

Security Advisory: Yemen & Bab el-Mandeb Strait (2 April 2015)

Yemen Security Brief

A week into the Saudi-led bombing campaign, coalition forces have failed to force Yemen's Houthis to enter into negotiations, with the Houthis continuing to attempt to gain control of the southern port city of Aden.

On Thursday, dozens of unidentified troops landed by sea in Aden. The soldiers arrived in a single vessel several hours after the Houthis and their supporters entered Aden. While it has not yet been possible to verify the nationality of the troops, the Saudi-led coalition has indicated that it is in control of the waters around Aden. If confirmed that this is a coalition move, it will be the first reported deployment of ground forces since Saudi Arabia launched the campaign a week ago.

Houthi forces pulled back from their positions in central Aden after coalition air strikes targeted the area at dawn on Thursday. Locals have reported that a unit of Houthi and allied fighters, who had advanced in tanks and armored vehicles through Aden's Khor Maksar district the day before, were now pulling back, however some fighters have remained in parts of the neighbourhood. Resident's of Aden's central Crater district have reported that as of midday Thursday, Houthi fighters and their allies are in control of the neighbourhood. They have deployed tanks and have carried out foot patrols after heavy fighting erupted in the morning.

Al-Qaeda has taken advantage of the on-going crisis in Yemen, freeing some 150 inmates from the central prison in the Arabian Sea port of Mukalla, which is located 500 km (300 miles) east of Aden. Local police and administrative officials have disclosed that while the identity of those freed remains unclear, some of them are believed to be al-Qaeda detainees. One of those believed to have escaped is Khaled Batarfi, a provincial al-Qaeda leader who was arrested four years ago. Earlier on Thursday, soldiers loyal to Hadi clashed with suspected al-Qaeda fighters in Mukalla.

Residents in Dhalea, located 100 km (60 miles) north of Aden, have reported that the town is controlled by militia fighters with Houthis deploying snipers on rooftops to carry out attacks. Residents reported air strikes overnight in the coastal town of Shaqra, which is under Houthi control and which lies on the coast between Aden and Mukalla.

Gulf of Aden Security Brief

MS Risk continues to advise vessels to avoid all Yemen ports until further notice and we continue to advise vessel operators to notify their insurers prior to sailing through the Bab el-Mandeb. Any vessels currently in the Gulf of Aden are advised to remain vigilant at all times. Pirate Action Groups (PAG's) are likely to continue to operate in this region and may easily be mistaken for refugees fleeing the chaos in Yemen.

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