

The Huthi Movement in Yemen: Ideology, Ambition, and Security in the Arab Gulf

Abdullah HAMIDADDIN (Editor)

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Abdullah Hamidaddin edited a comprehensive study published by Bloomsbury in cooperation with King Faisal Research and Islamic Studies. The book provides outstanding research on the Huthi movement including sections on its ideology, belief system; and role in reconfiguring one of the oldest and strongest culture and history in the region. The current state of the Yemeni government, that is the divided and insecure rule of country since the Arab revolts in 2011 poses military and political threats to the Arab Gulf States and the Horn of Africa. Yemen hosts paramilitary groups like the Huthis and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula along with unorganized groups belonging to Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as military groups with links to the Southern secessionists. Yemen is a failed state that poses serious insecurities for its citizens and for other states in the region. The underlining socio-economic problems of Yemen in terms of lack of economic activities, food insecurity, and the security of civilians are closely related with the ongoing proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran; the military intervention led by Saudi Arabia since 2015; the internal conflict among three major groups including Huthis, the Central government and the Southern secessionists. Amid all these overlapping elements of the conflict, the nature of the Huthi movement and how it has evolved to be major actor in Yemen require further attention.

The purpose of the book is to illustrate the nature and impacts of the Huthi movement in Yemen. A multi-layered and multi-disciplined analysis of the movement in the volume edited by Hamidaddin divides and categorizes the overall content. The research, thus, is a significant and meaningful academic effort as it fills in a valid gap on the Huthi movements in the literature for this closed religious and political group operating in Yemen. The book is also important for understanding the current form and content of the war in Yemen because the case studies in the volume focus on quite recent issues like the education and media policies of Huthis.

The book has 14 chapters in four subsections. These subsections of the book are not overlapping; thus, the reader is neither lost in intense reading nor exposed to repetitive

discussions. The first part of the book is on Huthi ideology and their belief system. In chapter one, Bernard Haykel depicts the religious and political ideology behind the movement and its relations with Zaydism in Yemen. In the second chapter, Mohammed Almahfali shows how dominant political themes in Huthi speeches changed from founder to current leader representing a nationalist discourse in the current stage differentiating itself from the initial Umma-oriented narrative.

Chapter three also delves into the historical narratives. However, differentiating it from the previous section, Alexander Weissenburger connects the historical narratives over Zaydism milestones with the notion of soft war. Weissenburger highlights that the movement seeks a historical legitimacy using more soft-war tools: to normalize Huthi rule, to make Zaydism and the ahl al-bayt an integral part of Yemeni nationhood and to draw analogies between today and the struggles of earlier Imams.

The second part of the book focuses on how Huthi policies have reconfigured Yemen's society. Marieke Brandt elaborates on the articulation of novel elements in tribal relations and the tribe-ruler axis in the Imamate, Republican and Huthi rule in Chapter four. Ewa Strzelecka's chapter five examines the challenges faced by women under the Huthi regime. The systemic sociopolitical repressive policies on women and the emerging ideology-driven violence are central elements that the chapter impressively illustrates. The sixth chapter by Shaker Lashuel scrutinizes Huthi policies and intervention in education. In a similar vein, Hannah Porter in chapter seven delves into Huthis' media and public messaging propaganda. Emily Summer's Chapter eight introduces the reader to traditional Yemeni folk literature, Zamil, as a propaganda tool and discusses how it works. Notably these chapters in the second part of the research, illustrate well-established case studies on the societal repercussions of Huthi engagement in a war-ravaged country.

The third section of the book focuses on the re-engineering of the state under Huthi rule. Anthony Chimento in the ninth chapter criticizes the Huthis' relations with tribal and sectarian groups through the use of coercive tools. Charles Schmitz in chapter ten discusses the Huthi visions for establishing a Yemeni state through their accumulated power and authority. Joshua Rogers in Chapter eleven also questions the future of Yemen under Huthi rule, discussing the involvement of formal institutions at the local level.

The last section of the book combines the Huthis' local policies and adaptation process with the movement's regional alliances. Chapter twelve by James Spencer is comprehensive research on the military support and technique of the movement illustrating a detailed and intensive analysis of hybrid warfare in Yemen since 2015. Eleonora Ardemagni draws our attention to the border problems between Saudi Arabia and Yemen and to the evolution of hybrid security governance in chapter thirteen. The very last chapter by Maria-Louise Clausen analyzes the Huthis' foreign policy making towards regional state and non-state actors. Despite the movement's broader regional angle as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, these chapters on regional impact are less comprehensive than the rest of the book.

The Huthi Movement in Yemen Ideology, Ambition and Security in the Arab Gulf is a brief handbook for the Huthi movement; and suitable for a wide range of readers including

undergraduate and post-graduate students, scholars, experts, policymakers and journalists. On a technical note the chapter referencing style is inconsistent. Several chapters use Chicago style, while others (chapters 9, 10 and 14) use in-text citations with Harvard referencing. In addition to this, although the book proposes a comprehensive discussion on Huthis, there could be a sub-section or a chapter to connect Saudi and Emirati policies in Yemen in relation to their role in the criminalization or militarization of Huthis. In this version of the book, the role of external powers in preventing local dialogue or peace is not acknowledged. Nevertheless, this edited volume by Abdullah Hamidaddin provides readers with a clear understanding of the multiple phases of the Huthi movement between 2002 and 2014, its relevance to Yemen's political history, and the current war in Yemen.