

[\(Japanese Version\)](#)

[\(Arabic Version\)](#)

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UAE in a swamp due to Houthis' attack

1. UAE wavers by drone attack



On January 17, 2022, two explosions took place in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). One was at an airport and the other was at an oil depot of the State Oil Company (ADNOC). Three people were dead and six citizens were injured. The attack was carried out by ballistic missiles and drones¹. The Yemeni rebel Houthis issued a statement of crime.

In early January, an UAE-registered cargo ship heading for Jazan Port in Saudi Arabia from Socotra Island off the coast of Yemen was hijacked by the Houthis in the Red Sea. Since 2015, coalition forces including Saudi Arabia and the UAE bombed the Houthis to support government forces led by President Hadi in the Yemeni Civil War. The Houthis counter-attacked the southern border of Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones. But the attack to airport and oil depot was the first one targeted at premises in the UAE's territory.

In Abu Dhabi, the US and French Air Forces are stationed at Al Dhafra Air Base and the country is one of the world's leading oil producers. Therefore, the incident caused the shock internationally. The UAE deployed F16 fighter jets to bomb missile launch pads in Yemen². In addition, the UAE has filed a lawsuit with the UN Security Council³. Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the de facto leader of the UAE, quickly phoned with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin⁴. The UAE wavered very much.

2. Involvement of UAE in Yemeni civil war

In Yemen, President Saleh (then) was purged by the Arab Spring in 2011. In 2015, the Houthi tribe who ruled the northern part of the country confronted with the central government of President Hadi in the capital Sana'a. The civil war was widened into a full-scale. The inferior government abandoned the capital Sana'a and withdrew to Aden. When the Houthi struck Aden, the president and ministers exiled to Saudi Arabia. Then, Saudi Arabia embarked on forming a coalition forces with several Sunni Arab countries including the UAE.

Government forces were weak in ground combat compared with the Houthis. Central government decided to cooperate with the Southern Independents militia (Southern Transitional Council) though they claimed the independence from central government. Two parties were incompatible each other but they formed an alliance. The ground forces consisting of the Southern Independents covered on the front line in the civil war.

Saudi-led coalition forces supported the allied ground forces by air-strike. While Iran supplied the Houthis weapons and ammunition. The Yemeni Civil War became a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The UAE supported the Southern Independents. The UAE supplied them weapon and ammunition. UAE carried out air-strike, too. F-16s took off from an air force base on Socotra Island, which was leased from Yemen to the UAE. However, the UAE withdrew their troops in 2019⁵ because the internal conflict between central government and Southern Transitional Council became fierce. Now, the UAE provides military support to local troops called Giant Brigade. As referred to the above, the UAE-registered cargo ship was hijacked in January. It was heading from Socotra Island to Jazan port in Saudi Arabia. The UAE insisted that the cargo was humanitarian aid only. But their claim was skeptical. It was highly possible that they loaded with weapons.

3. Houthis attacks the coalition members

Although the Houthi militia was dominant in the ground battle, they could not match the air strikes by the coalition forces. The situation has changed recently so that government forces with the Giant Brigade were going to recapture the capital Sana'a⁶. Then, the Houthis deployed the operations to directly attack the coalition foreign members. They attacked the eastern oil fields in Saudi Arabia, which were dispensable for the country⁷. They bombed the cities of Abha and Zizan in southwestern Saudi Arabia, too. Houthis attacked with ballistic missiles or drones. The Saudi army intercepted with the US-made Patriot missile. Army spokesman of Saudi Arabia said that they had received more than 400 ballistic missiles and 850 drones from the Houthis over the past five years, resulting the death of 59 civilians⁸. Air raids by the Houthis are a normal thing for Saudi citizens nowadays.



The Houthis have now focused on the UAE as a new target. The improved drone plays an important role in the civil war. Their latest drone Samad-3 is able to have a range of 1,500 KM with 18 kg of explosives. It can accurately capture the preset targets by GPS⁹. Their drones are possible to directly attack oil depot or airport in Abu Dhabi from Yemen.

To compete the Houthis, the UAE introduced US-made Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system to intercept Houthi's ballistic missiles¹⁰. However, THAAD system is to intercept missiles flying at high speed from high altitude. The system is not suitable for intercepting low-altitude and low-speed drones. The cost of Samad-3 Drone is estimated less than one hundredth of THAAD system.

4. What will be the UAE's strategy?

The UAE has a good reputation as a terrorism-free country in the Middle East. This is why Dubai has become a regional hub and attracts people and goods from all over the world. According to the Global Peace Index, the UAE is ranked 41st in the world. It is overwhelmingly superior to Saudi Arabia (128th in the world).

The bombing incident has surprised not only UAE itself but also the world. Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi has had telephone talks with the US Secretary of Defense. However, the Biden administration looks like to emphasize the relation with Qatar than that of the UAE. The US is now more serious in the crisis of Afghanistan and the LNG stable supply caused by NATO-Russia dispute. It was shown in the fact that the Qatari emir was invited to the White House in January 31st¹¹.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (commonly known as MBZ) of Abu Dhabi, who holds the real power of the UAE, is presumed to take a tough line about foreign policy. It was shown in his diplomacy that UAE has sent troops to Libya and has taken the initiative related to the issue of Qatari sanction. Therefore, he is unlikely to compromise with the Houthis to stop the attack on UAE. UAE will continue to support the Yemeni government forces with ample financial aid. UAE will also enhance its ability to intercept Houthi's missile and drone.

It looks like that Israel is attractive ally of the UAE. The UAE established diplomatic relations with Israel by the Abraham agreement two years ago. Israeli president has made an official visit to the UAE very recently. Just then, Abu Dhabi was attacked by missiles and drones of the Houthi¹². Defense issues had to be discussed between crown prince and Israeli president. Israel has a mobile all-weather air defense system, so-called Iron Dome. It is very effective to protect Israel from attacks by missiles and rocket artillery of Palestine or Syria. Israel is also a high-tech advanced country, and the world's number one in the development of high-performance drones. Iron Dome and high-performance drones are inseparable for Israeli which considers that first strike would be the best tactics for its security. The UAE would like to introduce Israeli cutting-edge arms. Israel is cautious about exporting Iron Dome, but might export drones to UAE to get ample petrodollars.

By Areha Kazuya

E-mail: Arehakazuya1@gmail.com

¹ Blasts near Abu Dhabi airport, oil facility kill 3, Houthis claim drone attack

<https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/blasts-near-abu-dhabi-airport-oil-facility-kill-3-houthis-claim-drone-attack>

2022/1/17 Daily Sabah

² UAE confirm missile launcher site in Yemen destroyed after second attack on Abu Dhabi

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2010481/middle-east>

2022/1/24 Arab News

³ UAE calls for UN Security Council session over Houthi attack on Abu Dhabi

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2007111/middle-east>

2022/1/18 Arab News

⁴ Abu Dhabi crown prince, US defense secretary discuss boosting military cooperation after Houthi attack

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2007791/middle-east>

2022/1/20 Arab News

⁵ UAE troops return from Aden, handover to Saudi and Yemeni forces

2019/10/30 Arab News

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1576676/middle-east>

⁶ Coalition in Yemen begins military operations in Sanaa

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2011196/middle-east>

2022/1/25 Arab News

⁷ Saudi Arabia oil stations hit in terror drone attacks

2019/5/14 Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1496856/saudi-arabia>

⁸ Saudis near Yemen border learn to live with Houthi fire

<http://jordantimes.com/news/region/saudis-near-yemen-border-learn-live-houthi-fire>

2022/1/29 Jordan Times

⁹ Yemen Houthi rebels, Saudi-led coalition in high stakes drone feud

<http://jordantimes.com/news/region/yemen-houthi-rebels-saudi-led-coalition-high-stakes-drone-feud>

2022/1/27 Jordan Times

¹⁰ UAE, US intercept Houthi missile attack targeting Abu Dhabi

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/456874.aspx>

2022/1/24 Ahram Online

¹¹ Biden tells emir he will make Qatar major non-NATO ally

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2015681/middle-east>

2022/1/31 Arab News

¹² UAE foils new Houthi ballistic missile attack

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2015126/middle-east>

2022/1/31 Arab News