Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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# Why would the Houthis be outmatched in their new campaign against Saudi Arabia?

As the Houthis have chosen to reignite the conflict by targeting Saudi maritime traffic in the Red Sea, they should not expect a replay of the war they fought in 2015.

Over the past decade, the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) and the Saudi-led Joint Forces Command (JFC) have fundamentally transformed how they detect, track, target and engage dispersed military threats.

Decisive advantage is no longer measured by the number of aircraft or precision-guided munitions. It now rests on a mature C6ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capability that dramatically shortens the time between detection and engagement.

It also denies an adversary the opportunity to recover between successive strikes.

Modern air campaigns are increasingly won through information dominance rather than platform superiority alone.

Aircraft, satellites, surveillance radars, and airborne early warning platforms continuously monitor the operating environment.

Maritime surveillance, electronic intelligence, and communications intercepts add further layers of information.

Together, they give commanders a common picture of the battlefield. That shared understanding allows them to identify, prioritise, and engage military objectives before an opponent can react.

## A continuously updated understanding of the battlefield

Several complementary sensors form the backbone of this capability. Weapon Locating and Counter-Battery Radars identify the origin of rocket, artillery, mortar, and some missile launches.

Missile launch detection systems and space-based Overhead Persistent Infrared (OPIR) sensors detect launch signatures almost immediately.

> Signals and electronic intelligence reveal command networks and communications activity

Counter-unmanned aircraft system radars track small drones that may evade conventional air defences.

Signals and electronic intelligence reveal command networks and communications activity, while other ISR assets identify supporting infrastructure.

Together, these sensors give commanders a continuously updated picture of the battlefield.

## Speed is the decisive advantage

Speed is the decisive advantage. Once a launch is detected and confirmed, targeting data is transmitted immediately through secure command-and-control systems to airborne strike packages.

Aircraft receive updated mission information while already in flight and can rapidly be retasked against validated military objectives without returning to base.

The sensor-to-shooter cycle is cut from hours to minutes. Mobile launch teams lose the time they depend on to relocate, conceal themselves, or prepare another attack.

> JTACs are linked to ISR feeds, artillery fire-direction centres, and digital command networks

The same approach extends to the tactical edge of the battlefield. Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) will deploy with the potential advancing Saudi-led ground forces

and their Yemeni partners.

They identify, validate, and designate targets for fighter aircraft and attack helicopters.

JTACs are linked to ISR feeds, artillery fire-direction centres, and digital command networks.

They synchronise close air support, artillery fire, attack aviation, and ground manoeuvre against time-sensitive objectives. The result is a joint force that fights as a single, integrated formation.

## Success comes from integration

This presents a fundamental challenge for the Houthis. Their military model depends on dispersed missile launchers, mobile drone teams, decentralised logistics, concealed storage sites, and rapid movement after conducting attacks.

Persistent surveillance steadily erodes those advantages. Launch areas are monitored continuously. Firing positions are identified quickly. Intelligence from multiple sources is fused into a single picture. Every movement becomes easier to detect and harder to conceal.

The effect extends well beyond the destruction of individual launchers. Each engagement can expose additional parts of the wider military system.

Command centres, logistics routes, maintenance facilities, communications networks, and weapons depots all become more vulnerable with each operation.

> Modern warfare depends on synchronised effects across multiple domains

Every strike also generates intelligence for the next. Over time, the pressure compounds and steadily reduces an adversary's ability to sustain military operations.

This also explains why any future Saudi-led campaign against the Houthis would extend well beyond air power alone.

Modern warfare depends on synchronised effects across multiple domains. Air, land, maritime, cyber, and intelligence capabilities operate as a single force.

Artillery, engineers, surveillance assets, and ground formations all reinforce the same objective. Success comes from integration rather than from any individual platform or service.

## The decisive factor

The effectiveness of this approach has already been demonstrated in regional operations through the RSAF JF fused architecture.

During Saudi military operations in southern Yemen in January 2026, persistent ISR, real-time command and control, JTAC-directed close air support, precision strikes, and JF coordination maintained continuous pressure on the opposing UAE-led Southern Transitional Council (STC) military formations.

Those operations illustrated how sustained information superiority steadily reduced an opponent's ability to manoeuvre, reinforce, and recover. Once that cycle begins, each successive operation becomes easier than the previous one.

That advantage is reinforced by the scale and sophistication of the Saudi Air Force.

The RSAF operates one of the world's largest fleets of 4.5-generation combat aircraft. This includes advanced F-15SA fighters, Eurofighter Typhoon Tranche 2 & 3A, and modernised legacy Panavia Tornado IDS strike aircraft.

Supported by airborne early warning aircraft (AWACS), aerial refuelling, precision-guided weapons, attack helicopters, and a mature

C6ISR capability, the force can sustain high-tempo operations across multiple axes. It also fields the largest 4.5-generation combat fleet in the Middle East.

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The broader strategic objective would differ fundamentally from that of the early Yemen campaign.

The aim would no longer be to hunt individual launch teams in an attritional contest. Instead, the priority would be to dismantle the military system that enables repeated attacks by the Houthis.

That effort would focus on command-and-control networks, logistics systems, communications infrastructure, and weapons distribution.

These capabilities take far longer to rebuild than individual launchers or drones. As they are degraded, the Houthis lose the ability to coordinate, resupply and sustain combat.

The decisive factor in any future campaign is unlikely to be a single aircraft or precision weapon.

It will be the ability to connect every sensor, every commander, every JTAC, and every strike platform into a single decision cycle.

The force that observes first, understands first, decides first and acts first will shape the course of the campaign long before the enemy can recover.

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