The Biden Administration's Security Challenges in the Gulf

By Anthony H. Cordesman

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Please provide comments to acordesman@gmail.com

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The U.S. needs to make fundamental changes to its security efforts in the Persian/Arab Gulf and the Middle East. The U.S. has done more to destabilize Gulf security over the last four years than to establish a stable structure of deterrence and defense. At the same time, the threat in the region has evolved far beyond extremist groups, such as ISIS, as well as past assessments of Iran's nuclear weapons efforts.

If the Biden Administration is to succeed in creating a new structure of deterrence and defense in the Gulf, it must look beyond extremism and issues like the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – important as they are. It must rebuild and strengthen its security partnerships with Arab states and address a wide range of new security issues.

There are no easy, "good," or simple solution to these challenges, and many will require years of patient efforts meant simply to contain the problems involved, rather than to solve them. The U.S. does, however, have a wide range of options, and it can make progress in many areas. There is still much to build upon even if the Biden Administration acts promptly and consistently to address the full range of challenges involved.

The Need for a Broader Response to the Security Challenges in the Gulf

A realist approach to the Arab-Gulf security challenge means that the U.S. must focus on the following issues and options:

Restoring Trust in the U.S. as a Strategic Partner

The U.S. has seriously undercut the trust of its Arab strategic partners by its threats to withdraw actual force cuts and by failing to define a clear future U.S. force posture in the Gulf. It has alienated its partners by placing more emphasis on arms sales and burden sharing than on actual strategic partnerships. It has not addressed developing challenges such as Assad's consolidation of power in Syria, Turkey's growing challenges in the region, Iraq's instability and the growth of Iran's influence, increases in Russian arms sales in the region, a potential Chinese strategic agreement with Iran, and the need to find long-term solutions to the causes of instability in Yemen.

Fortunately, these mistakes are largely the product of decisions at the White House level, particularly over the last four years. Military-to-military relations remain relatively strong, and there are real opportunities to create a far more effective structure of regional deterrence and defense, as well as to improve the stability of regional states. However, if the U.S. is to succeed, it must act quickly to show it will be a real and *lasting* strategic partner. It must communicate this message effectively to the leaders of partner states, their military, and their people.

The U.S. must reassure its partners that it will keep major forces deployed in the region, show that the U.S. is seeking to create effective collective security structures, emphasize the creation of cost-effective forces rather than burden sharing and arms sales, and fully consult with it partners over strategic and key security issues.

Expanding the Role of USCENTCOM to Help Create a Real Gulf Cooperation Council Defense Posture

Statements and actions by the Biden White House and other senior officials will play a critical role in such efforts, but U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) is the key tool the U.S. has in actually carrying out such efforts and rebuilding effective partnerships and military capabilities. High level statements and rhetoric will not be enough. Clear and consistent military action, which demonstrates consistent U.S. commitment to real strategic partnerships that treat partner states as actual allies and partners, is the most critical key to success.

In practice, however, it is the USCENTCOM – the key U.S. command in the region – that provides a tangible, real-world structure for rebuilding and strengthening the U.S. strategic partnerships in the region. It is also still a sound foundation to build upon. Once again, the failures in U.S. strategic relationships with its Arab partners since 2003 have been largely political and occurred at the White House level. The period since the U.S. invasion of Iraq has seen some major U.S. victories over extremist factions, but no one in the region can ignore the U.S. failure to provide an accurate assessment of the Iraqi threat in choosing to invade Iran; the break-up of Iraq's military forces; the lack of Iraq's capabilities to contain and deter Iran that followed; and the continuing division of the Iraqi government into an unstable mix of contending sectarian, ethnic, and other rival factions.

The same is true of the recent pressures at the White House level to cut U.S. forces in the region; to emphasize arms sales and burden sharing of partner states over effective deterrence and defense; and to give limited top level priority to creating effective U.S., allied, and regional partner forces that are as interoperable, mission capable, and as cohesive of a unit as possible. An emphasis on defeating the ISIS "caliphate" rather than on the forms of division as well as on putting maximum economic pressure on Iran have left the U.S. without an effective strategy for dealing with Iran, without a clear strategic partnership with Iraq, and without a clear strategy for dealing with terrorism and extremism to capitalize on the break-up of the ISIS "caliphate."

Nevertheless, there still are real opportunities for building a more stable structure of deterrence and defense. USCENTCOM has maintained solid military-to-military relationships. The end of the Saudi-Emirati-Bahraini-Egyptian boycott of Qatar offers a major new opportunity to create interoperable forces and collective security. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a potential way of strengthening the military aspects of the alliances between the U.S., its European allies, and the countries of the GCC – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. It may still be possible to make Iraq a real strategic partner. Adding Egypt and Jordan to such efforts at the USCENTCOM level, finding ways to include Iraq, and creating a quiet strategic dialogue that includes Israel are all additional options.

To succeed, however, the U.S. must demonstrate that USCENTCOM will keep enough U.S. forces in place to support its Arab partners and that those partners will benefit from the improvements in the power projection capabilities of the United State. Furthermore the U.S. must ensure that it will offer its Arab partners the ability to benefit from the U.S. development of joint all-domain force capabilities as well as from the unique U.S. capabilities to offer advanced warning; command and control; battle management; security data and communications; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities that Arab partners lack the resources and scale to develop.

USCENTCOM offers a unique opportunity to rebuild and expand an annual cycle of force planning and modernization efforts along with dialogues that include U.S. strategic partners as well as the broader leadership, intellectual elites, and media in partner states. One step in reaching out to Arab partners would be to issue the equivalent of a public USCENTCOM annual posture statement.

This statement could explain the developments of threat in net assessment terms, the joint capabilities of U.S. and partner forces, and relative levels of military spending and efforts. It could build upon military-to military efforts to create more effective deterrents, and it can actively counter hostile, information warfare propaganda as well as conspiracy theories. It could help close the information gap between the expertise and actions of the U.S. and partner military forces, and it can help deal with the lack of public understanding and support of these security efforts that is now a key problem in creating and maintaining strategic partnerships.

Restoring the U.S. Emphasis on Human Rights and the Rule of Law, But Making These Efforts in a Practical Context

No alliance has ever been close to perfect, but the threats from Iran and extremism, the challenges from Turkey, and the pressures from Russia and China all give the U.S. the opportunity it needs to make USCENTCOM the focus of a stable structure to oversee regional deterrence and defense – if the U.S. focuses on creating such capabilities and treats its partners with the proper respect.

Respect does not, however, mean ignoring either U.S. values or the fact that authoritarianism and the internal security structures of some partner states now help to breed extremism, terrorism, and the kind of political upheavals that began in 2011. The U.S. should restore its past emphasis on persuading its partners to pursue freedom, the proper rule of law, human rights, and democratic reforms.

The U.S. cannot, however, substitute sanctions on its strategic partners for human rights or slash arms sales and military support for patience and diplomacy. Egypt's shift to Russian and French arms sales has already shown that threatening partners – or cutting off U.S. arms sales and security support – is far more likely to drive them towards finding alternative support from Russia, China, or other states than make them yield to U.S. requests that attempt to impose sudden radical changes in their region, culture, and behavior.

The U.S. will make far more progress if it puts steady diplomatic pressure on its partners to make reforms over time. Such steady diplomatic and political efforts will also be far more effective if the U.S. focuses on the areas where actual progress and popular support in a given country is most likely to be achieved. The U.S. should address key cases and examples, but it can exert considerable pressure more indirectly by highlighting problems and issues through mechanisms like the State Department's annual reports on human rights, terrorism, and freedom of religion. Steady, consistent, and pragmatic pressure is the proper approach.

At the same time, the U.S. does need to give equal priority to the civil and economic development of its strategic partners as well as to the broader social reform efforts of Saudi Arabia and its other strategic partners. Jobs, adequate income, and effective government services – combined with social changes that make society more free and that counter extremism – are equally important forms of human rights.

The U.S. needs to clearly recognize that supporting these civil and economic reforms will be as important to achieving stability and fighting extremism as progress in creating military forces and deterrent defense capability. It must not push partner to increase defense spending, burden sharing, and arms sales at the expense of such civil reforms.

Reassessing the Strategic Importance of the Region and the Gulf

At the same time, the U.S. needs to reassess the strategic importance of the Gulf and the region. U.S. petroleum imports may have dropped to far lower levels; however, the U.S. now needs to reassess the importance of Gulf petroleum exports in terms of the fact that the Gulf region supplies some 20% of the world's petroleum, and this has both a massive global impact and a critical strategic impact on the U.S. economy.

The Gulf is the key source of petroleum exports to major Asian economic powers like China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. These Asian states now provide manufacturing exports to the U.S. that now make up a larger percentage of U.S. trade, the manufacturing sector, and GDP than U.S. petroleum imports did in the past, making them a critical source of strategic leverage over China.

Moreover, the U.S. not only need to make a more realistic assessment of the strategic importance of securing the global flow of Gulf exports to the world, it now needs to make it clear to its Arab partners that this is a key reason why the U.S. will remain in the Gulf and will continue to help them build a stable structure of deterrence and defense. The failure to do this has become one of the reasons that Gulf states increasing question the U.S. commitment to Gulf security

Looking Beyond Terrorism and Extremism

There are other areas where the U.S. needs to reassess the strategic importance of the Gulf. The threat from regional terrorism and extremism remains all too real, and it is clear that the break-up up of the ISIS "caliphate" weakened ISIS but did not defeat it. It is also clear that there are many other extremist movements – many tied to differences in ethnicity and sect, rather than Islamic extremism per se.

However, the U.S. needs to stop focusing on Iran and the day's most powerful violent extremist groups. It needs to recognize that it faces a far wider range of threats and causes of instability. It also should stop claiming that its limited victory against the ISIS "caliphate" defeated ISIS or brought stability and security to the Gulf and the Middle East. The claims that some U.S. officials have made during the last few years, stating that the U.S. can now withdraw major elements of its forces because of its victories over the "caliphate," have been made at a time when ISIS and other extremist elements have continued to operate – and these statements are little more than strategic nonsense.

Dealing with Competition from China, Russia, and Turkey

The U.S. also needs to recognize the fact that it faces direct strategic competition in the Gulf and the MENA region from Russia, China, and – to a lesser extent – Turkey. This competition already has led to a growing Russian presence in Syria as well as to new Russian and Chinese efforts to sell arms and technical support to America's strategic partners.

There have been reports of a major strategic partnership agreement between China and Iran, although it is unclear how real the prospects for such an agreement are. China has also established its first base in the region in Djibouti, and it seems to be laying the groundwork for the equivalent of naval facilities in Pakistan.

Turkey has moved sharply away from its past alignment with NATO and the U.S.; has brokered major arms sales tied to Russia; and is now playing a growing role in Syria, Iraq, Qatar and the region that generally challenges U.S. security efforts.

The U.S. will need to meet these challenges over time, and it should seek to do so with a limited degree of direct confrontation as possible. It needs to adapt its strategy, however, to recognize that military and civil competition with Russia and China occur at a global level and through third countries, in ways that go far beyond the prospect of direct confrontation and major conflicts. The U.S. cannot win a game of three-dimensional chess by playing tic-tac-toe.

Developing a Clear Strategy Towards Syria and Lebanon

The U.S. also needs to focus on the region and not just simply on Iran. Iran is now the key threat, but it still is only one threat of many. The U.S. cannot continue its present focus on sanctioning Iran or its tendency to ignore the other threats in the region. The U.S. has not pursued a credible strategy for dealing with Syria and Lebanon since at least 2011. Assad's growing consolidation of power in Syria can make it a major challenge to U.S. strategic interests – so do the growing Russian presence and influence in Syria as well as Syria's ties to Iran. The Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, which has become a failed state, poses another challenge.

No one can yet predict whether Assad can take full control of Syria; the role of Turkey; the shape of the Russian, Hezbollah, and Iranian presence in Syria; or the new levels of military and other security threats that these forces will present.

It is clear, however, that the U.S. needs to develop some strategy to contain these threats and to work with Israel and its Arab partners. The Biden Administration and our strategic partners will almost certainly confront an evolving and growing threat from Syria over the next four years, and the U.S. has so far addressed this threat largely through inaction and withdrawals. The U.S. strategic presence in the Gulf and the region must take explicit account of the risk of a new Syrian military build-up or at least limited confrontations and clashes – if not further conflicts – driven by Syria and the Hezbollah.

Focusing on Iraq as a Strategic Keystone

Iraq is a critical keystone to any U.S. security structure in the Gulf. Making Iraq a strong strategic partner is a critical U.S. national security interest. Iraq's location separates Iran from Syria, and by creating a strong and independent Iraq provides a potential way of containing Iranian military ambitions, creating a far stronger alliance between the Arab Gulf states, and securing a critical petroleum exporter with vast reserves of oil and gas.

Such efforts now involve major challenges. The U.S. has never had a consistent strategy for dealing with Iraq since it invaded the country in 2003. In spite of the role the U.S. has played in two wars in Iraq since 2003, U.S. efforts to create such a partnership have been poorly planned and executed, and they are now on the edge of lasting failure.

Since the U.S., Iraqi, and allied forces broke up ISIS's "caliphate" in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria – the U.S. has steadily cut its forces, its use of Iraqi bases and facilities, and its training and assist efforts. It has also seen a steady rise in Iranian influence and in the challenges that pro-Iranian Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs) pose to U.S. forces, diplomats, companies, and civilians – as well as a slow rise in ISIS attacks.

The U.S. did make nominal efforts to negotiate a structure for a strategic partnership with Iraq in 2020, but these efforts have so far had little substance. By January 2021, U.S. military forces had been reduced to a nominal 2,500 personnel, the U.S. had withdrawn from most of its bases and facilities in Iraq, and U.S. efforts to train and assist Iraqi security forces had been cut back to

something approaching a hollow shell. U.S. efforts to equip Iraqi forces with modern weapons like the F-16 and M-1 tank had failed to be effective, and Iraq was turning to Russian systems.

As of January 2021, efforts to create a strong and effective Iraqi central government have also only had limited success. Iran's influence still grew. Iraqi government efforts to create security forces that could secure and defend the country had made only limited progress. The Iraqi economy was in near collapse, and the Iraqi government remained ineffective in many areas and highly corrupt.

The U.S. needs to act quickly and decisively to do what it can to create a true strategic partnership, establish a strong and fully adequate train and assist effort, and encourage Iraq to form strong partnerships with Jordan and the Southern Arab Gulf states. It needs to work with the World Bank to help deal with Iraq's economic crisis and to help Iraq reform its structure of governance.

The U.S. must also show that it has a lasting concern with making Iraq a key strategic partner. This means helping Iraq resist pressure from Iran and Turkey, staying in spite of attacks from Iran and pro-Iranian PMFs, and competing with Russia for strategic influence. If the U.S. does not act quickly and succeed by the end of 2021, Iraq is likely to become a strategic keystone of Iran and Russia – not the U.S. and the Southern Arab Gulf.

Iran: Looking Beyond Sanctions and the JCPOA

Meeting each of these challenges – and the challenges posed by Yemen that are discussed at the end of this commentary – are critical to dealing with the threats posed by Iran. The U.S. also, however, needs to look beyond the immediate security challenges of dealing with the JCPOA, and it must find as many practical ways as possible to deal with Iran that not only helps to establish a stable structure of deterrence and containment, but that also encourages Iran to change its behavior and focus on its development and the welfare of its people, rather than focus on the "revolution" and the ambitions of some of its leaders.

Trading Sanctions, Aggression, and Threats for Regime Security and Development

The last four years have shown that sanctions, maximum pressure, and military threats alone are not an answer. So far, efforts to cripple Iran's economy have done serious damage to the lives of some 86 million people without changing or improving the behavior of the regime. If anything, they have led Iran's regime to be more aggressive in reaching out to other states and non-state actors; in cracking down on even moderate supporters of the regime; in building up more authoritarian internal security forces; and in focusing on nuclear weapons, a wide ranges of new missile forces, and irregular naval-air-missile forces in the Gulf.

Building up strong strategic partnerships which are clearly focused on deterrence and defense – not forcing regime change, focusing on offensive attacks, or potentially leading to some form of invasion – is one answer. Another is to offer an end to sanctions and the possibility of stable political and economic operations that will give Iran the ability to develop and meet its people's needs without threatening its regime from the outside.

At the present, the focus on collective deterrence and defense is likely to offer the most benefits, particularly if USCENTCOM can help America's strategic partners create a far more effective set of interoperable forces that focus on the right missions and if Iraq can be made a real strategic partner.

Over time, however, making it clear that Iran can get real benefits from cooperation, showing that the Iranian people have a real option that clearly serves their interests, and working to find some stable and mutual beneficial balance between Iran and the Arab countries may accomplish what superior military forces cannot.

Dealing with Iran's Growing Axis of Influence

For all the reasons cited earlier, the U.S. cannot deal with Iran by just focusing on Iran alone. One of the many failures at the White House level since 2003 has been the inability to come to grips with the growth of Iranian influence in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as with its ties to non-state actors in areas like Lebanon and the Palestinian Gaza Strip. These are areas where Iran has made important gains in spite of U.S. efforts. Iran has also shown that it can use civil as well as military means, work through third parties, and conduct effective gray area operations. These threats would grow far more serious if Iran can create strategic ties to China and Russia, and/or buy more modern arms and military technology.

Reassessing the Iranian Nuclear Threat

The merits and limits of the JCPOA have been made all too clear over the past decade. The best that can be said for the JCPOA is that it may be the least bad, near-term solution to one key aspect of the Iranian threat. So far, unilaterally withdrawing from the JCPOA has not proved to have any clear merits. It has not put successful pressure on Iran, it has separated the U.S. position from that of key European allies, and it has given China and Russia more strategic leverage in Iran.

The key question is whether the JCPOA can now be restored to some functional form and in a form that gains more support – or at least tolerance – from America's strategic partners in the region. One answer is to act on the basis of a clear dialogue between both America's key European partners in creating the JCPOA and its key Arab partners. Such a dialogue should not be bound by consensus, but it should be shaped through consultation.

There also are two problems with the JCPOA that the U.S. now needs to more honestly and openly address than it did at the time the JCPOA was negotiated.

- The first is that the JCPOA was negotiated almost exclusively on the basis of the extent to which it limited Iran's ability to produce weapons grade Uranium and Plutonium. Even at that time, this focus was questionable. It not only did not adequately restrict centrifuge development, but it largely ignored a wide range of other options Iran had for developing effective nuclear weapons.

    While the details of Israeli, Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, and North Korean nuclear weapons designs and development are unclear, these efforts occurred at a much earlier period in technology and computation capability, and many problems in design are now far easier to solve without actually detonating weapons. And, some of the more recent efforts seem to have involved large-scale testing of nuclear weapons designs that did not involve actual use of weapons-grade materials to produce a nuclear explosion.

    Iran has now been developing nuclear weapons since the time of the Shah. It is now making significant advances in centrifuge design that could ease the speed with which it produces fissile material, as well as make it easier to create smaller, covert enrichment facilities. More than that, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has raised questions about sites where Iran may have been using conventional explosions to test passive designs of

nuclear weapons with weapons grade material, which can reveal a great deal about the probable capability of such designs.

Any resumption or renegotiation of the JCPOA should address Iran's progress in centrifuges and its options for testing the design of implosive, boosted, and thermonuclear weapons without actually using weapons grade material. It may well be impossible to reliably detect and inspect many such efforts, but the possibility should not be ignored. It is already clear that Iran has all the technology needed to produce weapons grade uranium as well as ballistic and cruise missiles with enough range and payload to attack any target in the region if they are armed with a lighter weight and effective implosion weapon.

- The second is that Iran will almost certainly not accept the addition of meaningful constraints on its missile efforts. Iran now faces a growing U.S., European, and Arab Gulf state superiority in airpower, and one that is likely to increase in terms of land-based and naval-based air and missile defense in spite of Iran's acquisition of the Russian S-300. Iran cannot give up its progress in conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones in the face of foreign superiority in potentially hostile airpower.

Focusing on the Broader Iranian Missile Threat

The last three years have made it clear that Iran's lack of access to imports of modern combat aircraft, combat ships, and precision-guided weapons have helped to push Iran into developing and producing a wide range of precision guided, conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles as well as drones. It has also transferred such weapons and technology to the Hezbollah and the Houthi, and it has used them successfully against key petroleum facilities in Saudi Arabia.

This highlights the need for the U.S. to work with its regional allies to develop a full spectrum of missile, air, and drone defenses of the kind that Israel has deployed to either provide some convincing form of extended deterrence against both nuclear and conventional strikes or to provide its regional allies with their own longer-range, conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles.

These are not casual options. Defenses against one form of conventional missiles or drone strikes may simply drive Iran to focus on the use of other strike systems, while the cost of modern integrated air/missile defenses is so high that creating integrated defenses may be the only option that smaller Arab powers can afford or that larger powers will find cost-effective.

The U.S. should examine the full spectrum of Iran's missile/drone programs; include tactical anti-ship, anti-armor, and anti-air systems; and work with its allies to develop some cohesive and interoperable approach to dealing with such weapons.

Finally, there is a need to examine passive defense options. Missile defenses have a high cost and significant uncertainty per round. Many Gulf petroleum, water/desalination, electricity, and other critical civil and infrastructure facilities are large, vulnerable targets that are critical to national services and economies. Many have critical components that are one of a kind or have long lead times for replacement. Others are targets where almost any attack can lead to some degree of panic or a halt in operations. Adding new smaller facilities, protecting long lead time critical components, or buying replacements and stockpiling them are other options. These should, however, be coordinated efforts that do not leave a given country or a critical aspect of the target base more vulnerable than others.

Meeting the Challenges from Iran's Naval-Missile-Air Forces

The emphasis on airpower and modern land weapons in the Arab Gulf, along with limited experience in the use of sea power, has led to the uncertain modernization and creation of effective readiness standards in a number of Arab Gulf navies. Iran has also steadily improved it anti-ship missile capabilities, its ability to use land/air/sea based missiles to strike targets in and beyond the Gulf, its ability to strike cargo ships and tankers, its ability to "swarm" naval targets with highly dispersed smaller vessels, and its ability to use senor-driven or "smart" mines.

Arab Gulf navies have so far had erratic development at best, and the U.S. Navy cannot focus on this kind of threat and create enough mix of dedicated naval forces to substitute for effective Arab partner forces. The U.S. needs to work with its Gulf, Indian Ocean, and Red Sea partners to develop cohesive modernization plans to deal with these threats.

Addressing the Need for a Real-World Solution to the War in Yemen: How Does This End?

Finally, the Biden Administration needs to take a hard look at what kind of settlement to the fighting in Yemen could actually produce a stable state, and one that that meets its people's needs. The issue is not simply the war. It is the fact that Yemen's "failed" economy and process of governance has gone from poor to failed to a humanitarian disaster

It is also that no side in the fighting seems capable of dealing with the end result. The regime headed by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi may be backed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the U.S., and many other states. However, its real-world legitimacy consists of a government headed by a "president" who was a field marshal, a vice president under Ali Abdullah Saleh – the former dictator who had ruled for the previous three decades – and a deeply divided mix of supporters.

Hadi is the product of more than three years of civil fighting and political unrest that drove Saleh from power. He was "elected" for two years as the only candidate on the ballot in an "election" that was supposed to lead to a real president. His victory, however, led to more political struggles and a coup that led to him being driven out of the country in 2016. So far, the various elements of the Hadi faction only seems to have tenuous popularity, remain divided, and show limited competence.
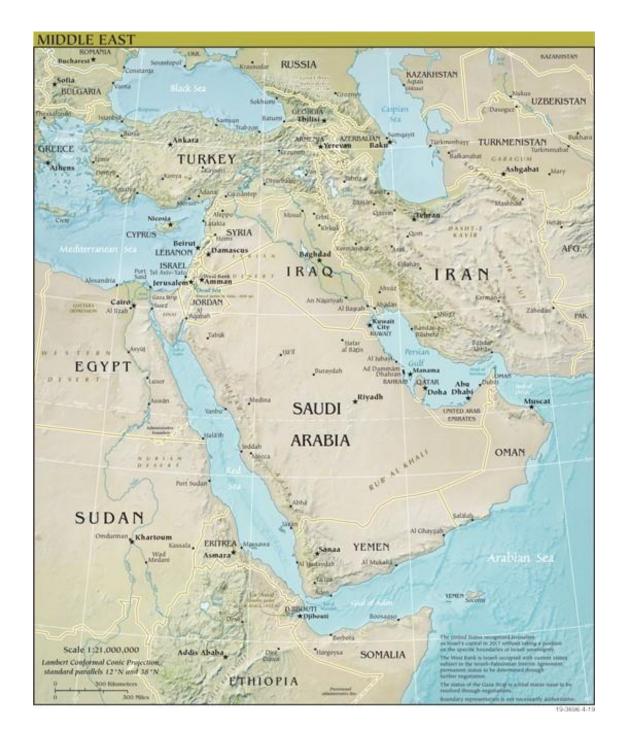
At the same time, the Houthis that now dominate the most populated and developed Western parts of Yemen are only one of many tribal, ethnic, and linguistic factions. They are descendants of the Imamate that ruled North Yemen from the ninth century until a coup by the Egyptian-trained Yemeni military officers which succeeded in 1962, that replaced the Imam with a military dictatorship that called itself a "republic." However, they only won back power in a series of coups and divided power struggles – especially as they are Zaydi Shi'ites in a country which is 65%-75% Sunni – that became an awkward merger of North and South Yemen in 1990.

It is unclear that either the Hadi "government" or the Houthis could have any real competence in administering a large, highly populated state of more than 30 million people with few resources. It is even less clear that they can deal with a humanitarian crisis that now affects some 14 million or more people – much less unite Yemen in a stable peace.

Moreover, a far more serious look is needed at the overall scale and impact of combat on Yemen's casualties and the scale of humanitarian problems. Far too much media attention has gone to the impact of airpower rather than on the massive impact of the different sources of civil fighting on the ground and the full range of factions involved.

Prolonging the war, creating some form of limited "victory," or reaching a ceasefire without the hope of creating effective governance and economic development are not answers to the key question that will shape Yemen's future: How can you end this war with some hope of creating an effective state – or states – with lasting stability?

Figure One: Map of the Persian/Arab Gulf

Source: CIA, "Physical Middle East Map," https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/maps/world-regional/.