Yemen's Houthi Rebels Carry Out a Drone Attack Against an Oil Facility in the United Arab Emirates

Earlier this week, Houthi forces in Yemen launched armed drones and missiles against an oil facility in the United Arab Emirates, which targeted fuel tankers owned by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and resulted in three deaths. The United Arab Emirates belongs to a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia that has been at war with the Houthis for years, and the recent developments have prompted fears of an increase in hostilities in the longstanding and devastating Yemeni conflict. Furthermore, analysts highlight that it complicates the efforts to de-escalate the war, and could prolong and intensify the civilian hardship taking place in Yemen. For years, international aid groups have described the humanitarian crisis there as the worst such disaster in the world, with an estimated 4 million people forcibly displaced and 5 million suffering from famine and disease. Throughout the course of the war in Yemen, the Saudi and UAE-coalition's air bombardment has been consistently found to have damaged residential homes, hospitals, schools, and other civilian infrastructure – eliciting widespread condemnation. These airstrikes have killed or wounded nearly 20,000 Yemenis, and investigation into the matter shows that the Saudi-led coalition has been responsible for 67% of attacks and destruction of noncombatant infrastructure. In just the preceding days, at least 20 people were killed in one of the latest airstrikes on the Yemeni capital city of Sanaa.

In the 24 hours prior to the Houthi drone attack on the UAE, the Saudi-led coalition announced that it had conducted 39 military operations against the Houthis. They boasted that 230 Houthi fighters had been killed and 21 vehicles destroyed. The Houthis have adopted the tactic of targeting oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and have also claimed similar attacks in the UAE, something Emirati authorities have always denied. Beside the explosions at the facility owned by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, a third minor fire was extinguished at the nearby Abu Dhabi International Airport. Houthi fighters have recently seized a UAE cargo ship and have yet to release either the ship or the crew. They have stated that the ship is carrying weaponry while the Saudi coalition, calling the seizure piracy, have said the ship is carrying medical supplies. The U.N. Security Council has pressed the Houthis to release the ship but after releasing a video purporting to show weapons on the ship, they have refused to do so.

The Houthis have refrained from attacking the UAE since it expressed that it withdrew its military from Yemen, but a UAE-backed Yemeni militia recently initiated an offensive operation against the Houthis. This was cited by the Houthis' political bureau as its reason for attacking the UAE now. According to some analysts, this operation by the UAE in the war has altered the balance of power away from the Houthis' favor. The attack by the Houthis now inside the UAE is being called an effort to dissuade the Emiratis from deeper involvement.

The UAE has promised retaliation for the Houthi drone attacks, and the Saudi-led coalition has already launched new airstrikes on the Yemeni capital. At least 20 people have been killed and 11 injured. It is feared that the confluence of violent escalations could create the risk of increased deterioration in the region's overall stability. The costs of this would be most felt by civilians, and as such, it is hoped that a major degradation is prevented.