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Saudis, Allies Plan Massive Invasion of Yemen

By Jason Ditz

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An air war that is already taking its toll on the civilian population of the Yemeni capital city of Sanaa is just the beginning, as Saudi Arabia is telegraphing their planned ground invasion of Yemen, and touting the number of Sunni Arab allies who will be going along.

The latest reports are that some 150,000 Saudi ground troops have massed along their border with Yemen, along with heavy artillery. Egypt also confirmed an undisclosed number of troops on transport ships off the Yemeni coast, who will join the invasion.

Egypt is not alone in joining the war, as a number of other Sunni Arab nations are reportedly involved, with an eye on fighting the Shi'ite Houthis, who control the capital city of Sanaa.

At present, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are confirmed to have help from Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan. There are also reports of Libya's government giving its approval, though they are unlikely to contribute troops, and Saudi state media also claimed Pakistan as part of the coalition.

The news of the war sent the price of oil jumping, as while Yemen itself is not a major producer, Saudi Arabia is, and its own oil production is centered around the territory of its Shi'ite minority. If fighting spreads to the Yemeni coast it could also imperil key shipping lanes.

Saudi officials are already trying to downplay the scope of the war, saying they don't intend to 100% occupy Yemen, but rather to just fight a big war and weaken the Houthis in the hopes that President Hadi, who resigned in January, will take over again.

That seems unlikely, with Hadi having fled the country yesterday in the face of a minor Houthi offensive. The more likely immediate impact of the Saudi intervention will be emboldening the Sunni Islamist forces in the country, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS, and giving them an advantage in expanding their territory.