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Ground Phase of Operation to Establish Control over Yemen Starts on Saudi Soil

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The Saudi defence ministry said on April 21 that the Saudi-led Decisive Storm military operation in Yemen had ended to give a start to a new operation named Restoring Hope. Formally the new operation seeks to revive the political process in Yemen on the basis of its previous national dialogue. It will also aim to fight terrorism, protect civilians, maintain humanitarian support and continue to enable the evacuation of foreigners. The change of name does not change much in essence. Saudi Arabia continues to deliver air strikes against Yemen killing many civilians.

Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the US Adel Al-Jubeir reiterated that Operation Restoring Hope will shift towards facilitating the political process. He stated that the coalition will continue to use force, as necessary, to prevent the Houthis from terrorizing the Yemeni people. He

encouraged the Houthis to end their aggression and participate in the political process in order to restore peace and stability in Yemen. «The objective is to focus on the political process, on the humanitarian process, while at the same time seeking to protect the Yemeni population from Houthi aggression», he said. «When the Houthis or their allies make aggressive moves, there will be a response. The decision to calm matters now rests entirely with them.» He added that Saudi Arabia will continue to control territorial waters and airspace of Yemen to prevent arms supplies to insurgents. Saudi Brigadier General Ahmed Assiri, spokesman of the Saudi-led coalition forces, told the same thing.

The new operation is launched to accomplish the same mission – to defeat the Yemeni Shiites and prevent the establishment of Iran's control over the country. Launching Restoring Hope after Decisive Storm is nothing else but moving from one phase to another. The armed intervention was undertaken to weaken the Shia movement. To some extent it has been achieved. Missile and air strikes were delivered against the military infrastructure to prevent the Houthis from access to arms and ammunition. The Saudi Arabia-led coalition allows no flights in Yemeni air space. Sea blockade prevents the Houthis from getting Iranian military aid. This mission is mainly carried out by United States with its strong naval presence (an aircraft carrier, eight warships and three auxiliary vessels). No matter that, the Houthis still control the larger part of Yemeni territory. Former President Hadi, who was close to Saudi Arabia, has little chance to return without boots on the ground.

According to Adrian Edwards, of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, shelter was emerging as one of the more pressing needs for Yemen's civilians, adding that the number of displaced could be expected to skyrocket from the current 150,000 if the violence continued. Moreover, he said, the current numbers of displaced were in addition to the 300,000 displaced by the previous violence that had afflicted the country, fuelling a steady flow of migrants from Yemen to the Horn of Africa. The UN health agency said at least 1,080 people had been killed in the country, including 48 children and 28 women, and a further 4,352 people had been injured in the violence between March 19 and April 20. According to UNICEF, At least 115 children have been killed and 172 maimed in the violence raging in Yemen since Saudi-led air strikes began on March 26, the UN children's agency said on April 24. More than 10 million Yemenis lack adequate food supplies and nearly five million are facing an emergency, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization has said in a report. The UN agency's latest assessment said 4.8 million people were suffering increasing malnutrition because of a lack of food including 850,000 children who were acutely malnourished.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman on April 21 ordered the Saudi Arabian National Guard, widely regarded as the kingdom's best equipped military ground force, to take part in Riyadh's campaign against Iran-allied Houthi rebels in Yemen. Military operations in the campaign have so far been carried out by the Royal Saudi Air Force and the Royal Saudi Land Forces, which answer to the defence ministry. The National Guard is a separate military structure run by its own ministry. It will be responsible for control of border and Shia-populated areas. This is especially important because the Saudis started the ground phase of the operation on their own soil. Saudi Shiites have demonstrated to protest the intervention by Sunni regimes into Yemeni conflict.

Saudi Arabian army is 75 thousand strong. It is composed of three armored brigades, five

mechanized brigades, one airborne brigade, one Royal Guard brigade, and eight artillery battalions. The army also has one aviation command with two aviation brigades. The country's military spending is immense. Saudi Arabia acquires huge quantities of arms. No doubt it has been preparing for territorial expansion since a long time. Saudi Arabia and Iran compete for influence. No doubt, Yemen is part of the process. Washington admits it. President Obama [said](#) he does not support the ground phase and prefers a political solution. It's not so much about the belligerents inside Yemen. He mainly means a compromise between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

It's hard to imagine the representatives of Tehran and Saudi Arabia discuss the situation in Yemen at the round table. Ansar Allah has refused to take part in any talks sponsored by Saudi Arabia. Its spokesman Allah Mohammed Abdulsalam said no talks are possible till bombings continue and Yemen is under blockade. The parties stick to irreconcilable positions.

Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, believes the United Nations should lead the process of peaceful settlement. No individual intermediaries can do the job. The consolidated efforts of United Nations permanent members are needed to stop the armed conflict. Otherwise there will be no «restored hope» for Yemenis.