

## Opinion

## Editorial

## The Abdali cell case in Kuwait reveals Iran's true colours

In this newest rift – the one between Iran and its neighbours – lies the story of the Gulf. Even Kuwait, a traditional peace broker committed to coexistence with all in the region, has been targeted by Iran.

Kuwait has reacted to the confirmation by its courts of the involvement of Iran and its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, in a plot to commit acts of terrorism on its soil, by ordering the expulsion of 15 Iranian diplomats and shutting down Tehran's cultural and military missions.

The case goes back to 2015. Huge arms caches were discovered in Kuwait near the Iraqi border. Twenty-six people, all Kuwaiti Shias except for one Iranian, were charged with spying for Iran and Hezbollah and with conspiring to commit acts of terrorism in Kuwait. The "terror and spying cell" is known as the "Abdali cell."

Members of the cell were accused of smuggling explosives from Iran with the complicity of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah.

At the end of July, Kuwait delivered a memo of protest to the Lebanese government over the training allegedly provided by Hezbollah to operatives of the Abdali cell.

The memo, quoted by the Kuwait news agency KUNA, called on the Lebanese government, which includes representatives of Hezbollah, to "curb the disgraceful practices" of the Iran-supported Lebanese radical group. It also accused Hezbollah of involvement in "intelligence, coordination of meetings, payment of funds and provision of weapons and training on Lebanese territory... with the aim of destroying the basic infrastructure of the state of Kuwait."

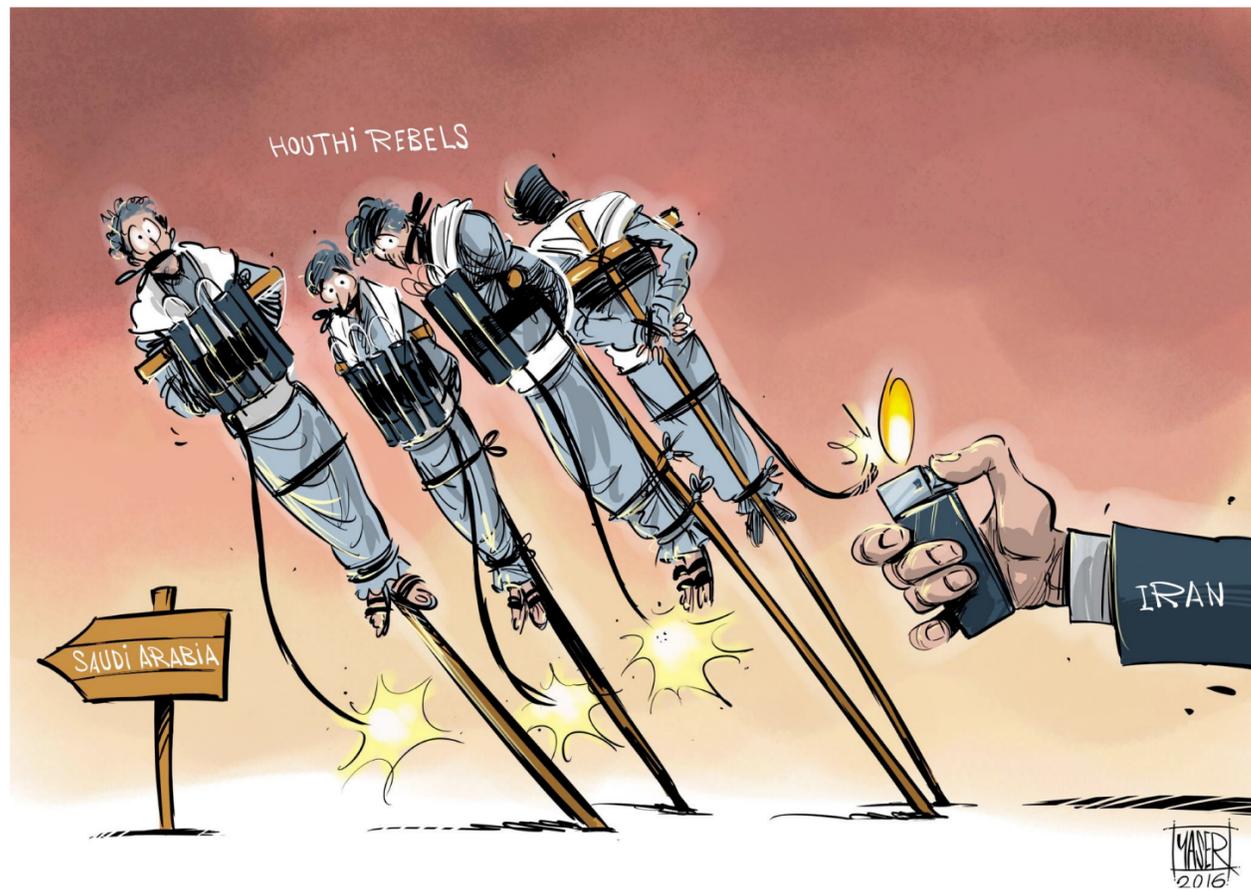
Unsurprisingly, the case added Kuwait to the list of countries that want nothing to do with Iran. Last year, Saudi Arabia severed ties with Tehran over attacks by Iranian demonstrators on its diplomatic missions.

For all Iran's protestations of innocence when confronted with evidence of interference in its neighbours' affairs, the reprehensible decades-old pattern of behaviour continues. Iran still violates UN embargoes on arming its proxies in Lebanon and Yemen. It continues to foment mischief in Iraq and elsewhere.

Then, there are reports from a multitude of sources, both regional and Western, of Iran finding ingenious ways to funnel arms shipments to Yemen's Houthis. This is considered to be the handiwork of the IRGC, as confirmed by an Iranian official to Reuters. "No activity goes ahead in the Gulf without the IRGC being involved," he boasted.

Despite protestations to the contrary, Iran is seeking to implement a radical sectarian, political and strategic agenda in the region. Radical forces within Iran have a huge stake in that and the state's material and ideological investment in it is too substantial to be dismissed as mere propaganda. It is clear that Iran will brook no bounds – of neighbourliness, good faith or high principle – in pursuit of its agenda. This goes some way towards explaining the Gulf states' and Egypt's insistence that Qatar reassess its imprudent cosiness with Iran.

Iran needs to find another course if there is to be peace in the region. As the trial in Kuwait of the Abdali cell shows, Iran is testing its neighbours' patience a bit too much.



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## Everyone in Yemen is in a state of denial

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“Placing Al Hudaydah port under the control of a neutral side can logically be a starting point for a more comprehensive political settlement in Yemen.”

Political deadlock prevails in Yemen and is likely to continue as none of the warring parties seem to have realised that a military solution to the conflict is virtually impossible. All previous power equations in Yemen have shifted and, what is worse, most Yemenis live in the fantasy world of old times.

Why is a political solution virtually impossible in Yemen and what makes the prevailing situation very likely to continue?

First, the Houthis do not seem to be willing to make concessions and accept that they are just one of the political forces on the scene. Houthi members apparently believe that they are the strongest and that they enjoy a revolutionary form of legitimacy in Yemen.

This kind of legitimacy, however, is pure fantasy. Starting from Saada in 2014, the Houthis expanded their control to neighbouring districts. In Amran, they kicked out the al-Ahmar clan with ease while Yemen's interim President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi watched. From there, they marched on Sana'a and took it after defeating the Yemen Army's Brigade 310.

The defeat of Brigade 310 was abominable for the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen. The latter had considered that unit and the 1st Brigade as symbols of their military might in Yemen. Brigadier-General Hameed al-Qushaibi, commander of Brigade 310, was loyal to the Muslim Brotherhood. He was hunted down and killed by the Houthis.

Backed by Iran, the Houthis could have accepted a settlement by surrendering control of the port of Al Hudaydah to a neutral party. That port is crucial to supplying the Houthis. They refused to give up control because they do not accept the

idea that they are just one element of the political map in Yemen and that they can be represented in any future government. They apparently believe they can spread their control to other areas in Yemen despite their daily losses.

The Houthis in Sana'a are living in a fantasy reality of their own. They could not care less about Yemen or Yemenis. Their only concern is Iran's expansionist plan. They cling to slogans such as "Death to America," "Death to Israel," "Damnation to the Jews." Even Iran abandoned these slogans but the Houthis find them useful to maintain their grip on Sana'a's inhabitants.

What is really unfortunate is that the Houthis are gaining strength in Sana'a. The counterbalancing presence in Sana'a is Ali Abdullah Saleh's camp. He draws his strength from a network of relations with forces from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary

Guards Corps and tribal leaders. A lack of funds, however, has weakened that network.

Time is not on the side of a political settlement in Yemen, unless there is a miraculous military victory leading to the fall of Sana'a. In the immediate future, this eventuality is impossible.

The Arab coalition involved in Operation Decisive Storm said it has achieved its first objective of eliminating Iran's expansionist scheme in the region but the situation remains complex and desperate because there are no figures with enough credibility and "legitimacy" to play a unifying role in Yemen. Southern Yemen has split and the situation in Taiz and central Yemen is stagnating.

Will Yemen remain hostage of the Houthis, a fanatical group with no political project for Yemen? Will it remain hostage of a legitimate group that can't even protect itself in Aden? Will it remain hostage of southern leaders who do not believe in unification?

Placing Al Hudaydah port under the control of a neutral side can logically be a starting point for a more comprehensive political settlement in Yemen. Logic, however, is the missing ingredient in the Yemeni stew.

Everyone refuses to admit that the old Yemen is gone. The Houthis say they have a divine mission to go back to the era of Imamate – divine appointment – while supporters of the legitimate government say they can go back to the experiment started by Saleh that was irrevocably stopped by the Muslim Brotherhood.

There are even those who envisage a Yemeni federation of some micro states. The piece missing from the picture is a unified Yemen. Is there anyone in Yemen ready to accept reality?



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