



# Yemen FAULT LINES

*SOCIOCULTURAL FAULT LINES are “exploitable sources of instability in the human domain; they can be real or perceived.”*

*Source: GCKN Fault Line Methodology, 2017*

## Fault Lines

### FL1: Statehood Narratives

Three distinct *Statehood Narratives* dominate Yemen’s political space: 1) Yemen as a tribal-nationalist Zaydi state, 2) Yemen as a unified federal republic, 3) Yemen as two independent states.

### FL2: Mobilized Religion

Religion has become a key lever of mobilization in Yemen, sharpening divisions between Zaydi Shiites and Sunnis. Key groups employing religion as a mobilization tool include Ansarallah (the Houthis), the Islah Party, and Salafi militias.

### FL3: Kinship Networks and Alliances

Relations between kinship-identity groups—families, clans, tribes—are a key driver of national-level Yemeni politics. Kinship alliances and networks are fluid and dynamic, constantly presenting actors with opportunities for exploitation.

### FL4: The Political Economy of Conflict

Yemen’s ongoing conflict has exacerbated poverty, scarcity, and environmental degradation, transforming the Yemeni economy into a tangle of self-perpetuating war-related activities.

*Yemen’s strategic location and large number of exploitable conditions make it an arena for domestic and external actors to perpetually capitalize on the country’s fault lines.*

## Implications

### 1 China, Russia Deepen Regional Influence via Yemen.



**Moderate Risk**  
Likelihood: Likely  
Consequence: Critical

### 2 Events in Yemen Strengthen Iran, Upend Gulf Security Architecture



**Moderate Risk**  
Likelihood: Highly Likely  
Consequence: Critical

### 3 Conditions Allow for Birth, Expansion, or Renewal of Sunni Violent Extremist Organizations



**Moderate Risk**  
Likelihood: Even Chance  
Consequence: Moderate



**EXPLOITABLE  
CONDITIONS**



731 McClellan Ave, Bldg 48  
Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027

Robert W. Kurz, Director • 913-684-5972  
[robert.w.kurz.civ@army.mil](mailto:robert.w.kurz.civ@army.mil)

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# OE Exploitation: Domestic, Regional, and Global

## DOMESTIC

**Ansarallah** leadership has rallied around the proto-imamate *Statehood Narrative*, used *Religious Mobilization* to gain new adherents, established durable *Kinship Networks and Alliances*, and enriched itself by exploiting *The Political Economy of Conflict*.



### The Internationally Recognized Government (IRG)

has exploited a reformist *Statehood Narrative* in order to maintain the status quo, while at the same time exploiting Yemen's other fault lines to establish a broad coalition whose very diversity also makes it vulnerable to exploitation.



### The Southern Transitional Council (STC)

has effectively exploited the Southern *Statehood Narrative* and Yemen's other fault lines in ways that often weaken its purported allies in the IRG, rather than its purported adversaries in Ansarallah.



## REGIONAL

**Iran** has jointly exploited *Statehood Narratives* and *Religious Mobilization* to further its own policy goals, while also exploiting *The Political Economy of Conflict* to flood Ansarallah with crucial military assistance.



### Saudi Arabia

has for years successfully exploited Yemeni *Kinship Networks and Alliances* and *Religious Mobilization*. Saudi Arabia's ability to exploit these fault lines has been substantially degraded by the actions of other domestic and regional actors, particularly Ansarallah.



### UAE

has effectively exploited the Southern *Statehood Narrative* to curb the influence of Political Islam, as well as *The Political Economy of Conflict* in order to establish allied militias and gain influence over strategic Yemeni territory.



## GLOBAL

**Russia** may seek to exploit Yemen's *Statehood Narrative* fault line through diplomatic and informational tools, so long as doing so does not jeopardize existing positive relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.



**China** may seek to exploit *The Political Economy of Conflict* in Yemen to gain access to natural resources and strategic locations, so long as doing so does not jeopardize existing positive relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.



**Global jihadist and other radical Sunni actors** may exploit Yemen's political, cultural and geographical particularities to establish a haven. They may also exploit the fine line that distinguishes Yemen's various mobilized Sunni groups.

## YEMEN POST-ARAB SPRING TIMELINE



**2011**  
Nationwide protests against President Saleh turn violent

Hadi elected transitional president (2012-2014)

**2012**



**2014**  
National Dialogue Conference collapses, Houthis take over Sana'a, Hadi flees to Aden and then Riyadh

Saudi-led military campaign launched to expel Houthis from Sana'a

**2015**



**2016**  
Houthi ballistic missile targets Riyadh, Saleh killed by Houthi gunmen

Southern Transitional Council (STC) established

**2017**



**2019**  
UAE withdraws from Yemen, tensions build between IRG and STC in Aden and beyond

IRG President Hadi replaced by eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, headed by Rashad al-Alimi

**2022**

