

Armed Conflict



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13:45 UTC

Saudi Arabia & Yemen Alert (UPDATE): Houthis target various Saudi sites in southern provinces, Yanbu, Taif on March 19-20; points to expansion of target bank

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Saudi Statements

- According to the Saudi official news agency, a total of nine unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and one ballistic missile were launched during the overnight hours of March 19-20.
- Saudi Arabia reportedly stated that no casualties or disruptions were caused as a result of the attacks.

Jazan Province:

- A ballistic missile targeted **Jazan city**. Picture material released in the report also shows what appears to be a remnant of a UAV.
- Unspecified devices hit and caused material damage at a water desalination plant in **al-Shuqaiq**.
- Initial reports quoting the Saudi-led Coalition stated that Iranian-manufactured cruise missiles

were fired at the al-Shuqaiq water desalination plant, as well as the ARAMCO facility in **Jazan**.

Asir Province:

- Unspecified devices targeted a gas station in **Khamis Mushayt**. Material damage to residential homes and vehicles was reported.
- An additional UAV attack targeted the **Dhahran al-Janoob power station**.

Medina Province:

- The Saudi Ministry of Energy reportedly stated that an ARAMCO Natural Gas Plant and a refinery in **Yanbu** run by a Chinese oil and gas petrochemical company were targeted in two separate UAV attacks. Production at the site reportedly temporarily decreased.

Mecca Province:

- Saudi air defenses intercepted a UAV targeting unspecified areas in **Taif**.



Houthi statements

- The Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree announced on March 20 that the Houthi forces

carried out an operation targeting sites in Abha, Khamis Mushayt, Jazan, Samtah, and Dhahran al-Janoob using an unspecified number of ballistic and winged [cruise] missiles, as well as UAVs.

- The Houthis also claimed that they have “compiled coordinates of a special target bank that includes a large number of vital targets that may be targeted at any moment” as part of the consequences of the Saudi “brutal siege” on Yemen.
- According to Saree, the attack constituted the second phase of Operation “Breaking the Siege”, the [first](#) of which included the launching of three Samad-3 UAVs towards an ARAMCO facility in Riyadh and six Samad-1 UAVs towards targets in Jazan and Abha.

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The latest attacks follow a [March 10](#) Houthi-claimed operation that was significantly smaller in its geographical scope and scale as well as in the different types of facilities targeted. The current attack thus indicates that the Houthi forces are currently escalating their cross-border attack campaign against Saudi Arabia, as highlighted by the Houthi spokesperson’s March 20 statement. Several elements in the latest attacks are notable due to their rarity. First, attacks against Yanbu are [not unprecedented](#) but are rare. The city is located around 300 km north of Jeddah and 900 km from the nearest Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen. While Saudi authorities indicated that they thwarted the latest attack against the city, the fact that an attack targeted the locale indicates that the Houthi forces have expanded their targets to strategic facilities in this coastal city. This assessment is also applicable to Taif, which is another area in Saudi Arabia the Houthis very rarely target.
2. Some of the targeted facilities themselves also indicate the diversification of the Houthi target bank within Saudi Arabia. This is demonstrated by the more seldom targeting of an electricity plant in southern Asir Province (the Dhahran al-Janoob Power Station) as well as a desalination plant in Jazan Province’s al-Shuqaiq, in addition to the attacks against oil and gas installations, which are generally considered the Houthis’ foremost priority. It is likely that this policy constitutes a Houthi attempt to exploit the fact that such facilities tend to be less protected by aerial defense systems than primary energy sector installations. The Iran-backed group is thus more capable of inflicting damage upon them, as indicated by the Saudi confirmation of at least some damage in the recent attacks. This increases the Houthis’ range of options at its disposal against Saudi Arabia for the latter’s perceived aggression and blockade against Houthi-held territories in Yemen. Such a policy is also likely perceived by the Houthi forces to allow them to overstretch Saudi aerial defense systems, as it will be challenging to protect a wider bank of strategic civilian facilities.
3. Although there are no indications to suggest otherwise, it currently cannot be ruled out that Saudi authorities are downplaying the potential impact on its strategic energy facilities, and that disruptions to operations and supplies followed as a result the Houthi attacks. In any case, at the current juncture, the fact that Saudi authorities have confirmed material damage in some of the sites reiterates the Houthis’ ability to circumvent aerial defense system to some degree and inflict damage upon strategic facilities, which could have also led to casualties.
4. The Saudi-led Coalition also stated during the afternoon hours of March 20 that it destroyed a Houthi explosive-laden vessel in Yemen’s Hodeidah Governorate, which thwarted an “imminent attack”. This reiterates the Houthis’ continued ability to assemble explosive-laden fast boats. They utilize these watercraft to target Saudi-led Coalition’s maritime assets, and more rarely, offshore Saudi civilian infrastructure near the Saudi-Yemeni border areas. The timing of the attempted attack, namely in conjunction with the large-scale aerial attacks, indicates that the Houthis may be dedicating an effort to also launch attacks through this means. **FORECAST:** This would broadly increase the risk of security incidents and attacks in and around Houthi-held territories in the Red Sea.
5. **FORECAST:** As per the Houthi pledge to conduct further attacks, additional cross-border aerial attempted attacks, as well as maritime attacks, are liable to occur over the coming days and weeks. This may include strategic civilian facilities that extend beyond oil and gas-related infrastructure in the country, including power and water desalination plants. Given precedent, prospective attacks are more likely to be recorded and inflict damage in sites in the country’s

southern provinces of Jazan, Asir, and Najran. However, damage and casualties in targets deep within Saudi territory, such as in Riyadh, Jeddah, Yanbu, as well as the Saudi's Eastern Province, cannot be ruled out over the coming days and weeks.

- 6. FORECAST:** The development is likely to also prompt the Saudi-led Coalition to increase its pressure on Houthi-held territories in Yemen, via air incursions as well as naval operations. Increased airstrikes are likely to target Houthi stronghold areas, including Saada, al-Jawf, and Sanaa. Airstrike campaigns in Sanaa are liable to extend to the Sanaa International Airport, given that the Saudi-led Coalition constantly maintains that the facility is used for the launching of aerial attacks against the Kingdom.

Recommendations:

1. Travel to Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam can continue while adhering to basic security precautions and adherence to cultural norms. **Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support plans.**
2. It is advised to avoid nonessential travel to the vicinity of strategic, military, and economic infrastructure in Saudi Arabia at the current time due to the heightened risk of further attacks.
3. Avoid travel to the border areas with Yemen in Asir, Najran, and Jazan provinces, given daily cross-border hostilities.
4. In the event that an explosion is heard, immediately seek cover. Remain cognizant that even if an incoming projectile is intercepted, falling debris constitutes a significant risk.