headed by Mohammed Ali Al-Huthi, chief of the Revolutionary Supreme Committee, is likely to gain new leverage in the movement, so further weakening UN-led diplomatic efforts.

Moreover, on the 19th of April, the “Red Sea operation” also started to re-conquer Yemen’s Western coast, currently seized by the Huthis. Tareq Mohammed Saleh, nephew of the former president, has been leading the military struggle to cut Huthis’ control on the territory linking Al-Mokha (the city renowned for its coffee, now controlled by the Saudi-led forces) and Taiz, still contested. Under the banner of the “National Resistance Forces”, Tareq Saleh rallied former Republican Guard’s soldiers and the Central Security Forces, an élite body loyal to the recognised president Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi. Therefore, given the persistency of the Yemeni war and the missile escalation, Saudi national security is now less assured than three years ago.

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