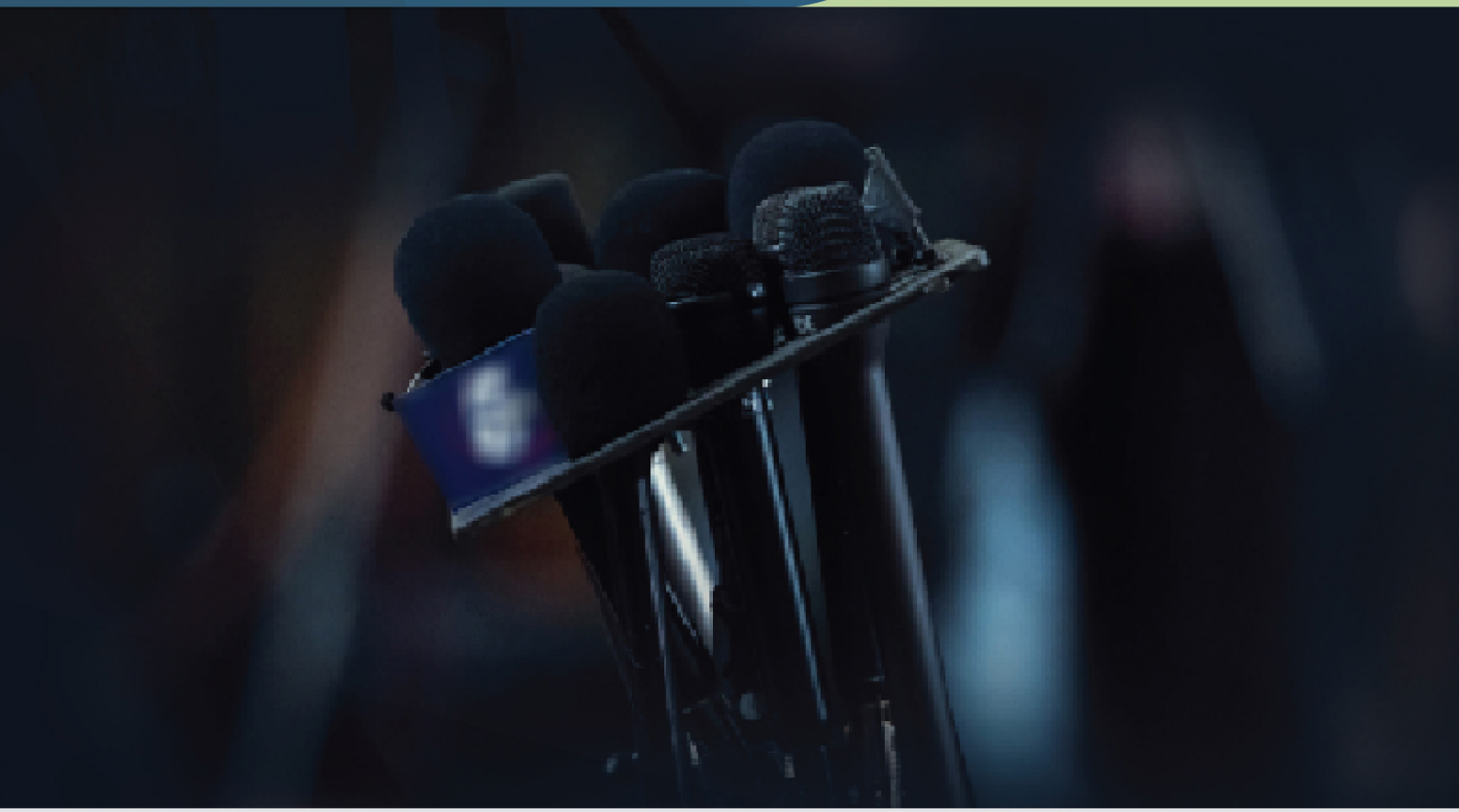
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The Houthi Narrative:
Between Weak Arguments and Efforts to Gain Influence

Field Study



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Between Weak Arguments and Efforts to Gain Influence

Study

Ahmad ALzurqa

November / 2026



We are a research institution concerned with studying Yemeni affairs and the regional and international influences on it. Through interpreting history, analysing the present, and predicting the future, in the aim of positive participating for better future of Yemen

Executive Summary

This study examines how Houthi narratives have found their way into media outlets unaffiliated with the group. In some Arab and international coverage, Houthi terminology has entered reporting on the actors involved in the conflict and its underlying causes. Actions carried out by Houthi forces are attributed to Yemen, while Houthi-run bodies in Sana'a are presented as state institutions. The study traces this pattern to several overlapping factors: the group's armed control over local media institutions, external support for the production and distribution of media content, growing demand for news on the Red Sea, and editorial decisions shaped by political considerations, the context of events, and the availability of sources.

The 2024 report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen provides direct evidence of Hezbollah's involvement in managing Houthi propaganda and preparing material for military campaigns, alongside other forms of support.[1] Documents published by the Islamic Radio and Television Union also demonstrate technical and institutional cooperation within a media network extending across Tehran, Beirut, and Sana'a.[2] Yet this network alone does not explain the appearance of Houthi terminology in media organizations operating beyond its reach.

1. UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, Final Report, UN Security Council document S/2024/731, 11 October 2024, paragraphs 20–21, addressing Hezbollah's media support for the Houthis.
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4079905?_sourc=&v=pdf
2. Islamic Radio and Television Union, "Yemeni Ministry of Information and Union Sign Cooperation Protocol to Develop Media Operations." Publication date not indicated on the webpage.
https://irtvu.co/article.php?id=376320&

In these institutions, editorial policies, journalists' assessments, the pressures of breaking news, and sympathy for causes championed by the group also influence coverage.

Yemen's place in international media coverage has shifted as the domestic struggle for power evolved into a conflict marked by growing external intervention. Since March 2015, Saudi Arabia's direct military intervention in support of Yemen's internationally recognized legitimate government, Iranian support for the Houthi group following its seizure of power, and differences between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have become central to how developments are interpreted. Following October 2023, international attention increasingly turned to maritime security and cross-border attacks. The Yemeni front became more closely linked to the wider regional confrontation during 2026, further pushing the origins of Yemen's domestic conflict into the background of some reporting, as coverage increasingly focused on confrontations between states.

The media examples examined in the study reveal significant differences between outlets, and even between headlines and the body of reporting within the same organization. The problem becomes particularly apparent when a group's self-designation is adopted as an independent description in a news bulletin or a presenter's question, while the legal status of Yemen's internationally recognized government is relegated to the margins or omitted altogether. Another factor emerges in coverage of operations linked to Gaza.

Legitimate solidarity with Palestinians may influence some editorial decisions, directing attention toward the stated objectives of an operation while reducing scrutiny of its consequences. The study examines this possibility through the published material itself, rather than relying on assumptions about journalists' affiliations or intentions.

The Yemeni government's official narrative rests on the political transition process, UN Security Council resolutions, international recognition, and the state's authority over the use of force and decisions concerning war and peace. Its ability to communicate these foundations has been weakened by its failure to establish a consistent news service capable of supplying journalists with the original reporting, images, and primary data they require. The leadership's prolonged presence outside Yemen, political divisions, and regional affiliations have further contributed to the tendency to portray the government's position as little more than an extension of Riyadh's. By contrast, Houthi media platforms and their supporting networks have supplied readily available content for use and circulation.

The study proposes three complementary lines of action: scrutinizing news production chains and the role of external assistance; establishing clear editorial standards for identifying actors and attributing claims across broadcasters and news agencies; and strengthening the capacity of Yemeni government institutions to provide primary information, issue corrections, and ensure accountability.

The study ultimately raises a broader question: Will media coverage restore Yemen's place as a state and society with its own history and independent interests, or continue to reduce it to an arena of confrontation among regional and international powers?

Methodology, Sources, and Scope

The study uses a descriptive and analytical approach, drawing on media framing analysis to examine news coverage. It draws on UN Security Council resolutions, reports of the UN Panel of Experts, research on Yemeni media and political framing, published documents on institutional cooperation, and dated news reports.

The comparative review covers 16 Arab and international media organizations. From these, 12 published items from 11 outlets were selected for closer examination across three periods: the seizure of the Galaxy Leader in 2023, the January 2024 strikes, and the renewed military operations in October 2026. The analysis compares headlines with the body of each report, examining how actors are identified and claims attributed. The selected items provide qualitative evidence rather than a statistically representative sample of the 16 organizations. The study does not examine full television broadcasts and therefore does not assess patterns of presenter interruptions or guest selection. The organizations reviewed include Saudi outlets Al Arabiya, Al Hadath, Asharq News, Asharq Al-Awsat, and Arab News; Sky News Arabia, Al Jazeera, Al Araby TV, and Al Mayadeen; the news agencies Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP), Associated Press (AP), and Anadolu Agency; and BBC Arabic, France 24, and Deutsche Welle Arabic. The amount of available evidence differs between outlets.

Each finding is therefore limited to the specific material examined. Assessing an organization's broader editorial approach would require a longer period of observation.

The study distinguishes between organizational ties and external support documented by reliable sources, and similarities in language or framing found in published coverage. Similar terminology does not, by itself, establish coordination. Nor does the available evidence allow conclusions about journalists' intentions or affiliations. The findings should therefore be read in relation to the materials examined and their publication dates. This limitation applies throughout the study.

From the Saada Wars to the Seizure of State Institutions

Houthi discourse developed within Yemen's religious and political rivalries and local conflicts. It was not initially a reproduction of Iranian propaganda. The group adapted its messaging as its position in the conflict changed. A 2024 study by Burhan Ahmed[3] traces this shift from a narrative of grievance during the Saada wars to claims of leading a popular revolution and, later, the use of religious authority to legitimize its rule.

Hussein al-Houthi's lectures, the group's recurring slogan, religious platforms, and mobilization activities helped establish a distinct political and religious vocabulary before the group expanded its presence on satellite television.

3. Burhan Ahmed, "Houthi Propaganda in the Media: A Study of Ideological and Intellectual Warfare," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 10 June 2024. https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-ar/policy-research-ar/22825

References to wilaya (religious authority), obedience to the leadership, and the religious characterization of opponents remained central to messaging aimed at the group's followers. In communications directed at Arab and international audiences, sovereignty, foreign intervention, and Palestine received greater emphasis. The distinction is evident when internal speeches and ideological materials are compared with military statements and political interviews. The audience and purpose of the message changed, but its underlying ideological foundations remained the same.



During Yemen's political transition, the Houthis increasingly adopted the language of revolution, anti-corruption, and opposition to foreign influence. This helped the group reach Yemenis dissatisfied with the political leadership and the results of the transition, including those outside its religious base. By adopting demands shared across different political constituencies, the group broadened its appeal while retaining control over leadership decisions, weapons, and political authority.

In a speech broadcast on 8 October 2014, Abdulmalik al-Houthi described his group's armed takeover of Sana'a on 21 September as a "popular revolution." Al Jazeera used the description in a headline attributed to him,[4] while including an opposing view in the body of the report. The example shows the difference between quoting a source's characterization and adopting it as an editorial description.

The takeover of institutions in Sana'a subsequently allowed the Houthis to issue statements from government premises and through media outlets operating under the names of state institutions. In February 2015, the UN Security Council demanded that the Houthis withdraw from government institutions and release detainees[5] This came before the Saudi-led coalition intervened in support of Yemen's internationally recognized government on 26 March 2015. The sequence of events contradicts the claim that the war began with Saudi airstrikes.

How Houthi Messaging Changed as the War Expanded

The Saudi-led coalition's intervention in support of Yemen's internationally recognized government in March 2015, together with the war's impact on civilians, provided the Houthis with material for a narrative centered on aggression and blockade. This allowed the group to shift from defending its position as a local armed movement that had seized power to claiming that it was defending Yemen itself.

4. Al Jazeera Arabic, "Al-Houthi: What We Did on September 21 Was a Popular Revolution," 8 October 2014.link
5. UN Security Council, Resolution 2201 on Yemen, 15 February 2015.
https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11781.doc.htm

The strength of this framing lies in its use of genuine civilian suffering that can be documented and shown, before drawing political conclusions that do not necessarily follow from that suffering. Its appeal cannot be understood without acknowledging violations committed by all parties to the war.



As the war continued, some media coverage began treating institutions seized by the Houthis in Sana'a as ordinary government bodies. Ministries, councils, spokespersons, and delegations were identified without specifying who controlled them. Questions about the possibility of negotiating with these bodies often took precedence over questions about how the group had acquired power through force. Understanding these developments requires identifying where authority actually lies and distinguishing between the institutions of the Republic of Yemen and those using their names without a constitutional mandate.

After October 2023, the war in Gaza gave the Houthis greater scope to redefine their role. The group began presenting itself as an actor in a major Arab cause, while language centered on support for Gaza, deterrence, and maritime operations gained prominence over reporting on repression and governance in Houthi-controlled areas. This added a regional and moral dimension to the group's domestic narrative without replacing its earlier messages. The Houthis could still address their followers in the language of religious loyalty, Arab audiences in the language of Palestine, and international media in terms of war, shipping, and negotiations. This ability to adapt their vocabulary to different audiences is a defining feature of their messaging.

The repetition of slogans, prominent figures, and symbols made Houthi media content recognizable even when circulated beyond the group's own platforms. This consistency was accompanied by factors that had a greater effect on its reach, particularly the group's control of local media outlets and its growing military activity in the Red Sea, which attracted extensive international coverage.

This expanded reach has come at a cost. As the Houthis have gained prominence in regional affairs, the rights of Yemenis living under their control have received less attention in some international coverage, unless journalists have made a point of addressing them. The group's invocation of Palestine cannot be separated from its record of recruitment, detention, coercive governance, and military operations against Yemeni cities. Equally, the suffering inflicted on civilians by Saudi-led coalition strikes, US strikes, or other military actions cannot be dismissed simply because the Houthis have used these incidents for propaganda purposes.

How Terminology Confers State Authority on an Armed Group

The terminology used in Houthi messaging falls into four broad categories: claims to state authority through terms such as "Yemeni Armed Forces" and "Sana'a Government"; reframing the history of the conflict through expressions such as "aggression" and "Saudi-Yemeni war"; denying the political standing of Yemeni opponents by describing them as "mercenaries" or "traitors"; and presenting military actions as serving objectives beyond Yemen through terms such as "resistance" and "support for Gaza." The effect of each expression depends on whether it appears in an attributed quotation or in a headline or report written in the outlet's own editorial voice.

The significance of a term changes as it moves from a guest's remarks to a presenter's question, a news ticker or headline, and ultimately into a news agency report presented as an independent account. Reporting statements by a party involved in the fighting is standard journalistic practice. The problem arises when attribution is dropped, removing the distinction between what that party claims and how the news organization describes events. This distinction is particularly important when identifying who speaks for Yemen and who bears responsibility for a specific attack.

Not all terms carry the same implications. “De facto authorities” is a descriptive term used in international reporting to identify an actor exercising effective control without recognizing the legitimacy of its rule. “Sana’a Government,” however, is more ambiguous when used without explaining that the body was established unilaterally by the Houthis. It risks turning the name of the capital into a claim of exclusive political authority. Above all, journalists should avoid treating the Houthis as synonymous with Yemen or presenting statements by the group’s military spokesperson as decisions of the Yemeni state.

Reports of airstrikes inside Yemen should identify the party responsible, the target, and the casualties or damage. Reports of attacks on Saudi Arabia should specify which forces launched the weapons. Fighting in Taiz or Marib should be reported by identifying the Yemeni forces involved and the locations of their operations. Such distinctions prevent responsibility for an armed group’s actions from being attributed to Yemen as a whole, while ensuring that external actors remain accountable for military operations they conduct.

Editorial Terminology: A Comparative Guide		
Commonly Used Term	**What It Obscures or Implies**	**More Accurate Editorial Wording**
"Yemeni Armed Forces" in a Houthi statement	Claims to represent Yemen's national armed forces.	Houthi forces / forces affiliated with the Houthi group, with the group's self-designation clearly attributed.
"Sana'a Government"	Uses the capital's name to confer state authority on Houthi rule.	Houthi-controlled authorities in Sana'a / the government formed by the Houthi group.
"Saudi-Yemeni War"	Erases the Yemeni government's role in the conflict and allows the Houthis to claim exclusive representation of Yemen.	The war in Yemen; or Saudi-Houthi clashes when referring to direct confrontations.
"Hotel Government" and "Mercenaries"	Uses derogatory labels to deny political legitimacy to opponents.	Yemen's internationally recognized government / government forces, with derogatory terms attributed to their source.
"September 21 Revolution"	Presents the armed takeover of state institutions as an expression of popular mandate.	The Houthi takeover of Sana'a in September 2014, with "September 21 Revolution" attributed to Houthi usage.
"Israeli Ship"	Reduces potentially complex ownership or operational links to a definitive claim about the vessel's nationality.	A vessel the Houthis claim has links to Israel, with its flag, ownership, and operator independently verified.
"Support Front" and "Resistance"	Treats the stated purpose of military action as sufficient to establish its legitimacy before the facts are examined.	Houthi military operations that the group says are intended to support Gaza, with their consequences also reported.
"Blockade"	Conflates targeted arms embargoes, maritime and commercial restrictions, and local road closures.	Specify the party responsible, the type and duration of each restriction, and its impact on civilians.

From a Guest's Remarks to the News Headline

The impact of inflammatory language depends on where it appears. In an attributed statement, its source is clear. When a presenter repeats the same language in a question, or when it appears in a headline or news ticker, the source's opinion may become an implicit premise of the report. The problem becomes more serious when this occurs repeatedly, particularly when the parties concerned are denied an opportunity to respond or face different levels of scrutiny.

A responsible presenter distinguishes between the language used by a guest and the descriptions adopted by the news organization. This means identifying the government by its official name and legal status, asking specific questions, challenging the basis of accusations, and allowing responses to verifiable claims. Reuters' editorial standards similarly require allegations and opinions to be attributed to their sources and a clear distinction to be maintained between source statements and the news organization's own reporting.[6]

A single offensive expression in a quotation does not establish an editorial policy. Its repeated use in headlines, questions, and selected clips, however, without attribution or correction, points to a specific failure of journalistic standards.

6. Reuters, Standards and Values, including editorial standards on verification, attribution, and corrections. https://reutersagency.com/about/standards-values/?

From Control of Sources to the Production of Breaking News

The Houthis generate events that news organizations cannot easily ignore, including vessel seizures, threats to shipping, missile launches, and announcements of conditions for ending military operations. These events carry real military and economic significance. The group's narrative gains ground, however, when news outlets adopt its interpretation or report its military claims as established facts without verification. This affects three aspects of coverage: the event itself, the identity and status of the actor involved, and the attribution of responsibility for escalation. Establishing the facts and attributing claims remain the responsibility of the editor.

The group also controls visual material that is difficult for news organizations to obtain independently at short notice, including footage of military operations, drone displays, and official meetings. Such material determines what audiences see and what remains outside the frame. Its source, content, and evidentiary limits must therefore be made clear. Footage of a missile launch does not establish that the target was hit, just as images of a weapon do not establish its range, origin, or operational capabilities.



The group's official media appearances include speeches by Abdulmalik al-Houthi, military statements by Yahya Saree, and interviews with figures such as Mohammed al-Bukhaiti. These appearances differ in length, format, and purpose. Examining what each speaker says and the questions they face is therefore more useful than simply counting media appearances.

The propaganda value of an appearance increases when the presentation lends authority to the speaker through honorific titles, backgrounds featuring the group's slogans, extended opportunities to make unchallenged claims, or panels dominated by guests sharing the same perspective. An interview that accurately identifies the speaker's position and challenges claims about events, casualties, damage, and inconsistencies using independent evidence may reduce that advantage, despite providing airtime.

Operations in the Red Sea illustrate this pattern. A Houthi statement can become breaking news before the outcome of an operation is known, while broadcasters circulate the group's footage because of the international importance of the waterway. Yet evidence of a launch does not establish a successful strike, and confirmation that a vessel has stopped does not verify the identity or affiliation claimed by the attacker.

International organizations may also engage with Houthi-appointed officials to deliver humanitarian assistance or arrange visits. The group's media platforms can then present photographs of these meetings as evidence of recognition of its unilaterally established government.

Fatima Abo Alasrar examines this practice in her analysis, The Legitimacy Trap,[7] citing coverage by the Houthi-controlled Saba News Agency of a meeting between a Red Cross official and a Houthi official following Israeli strikes in August 2025. The agency attributed political statements to the Red Cross official without an authenticated transcript or confirmation from the organization.

The humanitarian meeting, the Houthis' account of it, and the organization's official position are separate matters. Humanitarian coordination does not constitute political recognition, nor does the need to assist civilians absolve the group of responsibility for restrictions and violations in areas under its control. Journalists should establish who produced the report, obtain the original statements, and determine what can be independently verified beyond the account provided by the host.

Under pressure to publish quickly and contain costs, a statement may pass from a Houthi outlet to a news agency and then to dozens of websites. In the process, attribution may disappear from headlines, making the claim appear more definitive than it was at the source. For example, "the group announced a ban" may become "Yemen imposed a ban," while drone specifications announced by the Houthis may be repeated by commentators as verified technical facts.

7. Fatima Abo Alasrar, "The Legitimacy Trap: How International Institutions Sustain the Houthis' Hold on Yemen," Middle East Institute, 3 November 2025. https://mei.edu/publication/legitimacy-trap-how-international-institutions-sustain-houthis-hold-yemen/

Reuters' coverage of the October 2024 strikes provides a contrasting example. The agency attributed reports of British and American participation to the Houthi-run Al Masirah channel before including a British denial. Clear attribution and efforts to obtain an independent account allow journalists to use information from a partisan source without accepting its claims as fact.

Iranian and Hezbollah Support in Media Content Production and Distribution

External media support for the Houthis includes institutional networks such as the Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU), established in 2007 with its secretariat based in Tehran.[8] The union's documents describe committees responsible for news, political messaging, training, and production, alongside content-sharing services. These arrangements demonstrate an established network of cross-border cooperation, although they do not establish how individual organizations are funded or the extent of their editorial independence.



8. Hamdi Malik, "Understanding Iran's Vast Media Network in Arab Countries," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 March 2021.
https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/fhm-shbkt-alalam-alayranyt-alwast-fy-aldwl-alrbyt?

A more direct link appears in a cooperation protocol published by the union and signed by Dhaifallah al-Shami, representing the Houthi-controlled Ministry of Information, and Nasser Akhdar. The agreement covers technical, programming, and research cooperation, as well as exchanges of expertise.[9] The page examined does not display a publication date. It therefore confirms the existence of the agreement but does not establish when its provisions were implemented or at what cost.

Two documents dated September 2023 describe a meeting of the union's Political Discourse and News Committee, chaired by Al-Manar director Ibrahim Farhat, to coordinate media activities and messaging, and a technical meeting involving Lebanese, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Yemeni organizations on training, broadcasting systems, and shared services. Both meetings preceded the Gaza war, indicating that the conflict intensified an existing network rather than creating one.

In a Washington Institute analysis published on 2 March 2021, Hamdi Malik examined the union's structure and Nasser Akhdar's role at the time in connecting Houthi media with Hezbollah and Iranian networks, including his participation in a Houthi delegation to Geneva in 2015.[10] These findings show that the network was operating well before the escalation in the Red Sea, although individual positions and responsibilities may have changed by 2026.

9. Islamic Radio and Television Union, "Yemeni Ministry of Information and Union Sign Cooperation Protocol to Develop Media Operations." Publication date not indicated on the webpage.
https://irtvu.co/article.php?id=376320&utm

10. Hamdi Malik, "Understanding Iran's Vast Media Network in Arab Countries," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2 March 2021.
https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/fhm-shbkt-alalam-alayranyt-alwast-fy-aldwl-alrbyt

The central question is how a message moves from a Houthi outlet through the wider production and distribution network. Malik's account of Al Masirah broadcasting at the time from Beirut's southern suburbs, together with his discussion of U-News and media training, research, and development centers, provides evidence of supporting infrastructure.

The union's documented cooperation with the Houthi-controlled Ministry of Information and its September 2023 meetings further establish channels for communication and the exchange of expertise. Establishing the network's role in producing or distributing a particular report, however, requires examining the original material and its distribution records.

Between the original producer and the publishing outlet, several stages can alter how material is understood. Military footage broadcast by Al Masirah may be translated or accompanied by commentary on another platform before appearing in an international news report or digital clip that removes a statement from its original context. Comparing versions, publication dates, and accompanying metadata can help establish each organization's role in producing and presenting the narrative.

At the local level, the network begins with Houthi media channels, websites, and online activists and extends to public institutions under the group's control. Material issued under the name of Saba News Agency or the Ministry of Information can appear to originate from an official government source unless its institutional affiliation is made clear.

Anadolu Agency provided such clarification on 12 January 2024 when reporting a statement by the Houthi political council through Saba, identifying the agency as Houthi-controlled.[11] This distinction prevents readers from confusing an institution's established name and history with the authority currently controlling its reporting.

The Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Ahed website used the terms "Yemeni Armed Forces" and "support for Gaza" to describe Houthi operations in an article published on 31 December 2024.[12] The example shows how the group's terminology moves into an allied media outlet, reaching another audience within a broader regional narrative.

The available documents establish declared cooperation and forms of support identified by independent sources. They do not, however, establish organizational links between the network and every media outlet that uses similar terminology. Similar headlines or questions in Arab media organizations outside the network may reflect shared political positions, ideological perspectives, professional pressures, or individual judgments about newsworthiness. The influence of a narrative on published coverage must therefore be distinguished from evidence of an organizational relationship between the source and the newsroom.

11. Anadolu Agency, "Houthis: All American and British Interests Are Legitimate Targets," 12 January 2024. link

12. Ali al-Darwani, "Yemen 2025: A Sixth Phase of Support for Gaza and New Surprises from the Yemeni Armed Forces," Al-Ahed News, 31 December 2024. Cited as evidence of the publishing outlet's terminology. https://alahednews.news/post/77889/اليمن-2025-مرحلة-سادسة-من-إسناد-غزة-ومفاجآت-جديدة-للقوات-المسلحة-اليمنية

Hezbollah's Support for Houthi Propaganda as Documented by UN Experts

The final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, submitted to the Security Council on 11 October 2024 as document S/2024/731,[13] details several forms of Hezbollah support for the Houthis. Paragraph 20 identifies Hezbollah's involvement in decision-making structures, training, technical and financial assistance, and ideological guidance.

It also explicitly documents support for managing media propaganda and preparing material for military campaigns. This establishes Hezbollah's involvement in Houthi media operations through UN documentation, rather than inference based on similarities in language or messaging.

Paragraph 21 examines statements made by Houthi spokespersons through Iranian and Lebanese media outlets between October 2023 and April 2024.[14] The Panel identified these appearances as indications of political and military coordination within the "Axis of Resistance." They also provide evidence of the regional connections shaping Houthi messaging.

13. UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, Final Report, UN Security Council document S/2024/731, 11 October 2024, paragraphs 20–21.
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4079905?utm_=&v=pdf
14. UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, Final Report, UN Security Council document S/2024/731, 11 October 2024, paragraphs 20–21
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4079905?utm=&v=pdf

The UN findings are consistent with documents published by the Islamic Radio and Television Union and research by the Washington Institute, which identify networks for training media personnel and producing and exchanging content among allied organizations. Establishing who produced a particular video or subsequently changed its headline, however, requires examining the original material and its distribution history. Such conclusions cannot be drawn from the presumed political affiliations of those who received or shared it.

Digital Dissemination: Coordinated Activity and Organic Sharing

There is also limited technical evidence of similar messaging being spread through coordinated inauthentic activity. In October 2020, Meta announced the removal of a network originating in Iran, which it linked to individuals associated with the Iranian government.[15] Among the examples identified was content about Yemen that referred to the "army and popular committees" confronting "Saudi aggressors." The network described in Meta's report had a limited audience. The case demonstrates the use of this method but does not establish its wider influence across digital platforms or suggest that Arab public sympathy can be attributed to fake accounts.

Content can circulate more widely when a video clip is separated from the questions and context of its original broadcast, then shared across platforms under a new headline or with a different translation.

15. Meta, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Mexico, Iran and Myanmar," October 2020. https://about.fb.com/news/2020/10/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-mexico-iran-myanmar/

This may result from coordinated partisan distribution or spontaneous sharing by users with no organizational ties. The number of shares alone therefore reveals neither who initiated the circulation nor the level of public support for the message.

A study by Nadia Al-Sakkaf, published in April 2026,[16] provides further evidence on Houthi digital messaging.

It examines Arabic-language content related to Yemen on X between June 2018 and August 2025, focusing on portrayals of humanitarian organizations and civil society, and the relationship between online campaigns and the detention of humanitarian workers in 2024 and 2025.

The study identifies different approaches to messaging among pro-Houthi accounts. Prominent figures tended to use diplomatic language, influencers helped shape the direction of public discussion, while anonymous or less prominent accounts circulated accusatory and conspiracy-based narratives. These findings concern the specific online activity examined and should not be generalized to the Houthis' entire digital presence.

Al-Sakkaf's research also identifies links between campaigns targeting humanitarian organizations and the detention of their staff in 2024 and 2025. Posts accusing aid workers of espionage may help create a climate in which security measures against them appear justified, or public sympathy for those detained is diminished.

16. Nadia Al-Sakkaf, "Digital Narratives and Houthi Detention of Humanitarian Workers: X, Propaganda, and the Erosion of Civic Space in Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 21 April 2026. https://sanaacenter.org/publications/policy-research/26790

The Internationalization of Yemen's Conflict and Its Transformation into a Proxy War

How the War Became a Regional Conflict

The concept of a "proxy war" helps explain part of the structure of Yemen's conflict after 2015. The current phase began with a crisis of governance, a contested political transition, and internal armed confrontations that preceded large-scale foreign intervention. Saudi Arabia led a military coalition in support of the internationally recognized government, while Iran provided the Houthis with growing military, technical, and political support.

The United Arab Emirates also backed Yemeni armed groups with differing priorities. Within these overlapping relationships, local actors retained their own interests and calculations, while regional sponsors gained additional means of influence.



The current phase of the conflict began with the Houthi takeover of Sana'a on 21 September 2014, which disrupted the political transition. The Saudi-led coalition intervened militarily in March 2015, as Iranian support for the Houthis became more visible and explicit, bringing the war into a direct regional confrontation. In subsequent media coverage, airstrikes and the humanitarian consequences of the war often received greater attention than the initial armed takeover. Comparative research on media coverage has documented this shift inframing.[17]

The Gulf rift that emerged in 2017 introduced another dimension. Arab media coverage became a platform for competing narratives about the legitimacy and consequences of Saudi intervention, while Riyadh and Abu Dhabi differed over certain Yemeni factions, the southern question, and their respective priorities. Developments in late 2025 and early 2026, documented by the UK House of Commons Library[18] and a study published by the Mokha Center for Strategic Studies,[19] show how competition between externally backed forces reshaped the distribution of power within the anti-Houthi camp.

Foreign involvement thus extended beyond support for the Houthis, complicating military and institutional decision-making among their opponents and weakening the Yemeni state's ability to present a coherent account of its own position.

17. Talha Ismail Duman and Furkan Halit Yolcu, "Two Narratives of One War: Understanding Saudi Arabian and Qatari Media Coverage of the Yemen War," International Journal of Communication, Vol. 17, 29 August 2023. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21047?
18. Philip Loft, "Yemen in 2026: The Fall of the Southern Transitional Council and Renewed Houthi-Saudi Conflict," House of Commons Library, 5 October 2026. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/CBP-10427/?
19. Dr. Ismail Al-Suhaili, "The End of Ambiguous Balances: Eastern Yemen, Saudi Security Imperatives, and Yemeni Unity," Mokha Center for Strategic Studies, January 2026.
https://mokhacenter.org/?p=11152

Another turning point came after October 2023. Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, together with related US, British, and Israeli strikes, drew Yemen into a regional and international security crisis involving global trade, supply chains, the war in Gaza, and confrontation with Iran. The Houthis gained greater news prominence because their military decisions now affected shipping companies, governments, and markets with limited familiarity with the origins of Yemen's conflict. This increased the visibility of the group's narrative in reporting on military operations, although such exposure does not mean that audiences accept its political agenda.

During 2026, developments along Yemen's western coast became more closely connected to the security of Bab al-Mandab and the Strait of Hormuz amid escalating US-Israeli-Iranian confrontation in the Gulf. An International Crisis Group report published on 18 September 2026[20] examined Yemen's coastal front in the context of the wider regional conflict. Reuters subsequently reported renewed Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and intensifying fighting around Taiz on 13 and 14 October.[21][22]

Developments in Yemen increasingly carried consequences beyond its borders, although this did not diminish the Houthis' responsibility for military decisions made according to their own interests and calculations.

20. International Crisis Group, "Closing a New War Front in Yemen," 18 September 2026.
https://www.crisisgroup.org/stm/middle-east-north-africa/yemen-saudi-arabia-iran/closing-new-war-front-yemen
21. euters, "Shelling Worsens and Prices Spiral in Yemen's Taiz," 13 October 2026.
https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemens-taiz-shelling-worsens-prices-spiral-2026-10-13/?
22. Reuters, "Houthis Bring War to Riyadh," 14 October 2026.
https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/houthis-bring-war-riyadh-2026-10-14/?

Proxy Warfare and the Limits of the Framework

Proxy warfare involves an external sponsor providing a local actor with funding, weapons, training, or political backing to advance shared interests. The case for such a relationship becomes stronger when there is documented coordination over objectives and timing. Elements of this pattern are evident in Iran and Hezbollah's relations with the Houthis, as documented by the UN Panel of Experts and other studies. At the same time, the Houthis have their own leadership structure and domestic interests, making their military decisions the product of both local calculations and regional relationships.

Iran's geopolitical interests are reflected in the Houthis' ability to exert pressure around Bab al-Mandab, alongside Iran's own strategic position at the Strait of Hormuz. Together, these positions offer potential leverage over maritime transport, energy markets, and regional adversaries. This interpretation is supported by military geography and the timing of events, but it does not establish the existence of a coordinated operational plan behind every incident.

The conflict's regional dimensions also shape media coverage. When Yemen's war is reduced to a confrontation between Tehran and its adversaries, Houthi military actions may be presented as actions of the Yemeni state.

This framing reflects external interests and the concerns of regional audiences. It may also be reinforced by editorial decisions that give precedence to the war in Gaza or maritime security over the origins of Yemen's domestic conflict. Regardless of an outlet's political affiliations, editors remain responsible for accurately identifying the actors involved, their objectives, and the outcomes of their actions.

What Does a Comparison of Arab and International Media Coverage Reveal?

Media framing can be examined through three documented events: the seizure of the Galaxy Leader in November 2023, the US-British strikes in January 2024, and Operation Dawn of Yemen in October 2026. Comparing coverage of these events shows how the placement of claims differs between headlines and article text, and how news organizations vary in identifying the parties to the conflict and acknowledging the legal status of Yemen's internationally recognized government.[23]

The Galaxy Leader

On 19 November 2023, Al Jazeera Arabic used the term "Israeli ship" in a headline about the vessel seized by the Houthis,[24] while the article also included elements of the Israeli account. On 20 November, Sky News Arabia described the incident as the seizure of a vessel the Houthis "believed" to be Israeli and reported the Israeli military's denial that the ship was Israeli.[25]

The difference lies in how the claim about the vessel's identity was presented and the degree of qualification used. This alone is insufficient to establish bias across either organization's wider coverage. The Israeli denial does not, in itself, settle questions about the vessel's ownership or commercial links. The nationality of its crew, its registered flag, and its ownership and operating arrangements are separate matters.

23. UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, Final Report, UN Security Council document S/2024/731, 11 October 2024, paragraphs 20–21. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4079905

24. Al Jazeera Arabic, "Houthis Seize Israeli Ship; Tel Aviv Calls Incident Extremely Serious," 19 November 2023.https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/11/19/الحوثيون-يحتجزون-سفينة-إسرائيلية-وتل

25. Sky News Arabia, "Harm Affecting Everyone: What Are the Risks of Attacks on Ships in the Red Sea?", 20 November 2023.https://www.skynewsarabia.com/amp/middle-east/1671645-ضرر-يطال-الجميع-مخاطر-الهجمات-السفن-بالبحر-الأحمر؟

The 12 January 2024 Strikes: Distinguishing Source Claims from News Reporting

During the US-British strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen, Deutsche Welle Arabic used a headline that clearly identified the parties carrying out the strikes, their targets, and the location: "US and British Airstrikes on Houthi Targets in Yemen."[26] In a separate report, Anadolu Agency used the phrase "legitimate targets for our forces" in a headline that attributed the statement to the Houthis. The report also identified the group's political council as the source and clarified that the version carried by Saba News Agency came from a Houthi-controlled outlet.[27] Such wording maintains the distinction between reporting a claim and endorsing it, leaving questions of legal legitimacy and military outcomes subject to independent verification.



26. Deutsche Welle Arabic, "US and British Airstrikes on Houthi Targets in Yemen," 12 January 2024. https://www.dw.com/ar/a-67960197

27. Anadolu Agency, "Houthis: All US and British Interests Are Legitimate Targets for Our Forces," 12 January 2024. https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/3107102/الدول-العربية/الحوثي-كل-المصالح-الأمريكية-البريطانية-أهداف-مشروعة-لقواتنا-

October 2026: The Government Narrative and the Limits of Field Verification

Coverage of the Yemeni government's announcement of Operation Dawn of Yemen in early October 2026 revealed differences in how media outlets identified the parties to the conflict. On 4 October, Reuters described the Yemeni government as "internationally recognized" and the Houthis as backed by Iran.[28] Al Jazeera Arabic reported the government's account of the operation and its objective of restoring state institutions in articles published on 5, 7, and 13 October, identifying government forces and the Houthis as distinct parties.[29][30][31] Al Araby TV, meanwhile, used the wording "announces control" on 5 October and included the Houthis' denial of the reported advance,[32] maintaining a distinction between the government's claim and developments that had yet to be independently confirmed.

28. Reuters, "Yemeni Government Launches Offensive to Retake All Territory from Iran-Backed Houthis," 4 October 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/head-yemens-presidential-council-announces-military-operations-retake-territory-2026-10-04/

29. Al Jazeera Arabic, "Air Support and Rapid Advances: What Happened in Yemen?", 5 October 2026. https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2026/10/5/إسناد-جوي-وتقدم-سريع-ماذا-جرى-في

30. Al Jazeera Arabic, "Dawn of Yemen: A Military Operation to Retake Sana'a," 7 October 2026. https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/encyclopedia/2026/10/7/فجر-اليمن-عملية-عسكرية-لاستعادة-صنعاء

31. Al Jazeera Arabic, "Al-Alimi Reaffirms Continuation of Operation Dawn of Yemen," 13 October 2026. https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2026/10/13/العليمي-يؤكد-مواصلة-فجر-اليمن-والقوات

32. Al Araby TV, "Casualties in Attack on Sana'a as Government Forces Announce Control of Bab al-Mandab," 5 October 2026. https://www.alaraby.com/news/ضحايا-بهجوم-على-صنعاء-القوات-الحكومية-تعلن-السيطرة-على-باب-المندب

During the first week of October 2026, Asharq News featured government spokespersons and assessments by field commanders. On 9 October, it reported the government's statement to the UN Security Council asserting the state's exclusive authority over decisions of war and peace.[33]

On 10 and 14 October, the outlet published figures for military strikes announced by government forces, attributing those figures to their source.[34][35] This distinction is essential: reporting that a military force has announced a particular result is not the same as independently verifying that result. Al Hadath, by contrast, published a headline on 5 October stating that the Houthis had "fallen into a trap."[36] The article itself made clear that the description came from an adviser to the chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council. The phrase carries a different implication when presented in a headline than when attributed to a source within the report.

On 5 October 2026, Arab News approached developments in Yemen through US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's pledge to uphold American security commitments to Saudi Arabia amid Houthi attacks.[37]This framing placed Saudi security and its international relationships at the center of the story.

33. Asharq News, "Yemeni Government Tells Security Council: Operation Dawn of Yemen Aims to Restore the State and End the Houthi Coup," 9 October 2026.
https://asharq.com/politics/198998/الحكومة-اليمنية-فجر-اليمن-لاستعادة-الدولة-وإنهاء-الانقلاب/
34. Asharq News, "Yemeni Forces Announce 1,900 Strikes Against Houthis in 24 Hours," 10 October 2026.
https://asharq.com/politics/199082/القوات-اليمنية-تعلن-تنفيذ-1900-عملية-استهداف-ضد-الحوثيين/
35. Asharq News, "Yemeni Army Announces 2,309 Strikes Under Operation Dawn of Yemen," 14 October 2026.
https://asharq.com/politics/199487/الجيش-اليمني-يعلن-تنفيذ-2309-عمليات-استهداف-ضد-الحوثيين/
36. Asharq News, "Yemeni Army Announces 2,309 Strikes Under Operation Dawn of Yemen," 14 October 2026.
https://asharq.com/politics/199487/الجيش-اليمني-يعلن-تنفيذ-2309-عمليات-استهداف-ضد-الحوثيين/
37. Al Hadath, "Focus on Retaking Sana'a as Houthis Fall into a Trap," 5 October 2026
https://www.alhadath.net/yemen/2026/10/05/العين-على-استعادة-صنعاء-والحوثيون-وقعوا-في-المصيدة

On 14 October, Asharq Al-Awsat highlighted military developments in Taiz, Marib, and Al-Jawf within the wider confrontation.[38] When Yemen is covered primarily through the interests of a neighboring state, the origins of the Yemeni conflict, the situation of civilians, and the role of government forces may receive less attention, even when the reported facts are accurate.

The material examined spans different journalistic formats, including breaking news, explanatory reporting, and discussion programs. The analysis focuses on dated headlines and article texts. Full broadcasts by BBC Arabic, France 24, and other outlets were not examined to the same extent.

38. Arab News, "Rubio Says US Will Honor Saudi Security Commitments Amid Yemen Fighting," 5 October 2026. https://www.arabnews.com/middle-east/rubio-says-us-will-honor-saudi-security-commitments-amid-yemen-fighting-3004754

Dated Examples from the Three Key Events

Outlet and Date	Material Examined	Verifiable Editorial Indicator
Al Jazeera Arabic — 19 November 2023	Seizure of the Galaxy Leader	The headline described the vessel as an "Israeli ship," while the article included the opposing account.
Sky News Arabia — 20 November 2023	The same vessel seizure	The vessel's alleged Israeli identity was attributed to the Houthis' belief, and the Israeli denial was included.
Deutsche Welle Arabic — 12 January 2024	US-British airstrikes	The phrase "Houthi targets in Yemen" distinguished the targets from the country.
Anadolu Agency — 12 January 2024	Threats issued by the Houthi political council	The threats and terminology were attributed to their Houthi source.
Reuters — 4–5 October 2026	Launch of the government offensive	Identified the internationally recognized government and the Houthis as distinct actors and specified their external backing.
Al Araby TV — 5 October 2026	Advances toward Bab al-Mandab	Distinguished the government's announcement of control from the opposing side's denial.
Al Hadath — 5 October 2026	Statements by an adviser to Al-Alimi	Used a confrontational headline, while the article attributed the characterization to its source.
Asharq News — 9 October 2026	Yemen's statement to the UN Security Council	Reported the government's account as an official position.
Al Jazeera Arabic — 13 October 2026	Al-Alimi's statements and government military operations	Presented the government's account and identified the institutional status of the actors involved.
Asharq Al-Awsat — 14 October 2026	Developments in Operation Dawn of Yemen	Used a battlefield-focused account of the fronts and air support, with claims attributed to their sources.
Arab News — 5 October 2026	Washington's security commitments to Saudi Arabia	Prioritized Saudi security and international relations as the main angle of coverage.
Agence France-Presse (AFP) — 5 October 2026	Government military campaign against the Houthis	Distinguished between the Saudi-backed government and the Iran-backed Houthi group.[39]

39. **Agence France-Presse (AFP)**, "Yemen: President Announces Offensive to Retake Entire Country from Houthis," 5 October 2026. Republished by Boursorama. https://www.boursorama.com/actualite-economique/actualites/yemen-le-president-annonce-une-offensive-pour-reprendre-l-ensemble-du-pays-aux-houthis-44ef85d3c06d3a3fa43be36128c9eb19

The cases examined reveal differences in how news organizations identify the parties involved, attribute claims, and distinguish between headlines and article content. These differences may reflect institutional editorial policies, individual editorial decisions, newsroom pressures, and access to sources. Assessing the extent of ideological or political influence within newsrooms would require a larger body of material collected over time, complete broadcast recordings, and accounts of how editorial and publication decisions were made.

Editorial Decisions: Institutional Policy and Individual Judgment

The language of an armed group can enter international news coverage without external direction. An organization's editorial policy, the experience of its editors, the views of producers and presenters, and their assessments of an event's political or moral significance can all shape the choice of angles and sources. A report may be factually accurate yet remain incomplete if it omits essential background or adopts a source's characterization without attribution.

Coverage of military operations that the Houthis have linked to Gaza illustrates the importance of this distinction. A journalist may strongly support the Palestinian cause and give extensive coverage to a Houthi statement describing an operation as an act of support for Gaza. That editorial choice does not, in itself, indicate support for Houthi rule in Yemen. The problem arises when military claims are accepted without verification, or when an operation's stated purpose is used to set aside questions about civilian casualties and responsibility for decisions involving the use of force.

Such shortcomings can be assessed by examining how claims are attributed, the questions asked, and the information omitted from coverage.

The composition of news teams and their established professional relationships also influence which guests and sources appear regularly on air. Through experience and routine working practices, editorial teams may favor familiar commentators and similar interpretations over Yemeni specialists who could provide a different perspective. Such patterns do not necessarily indicate hidden ideological or organizational direction. Editorial shortcomings become apparent when headlines repeatedly adopt the descriptions used by one source, when different speakers face unequal standards of evidence, or when one side is regularly allowed to interpret events without comparable scrutiny. Published material does not reveal who commissioned a report, selected a guest, or approved a headline. The study therefore identifies observable editorial patterns without attributing them to any particular network or group within a newsroom.

Guest Selection and Debate Moderation

A debate can become unbalanced when an experienced speaker faces a guest with less knowledge of the facts or limited access to relevant sources. The gap widens when questions, follow-ups, interruptions, and the allocation of the final word differ between participants, or when clips selected for digital publication give one side an apparent advantage. Standards of balance go beyond counting speaking time to consider the information, documents, and questions available to each side.

In a discussion of a Houthi operation, the group's representative should be asked who authorized it to declare war on behalf of Yemenis, and about the results and consequences of the attack. A government representative should likewise be questioned about evidence of battlefield advances and the protection of civilians. Editorial decisions begin with defining the program's central question, continue through the moderation of the discussion, and extend to the selection of clips republished on digital platforms.

Impartiality does not mean giving equal time to established facts and unverified claims. Professional coverage has two responsibilities: protecting a speaker's right to present their position without distortion, and preventing that position from becoming the outlet's own characterization without evidence. Interviews with representatives of armed groups require original documents, legal references, and records of previous statements, as well as questions about current political developments. Clips shared on digital platforms must also include sufficient context, as they may preserve a compelling answer while omitting the critical question that preceded it.

Regional Polarization and Its Impact on Media Coverage

The Gulf crisis that began in 2017 influenced the framing of Yemen's war in transnational media. A study by Duman and Yolcu, published in the *International Journal of Communication* in 2023[40], analyzed 3,016 items from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya between 2015 and 2020. It documented shifts in coverage alongside Saudi-Qatari polarization.

40. Talha Ismail Duman and Furkan Halit Yolcu, "Two Narratives of One War: Understanding Saudi Arabian and Qatari Media Coverage of the Yemen War," *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17, 29 August 2023. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21047

This demonstrates how disputes between states can reshape the coverage of Yemen's war and the attribution of responsibility, beyond professional differences between two media organizations.

Riyadh and the Yemeni Government: From Support to Perceived Dependence

The Yemeni leadership's presence in Riyadh since 2015 has influenced how the government is described internationally. The Sana'a Center has described the government as operating largely from Riyadh[41][42], while Carnegie (2020)[43] examined how its dependence on the coalition affected its decision-making autonomy and institutional effectiveness. The description "Saudi-backed" came to overshadow its legal status as the representative of the Yemeni state. Riyadh's opponents used this narrative to portray the war as a confrontation with Saudi Arabia, sidelining the Houthi takeover.

During the Gulf crisis, coalition mistakes, airstrikes, and the blockade became subjects of criticism in media outlets opposed to Riyadh, which the Houthis incorporated into their own narrative. Some involved documented violations that warranted reporting, while others required verification. The political effect lay in extending accusations concerning specific operations into a narrative that granted Saudi Arabia's opponent the status of Yemen's legitimate representative.

41. Majed Al-Madhaji, "The Riyadh Agreement: Saudi Arabia Takes the Initiative in Southern Yemen," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 5 November 2019.
https://sanaacenter.org/publications/perspectives-and-analyses/8324
42. Marine Poirier, "Politics Despite War: Yemen's Political Elites in Cairo," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 2022.
https://sanaacenter.org/publications/policy-research/18228
43. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Five Years of Yemen Conflict Yield Muddled Picture for Saudi Coalition," March 2020.
https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2020/03/five-years-of-yemen-conflict-yield-muddled-picture-for-saudi-coalition

Media coverage may also become a means of exerting pressure in regional disputes by increasing the political cost of Saudi Arabia's position. However, the comparative study establishes changes in media framing between 2015 and 2020 under the influence of polarization, rather than evidence of any specific political bargaining.[44]

Differences in the priorities of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and their respective allies also produced competing definitions of legitimacy and threats, as reflected in Carnegie's examination of issues involving Islah, southern Yemen, and ports.[45] Narratives within the anti-Houthi camp diverged between restoring the state, confronting Islamists, representing the south, and counterterrorism. The conflict increasingly appeared as a struggle between regional sponsors rather than a national crisis in which an armed group had seized the country's capital.

This allowed the Houthis to portray their opponents as competing centers of power driven by the interests of their external backers, while making it harder to present a unified government narrative. The leadership's presence abroad and the fragmentation of authority became part of the image against which the Houthis positioned their own narrative.

44. Talha Ismail Duman and Furkan Halit Yolcu, "Two Narratives of One War: Understanding Saudi Arabian and Qatari Media Coverage of the Yemen War," *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 17, 29 August 2023.
https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21047

45. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Five Years of Yemen Conflict Yield Muddled Picture for Saudi Coalition," March 2020.
https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2020/03/five-years-of-yemen-conflict-yield-muddled-picture-for-saudi-coalition

Saudi institutions explained the objectives of the intervention through media and diplomatic channels, as Tom Walsh has shown.[46] Yet justifying the intervention did not establish an independent Yemeni source of information. Riyadh's messaging appeared more consistent than that of the government operating from abroad, allowing Saudi Arabia's opponents to criticize its policies and the Houthis to incorporate that criticism into their own narrative.

Three levels overlap in explaining media coverage: institutional editorial policy, the daily decisions of editors and presenters, and the constraints of rapid broadcasting and limited access to sources. These are accompanied by emotional attitudes toward Palestine and Saudi intervention. Their influence can be examined by comparing coverage before, during, and after regional disputes.

The Iranian narrative presents the Houthis as a "support front" within an axis confronting the United States and Israel. The Saudi framing views them as a direct security threat, while the Emirati framing links them to the south, ports, and local partners. Given the divisions within the Gulf, it would be unreasonable to infer a newsroom's allegiance to its government from a single headline.

Western media tend to approach Yemen through shipping, markets, and diplomacy. Descriptions such as "Iran-backed Houthis" and "Saudi-backed government" reflect actual relationships, but they can obscure the distinction between armed control and international recognition, as well as the domestic history of the conflict and the concerns of Yemenis.

46.Tom Walsh,: Marketing Operation Decisive Storm," *Middle East Studies,* published online 20 December 2024.https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dome.12345

Not every report criticizing the coalition serves the Houthis. Documenting civilian casualties from airstrikes or restrictions on ports and airports is legitimate journalism, regardless of how the Houthis use such reporting. The standard should be a consistent approach to verification that establishes responsibility without turning a documented violation into political endorsement of the opposing side. This applies equally to deliberate Houthi attacks on civilians in Taiz, Marib, and Aden, and to violations committed by pro-government forces.

How Regional Interests Shape News Selection

A media organization with no ties to the Houthis may choose an angle that supports part of the group's narrative because of an independent political position. This may involve focusing on Saudi Arabia, maritime security, or operations the Houthis claim to conduct in support of Palestine. These issues have undeniable news value, but coverage becomes incomplete when the origins of Yemen's conflict are omitted, civilian suffering is overlooked, or the outlet adopts Houthi terminology in its own editorial voice.

Iranian support is distinct in that it involves publicly documented cooperation networks and UN evidence of Hezbollah's assistance with Houthi propaganda. Other media organizations operate under their own ownership structures, working arrangements, and editorial priorities, which may overlap with aspects of Houthi messaging without placing them under the authority of those producing it.

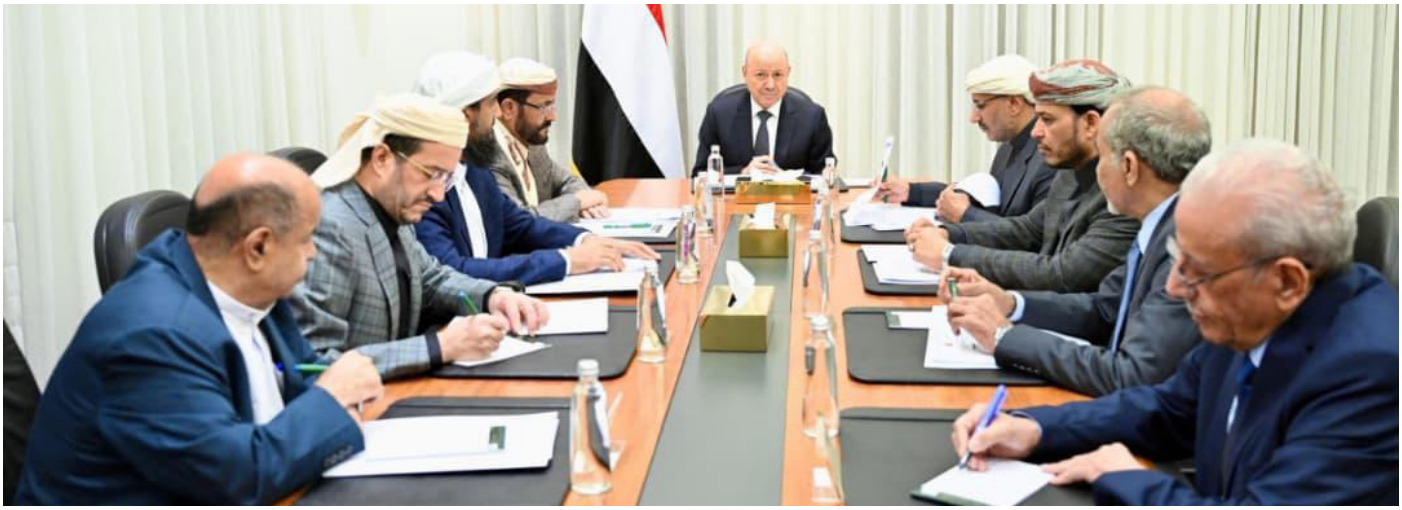
Before the Red Sea attacks, Yemen featured in international decisions as a country facing armed conflict, a disrupted political transition, and a humanitarian crisis. International headlines subsequently gave increasing priority to shipping, energy, and confrontation with Iran. This shift reflects a real increase in regional security risks, but it comes at an informational cost when Taiz, Marib, Sana'a, and the fate of civilians become little more than background to reporting on the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The internationalization of media coverage is therefore part of the problem examined in this study: the audience for news about Yemen has expanded while the understanding of Yemen's conflict has narrowed.

The Yemeni Government's Official Narrative: Legal Foundations and Core Arguments

Since the Houthis' armed takeover of Sana'a in September 2014, Yemen's internationally recognized government has maintained a political and legal account of the war's origins, the responsibilities of the parties involved, and the conditions for ending the conflict. This account rests on foundations independent of the Houthi narrative: constitutional legitimacy, the post-2011 political transition, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, UN Security Council resolutions, particularly Resolution 2216, and the state's exclusive authority over weapons and decisions of war and peace. What the Houthis describe as a revolution to restore sovereignty, the government regards as an armed coup that disrupted the political transition and transferred sovereign decision-making to a group operating outside constitutional institutions.

The government's legal status differs from the armed group's control over institutions in the capital. Yet the visibility of its narrative in the media depends on translating these legal foundations into documented reporting, verifiable statements, and consistent attention to citizens' concerns. This is where the gap between international recognition and the government's role in producing news becomes apparent.

The government's account begins with Houthi military expansion, the takeover of Amran and Sana'a, the seizure of state institutions, and the detention of the president and government. It draws on the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, its implementation mechanism, and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference as the framework for the transfer of power and constitutional transition. Security Council Resolution 2201, adopted in February 2015, demanded that the Houthis withdraw from state institutions[47].



Resolution 2216, adopted in April 2015 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, subsequently required them to withdraw from areas they had seized, including the capital, surrender weapons, and cease exercising the functions of the legitimate government[48].

47. UN Security Council, Resolution 2201 on Yemen, 15 February 2015. https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11781.doc.htm
48. UN Security Council, Resolution 2216 on Yemen, 14 April 2015. https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm

The crisis therefore did not begin with the March 2015 airstrikes, although the coalition's military intervention remains a separate and central part of the war's history and its costs.

The government links its narrative to the state's authority over weapons and decisions of war and peace, the established frameworks for a political settlement, ending the use of republican institutions outside its authority, Iranian support for the Houthis, and the protection of the republican system and citizenship. Despite their importance, these principles need to be supported by concrete measures to protect civilians and provide essential services.

On 7 April 2022, President Hadi transferred his powers to the Presidential Leadership Council, a move welcomed by the UN Security Council.[49] This broadened political participation while differences persisted over southern Yemen, the structure of the state, relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and military and economic priorities. The government's institutional recognition is one matter; its ability to communicate a unified message internationally is another.

On 9 October 2026, the government presented Operation *Dawn of Yemen* to the UN Security Council as an effort to restore state institutions and return control over weapons and decisions of war and peace exclusively to the state.[50] It described the operation as a confrontation with an armed terrorist group, rather than with a region or religious sect, and committed to protecting civilians.

49. UN Security Council, "Security Council Press Statement on Yemen," 13 April 2022, Press Release SC/14861. https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14861.doc.htm

50. Yemeni Government's Saba News Agency, "Yemen's Statement Before the UN Security Council," 9 October 2026.

On 13 October, the website of the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council published his statement: "The decision to end Houthi terrorism is in force and irreversible."[51]

The government's narrative also invokes the September and October revolutions and equal citizenship in opposition to the group's claim to leadership based on a theocratic doctrine of divine selection and alleged hereditary superiority. It connects the protection of cities and institutions to Yemenis' right to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. The government has a legal status that distinguishes it from the Houthis, but the republic is socially and politically broader than the current government and its constituent political forces.

Civilian protection featured prominently in the cabinet's statement on Taiz on 10 October 2026, which addressed the siege, road access, and the protection of residents.[52] The strength of this narrative depends on accurate information about casualties, displacement, services, and roads, as well as measures open to independent verification. Reuters and the Associated Press reported during the same week on the pressure that fighting placed on hospitals in Taiz and the tightening siege affecting its residents[5354].

51. Official Website of the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council, "President of the Presidential Leadership Council: The Decision to End Houthi Terrorism Is in Force and Irreversible," 13 October 2026. https://presidentalalimi.net/en/news2056.html

52. Yemeni Government's Saba News Agency, "Cabinet Praises Taiz's Resilience and Affirms That Lifting the Siege and Protecting Civilians Are National Priorities," 10 October 2026. https://www.sabanew.net/story/ar/153764

53. Reuters, "Fighting in Yemen Overwhelms Hospitals and Cuts Off Aid to 800,000 People, Relief Agencies Say," 14 October 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/yemen-hospitals-overwhelmed-by-surge-war-casualties-red-cross-warns-2026-10-14/

54. Associated Press, "Fears in Taiz as Houthis Tighten Siege of Yemen's Third-Largest City," 13 October 2026. https://apnews.com/article/89a793d5c55c34fd4f7e08c9df5835a6

Holding the Houthis accountable for their attacks does not diminish the government's responsibilities toward civilians and the forces under its command.

The Crisis of Government Communication and Original News Production

Having a narrative is different from being able to establish it as a source others can rely on. A study on Yemeni media ownership presented by the International Federation of Journalists in May 2023[55] highlighted the alignment of media outlets with parties to the conflict. Of the 26 television channels included in a sample of 365 media outlets, 23 supported warring parties. These figures cannot be treated as a comprehensive account of Yemen's media landscape in 2026.

When public media become primarily a platform for reporting officials' activities and meetings, fewer resources remain for gathering the facts that citizens and foreign correspondents need. Administrative procedures delay the release of information, while some statements are confined to officials' personal accounts, allowing competing outlets to publish footage and statements first. The quality of an official source depends on the accuracy of its information and the speed of its corrections, not the volume of ceremonial coverage it produces.

Editorial independence requires journalists to be able to question institutions, verify their information, serve the public, and distinguish news from political messaging.

55. International Federation of Journalists, "Yemen: New Study Raises Concerns Over Media Independence and Journalists' Rights," 15 May 2023. https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/visuals/detail/yemen-new-study-raises-concerns-over-media-independence-and-journalists-rights/category/press-releases

International recognition establishes the government's legal status, but the credibility of its media depends on factual accuracy, regular corrections, and accountability for officials.

Multiple centers of decision-making within the government and its constituent groups produce multiple spokespersons and inconsistent terminology. One faction may withhold information for fear that a rival will benefit, while an official may issue a statement that the relevant authorities cannot substantiate. Differences among external sponsors further complicate matters, leaving journalists uncertain about who holds the information, who has decision-making authority, and who is responsible for issuing corrections.

This does not mean the government lacks a spokesperson. Rajeh Badi previously held the position, and military and political statements are issued regularly. The problem lies in the consistency of briefings, the allocation of responsibilities, and services provided to journalists. On 11 August 2026, the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council acknowledged that delays in releasing official information allow the Houthis to fill the gap[56]. The problem therefore concerns institutional performance rather than the absence of a legal narrative.

The official information system needs authorized spokespersons for political, military, economic, and public service matters, supported by newsrooms, correspondents, and documentation and translation units operating on clearly defined shifts.Journalists should know who can answer their questions, who verifies figures, and where to obtain

56. Yemeni Government's Saba News Agency, "Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council Emphasizes the Central Role of National Media in Raising Awareness and Countering Misleading Narratives," 11 August 2026. https://www.sabanew.net/story/ar/150658

original images, updates, and corrections without relying on personal connections with officials.

International news agencies need specific facts supported by dates, locations, and identifiable sources, rather than lengthy statements of condemnation or praise without verifiable evidence. Weak archiving, translation, and licensing arrangements for photographs and videos make government reporting more difficult to use, even when the government's legal position is clearer than that of the Houthi armed group.

When announcements about military operations or negotiations come through officials based outside Yemen, Yemeni decision-making appears less independent. Addressing this requires a sustained, direct government presence inside the country, access to primary information, and clarity about the nature of external support and its influence on decisions.

Limited field access and threats against journalists, documented by Human Rights Watch in 2025,[57] add to these difficulties. Repression makes official or partisan statements easier to obtain while making independent, critical testimony more difficult and dangerous. The imbalance in available voices is therefore shaped by working conditions, not editorial intentions alone.

There is a need for an information unit to collect and verify data from government institutions, authorized spokespersons, regular briefings in Arabic and English, and a press center capable of field verification.

57. Human Rights Watch, "Yemen: Journalists Under Assault," 11 September 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/11/yemen-journalists-under-assault

Coordination should focus on making information available and correcting inaccuracies, while preserving newsroom independence from political direction and the personal interests of officeholders.

Institutional weakness becomes apparent when an official's or activist's account announces a battlefield advance before the relevant authorities, without coordinates, identifiable sources, or dated images, or when casualty figures are released without explaining how they were counted. Foreign editors need timely information that can be attributed and verified. When it is unavailable, they turn to sources that provide ready-to-use material, even when those sources are partisan.

Media policy should not address foreign editors alone. People living in government-controlled areas need information about prices, salaries, public services, and official accountability. Residents of Houthi-controlled areas need documented answers rather than collective accusations of disloyalty. Audiences that distrust reporting on public services will not automatically trust military reporting. Freeing newsrooms from routine praise of officials therefore strengthens the image of the state rather than undermining it.

Yemeni Realities Overlooked by the Regional Confrontation Framework

The language used for domestic mobilization differs from the messaging the Houthis direct toward Arab and international media. Internal communications emphasize obedience, *wilaya* (religious authority), and religious condemnation of opponents, while external messaging presents the group in terms of sovereignty and regional causes.

This distinction helps explain why issues such as detention, recruitment, and coercive rule are absent from some coverage focused exclusively on Houthi statements about the Red Sea or Gaza.

A broader account of Yemen places maritime attacks alongside civilian suffering in Taiz and Marib, the rights of journalists and detainees, and conditions within educational and media institutions under Houthi control. Reporting the group's stated objectives without examining the consequences of its actions and its record of governance conceals part of its political and legal responsibility. The same standard applies to the actions of government forces and the coalition.

Audiences: News Consumption, Sympathy, and Political Support

The war in Gaza enabled the Houthis to link their military operations to a cause of considerable importance to Arab audiences. Arab Center opinion surveys conducted in 2024 showed widespread opposition to US and Israeli policies, helping explain why some audiences may respond favorably to operations presented as supporting Palestine. Support for Houthi rule in Yemen, however, requires a separate survey designed specifically to measure that position.

Houthi propaganda draws on this sympathy to present opposition to its military methods as opposition to the Palestinian cause itself, using images from Gaza and the desire to exert pressure on Israel. Yet the legality of military action and its impact on civilians, shipping, and Yemen's economy must be assessed against the facts and applicable law, rather than the justice of its stated cause.

Nationalists, Islamists, leftists, and politically unaffiliated individuals may all support a particular operation without sharing the same views on Iran or the Houthis. Such support does not imply acceptance of the doctrine of *wilaya* or the group's claim to govern Yemen. The distinction is lost when enthusiasm for a particular military operation is presented as support for the authority of those carrying it out.

Domestic mobilization reveals another dimension. In February 2024, Human Rights Watch documented an expansion in Houthi child recruitment following 7 October.[58] In December 2023, it also examined Houthi attacks on commercial vessels and civilian crews. These findings raise the question of what is being done in the name of Palestine and who bears the consequences. The stated objective of an operation does not determine the legality of its methods or their outcomes.

A survey published by the Sana'a Center on 16 October 2024,[59] covering 414 respondents across 11 governorates, distinguished between attitudes toward Red Sea operations and attitudes toward the Houthis. In Houthi-controlled areas, 35% expressed positive views of the operations, compared with 8% toward the Houthis. In government-controlled areas, the corresponding figures were 28% and 3%. These findings are limited to the survey sample and are not representative of public opinion, but the gap is notable in both areas.

58. Human Rights Watch, "Yemen: Houthis Recruit More Child Soldiers Since October 7," 13 February 2024. https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2024/02/13/yemen-houthis-recruit-more-child-soldiers-october-7

59. Lara Uhlenhaut, Yazeed Al-Jeddawy, and Mona Ghaleb, "A Snapshot of Yemeni Public Opinion on Red Sea Developments," Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 16 October 2024. https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/july-sept-2024/23516

Audience support for the group cannot be measured through views and shares. Viewing content, sharing it, sympathizing with its stated objective, and supporting the organization are four different responses. An individual may engage in the first three without accepting Houthi rule or the group's claim to represent the Yemeni state. Reach figures alone are therefore insufficient to measure political influence.

The repetition of slogans and familiar figures makes Houthi content easier to recognize, while military operations and interest in Gaza and the Red Sea increase exposure. Whether this translates into sustained political support has not been established through representative surveys of Arab audiences. Attitudes may change as the war develops, its effects on civilians become clearer, and independent information about conditions inside Yemen becomes more widely available.

Legal Designations and Rules of Media Coverage

Legal designations of the Houthis vary by authority and jurisdiction. In February 2024, the United States reinstated the Houthis' designation as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT), before designating the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in March 2025.[60] In 2022, the Gulf Cooperation Council's Ministerial Council called for national measures against the group. These decisions differ in origin and legal effect and do not constitute a single international designation.[61]

60. U.S. Federal Register, "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Ansarallah," 5 March 2025. https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-03629

61. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) General Secretariat, "Statement of the 152nd Session of the GCC Ministerial Council," 1 June 2022. https://www.gcc-sg.org/ar/MediaCenter/News/Pages/news2022-6-5.aspx

UN Security Council Resolution 2624 (2022) included the Houthis under the Yemen sanctions regime, subject to a targeted arms embargo, and described them as a "terrorist group."[62] This differs from the US designations and from the sanctions regime covering ISIS and Al-Qaeda. A media organization's legal responsibilities depend on the rules of the relevant jurisdiction and the nature of the material published or services provided, rather than the mere appearance of a Houthi representative in an interview.

Legal designations impose obligations and penalties within the jurisdiction of the issuing authority. Editorial decisions, however, are governed by newsworthiness, institutional policy, and applicable regulations. A US designation does not prevent the group from being named in news reports worldwide. Similarly, describing an act as terrorism or attributing a terrorist designation to the authority that issued it does not resolve questions concerning weapons, shipping, casualties, or negotiations.

Accusing a broadcaster of violating a national law or a binding decision requires identifying the relevant jurisdiction, the applicable legal provision, and the specific conduct involved. Reporting news, transferring funds, providing prohibited services, incitement, and propaganda cooperation covered by a specific restriction cannot all be treated as equivalent. Material may fall short of professional standards or conflict with state policy without constituting a legal violation, while the reverse is also possible. Journalistic status does not exempt an organization from obligations relating to a particular transaction.

62. UN Security Council Yemen Sanctions Committee, "Houthis: Sanctions Listing Summary," 28 February 2022. https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/houthis-0

Legal judgments must rest on the applicable provisions and the conduct involved, not simply on a person's appearance on screen.

International media organizations apply editorial policies to the term "terrorist," often requiring attribution and factual specificity, as reflected in archived BBC guidelines, which should not be treated as authoritative for subsequent updates, and Reuters' standards on verification, attribution, and corrections.[63] Attributing a legal designation does not relieve a news outlet of its responsibility to report the facts of an attack, its casualties, and the party responsible.

Future Scenarios and Recommendations

Over the next six to twelve months, the portrayal of the Houthis in international coverage is likely to depend on whether cross-border attacks continue and on their humanitarian and economic consequences, as well as the ability of other Yemeni sources to provide timely information. Escalation may sustain high levels of media exposure even as public sympathy declines. Alternatively, stronger independent verification may reduce the unqualified use of Houthi terminology. Continued divisions within the government and among regional actors may also sustain competing, partial narratives. The available evidence does not allow the probability of each scenario to be quantified.

63. Reuters, "Standards and Values," including editorial standards on verification, attribution, and corrections. Online edition. https://reutersagency.com/about/standards-values/

These developments can be monitored through specific indicators: independently verified attacks and their consequences, maritime and commercial security, journalists' access to Taiz, Marib, and the coast, the regularity of government briefings, differences in accounts among allied forces, and how broadcasters and news agencies respond to corrections and new evidence. Increased coverage should not be equated with greater political support or success by the Houthis in monopolizing the interpretation of the conflict.

Proposed Action Plan: First 90 Days		
Priority	**Action**	**Monitoring Indicator**
Within 15 days	Develop a unified, publicly available terminology guide for government media and an independent editorial guide for cooperating outlets, distinguishing legal status from an actor's self-designation.	Reduction in unattributed terminology in headlines and correction of documented cases.
Within 30 days	Establish a government press portal with scheduled shifts, designated spokespersons, an inquiry system, and a record of updates and corrections.	Responses within a published timeframe; an open record of facts and sources.
Within 45 days	Introduce a protocol for images and figures specifying dates, locations, document sources, and methods for counting casualties and operational results.	Proportion of reports supported by original documentation and public correction of errors.
Within 60 days	Establish a domestic correspondent network with safety training and a center to facilitate foreign journalists' access on a non-discriminatory basis.	Independently produced field material available for reuse; response times.
Within 90 days	Launch an international bulletin in Arabic and English, a searchable archive, and a review system for programs and guest appearances.	Number of international citations of original reporting rather than ceremonial government statements.
Ongoing	Establish a pluralistic media monitoring initiative using a consistent sample, distinguishing headlines, programs, news, and opinion, and recording corrections.	Monthly, reviewable reports without bias percentages derived from distorted samples.

The response should begin by developing a government information service that goes beyond mobilizing supporters and provides journalists with documented material regardless of their outlets' editorial positions. The news agency and newsrooms should operate under verification and correction standards that also allow officials to be held accountable. Arab and international media organizations should adopt coverage guidelines that identify the legal status of the actors involved and distinguish their self-designations from the outlets' own descriptions. Regular reviews should cover widely circulated programs and reports. Measuring change requires three sets of evidence: a dated archive of news reports, headlines, and their sources; complete recordings of programs to assess guest selection, questions, and interruptions; and audience surveys distinguishing exposure, engagement, sympathy, and political support. This would allow assessments of media amplification to move beyond impressions toward documented, comparable patterns.

Conclusion and Key Findings

Four factors have contributed to the spread of Houthi narratives across Arab and international media: the group's control over Yemeni media institutions and communication services; media support from Hezbollah and Iran-linked networks, as documented by UN experts; Yemen's transformation into a theater of regional and international confrontation; and editorial decisions shaped by political interests, professional judgments, and personal convictions.

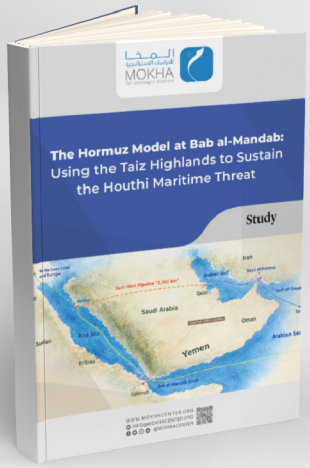
The prolonged presence of a substantial number of officials from Yemen's internationally recognized government in Saudi Arabia has also made its narrative easier to reduce to Riyadh's position.

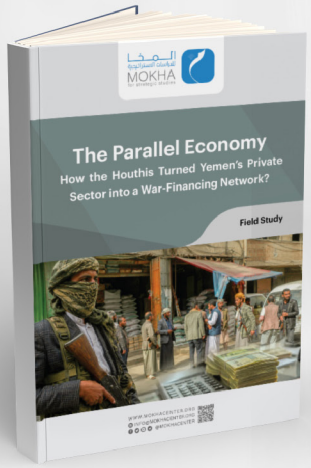
Actors opposed to Saudi Arabia have exploited this in competing media accounts of the war.

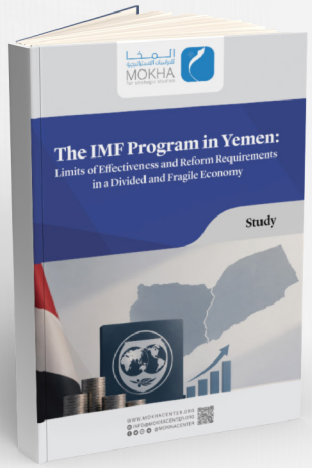
The study concludes that the deeper problem lies in the adoption of terminology used by an armed group designated as a terrorist organization into the news outlet's own voice, or in replacing the struggle over the Yemeni state with a narrative centered on rivalries between states. Addressing this requires accurately identifying the actors involved and their responsibilities, independently verifying military operations, establishing a credible and accountable Yemeni government information service, and restoring civilian rights and the interests of Yemeni society to the center of media coverage.

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