

# THREAT FROM IRAN 'Saudis won't rule out building nukes'

CNN ONLINE  
The Saudi Ambassador to the United States would not rule out the possibility of the Saudis creating their own nuclear bomb to counterbalance a nuclear-armed Iran in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Thursday.

"This is not something we would discuss publicly," Ambassador Adel Al-Jubeir said on "The Situation Room." Later, when pressed, he said, "This is not something that I can comment on, nor would I comment on."

"But the kingdom of Saudi Arabia will take whatever measures are necessary in order to protect its security," he added. "There are two things over which we do not negotiate: Our faith and our security."

Al-Jubeir said, however, the details disclosed by the Obama administration to the Saudis about the developing nuclear deal with Iran were "positive."

"I can't say that we like it, because we don't know the details," he said. "The assurances we have received from the administration have been positive but we want to see the details before we can make a judgment."

The Saudi ambassador said other countries in the Middle East are "concerned" about Iran potentially gaining nuclear weapons, but that the Obama administration has assured them "all paths leading to a nuclear weapon by Iran will be cut off" and there will be "very intrusive inspections" that will prevent such an outcome.

The Saudis, supported by allied forces, launched an air campaign on Thursday against rebel forces in Yemen that Saudis see as aligned with Iran. In an implicit reference to that conflict, which is rapidly escalating into what some see as a proxy war between the Saudis and Iran, Al-Jubeir said his nation is concerned about Iran's "interference in the affairs of other countries in the region."

"We believe Iran's behavior ... is not reassuring to people in the region," he said.

# Saudi Arabia draws the line in Yemen

## Analysts say airstrikes on Shia rebels a clear message to US, Iran

AGENCIES

Saudi Arabia kept some key details of its military action in Yemen from Washington until the last moment, US officials said, as the kingdom takes a more assertive regional role to compensate for perceived US disengagement.

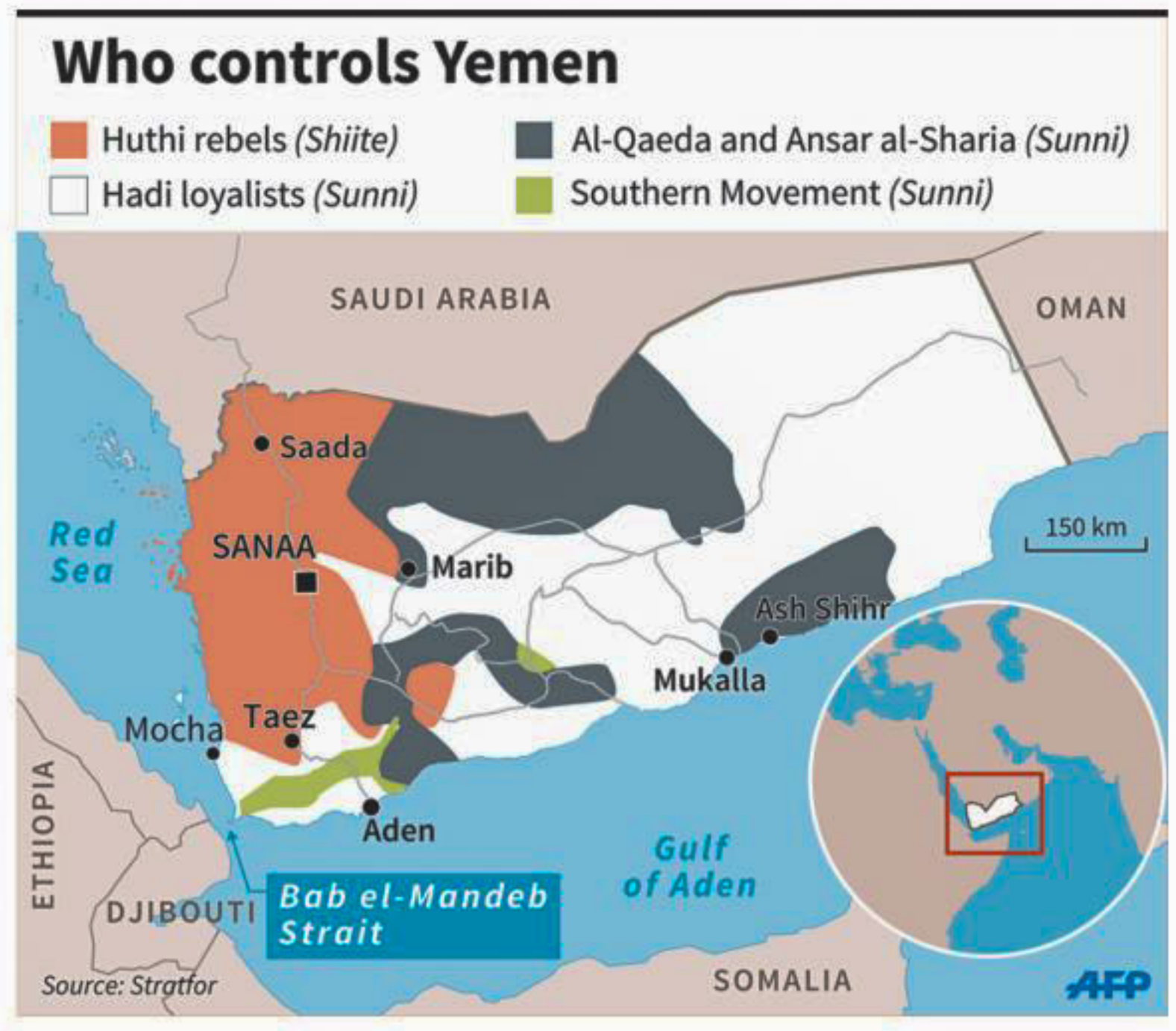
The Middle East's top oil power told the United States weeks ago it was weighing action in Yemen but only informed Washington of the exact details just before Thursday's unprecedented air strikes against Iran-allied Houthi rebels, the officials said.

Although the Saudis spoke with top US officials as they debated an air assault in support of embattled Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, US officials acknowledged gaps in their knowledge of the kingdom's battle plans and objectives.

Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, said Riyadh consulted closely with Washington on Yemen - but ultimately decided it had to act quickly as Houthi rebels moved toward Hadi's last redoubt in the southern city of Aden.

"The concern was, if Aden falls, then what do you do?" al-Jubeir told a small group of reporters on Thursday. "The concern was that the situation was so dire you had to move."

Saudi Arabia's air strikes point toward an aspiration to defend its



regional interests with less reliance on the US security umbrella that has long been the main thrust of Washington's relations with the oil-rich kingdom.

Riyadh has been growing increasingly assertive since early 2011, when Washington's reluctance to back former Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak in the face of mass protests led the Saudis to doubt its commitment to traditional Arab allies.

Obama's decision in summer 2013 not to bomb Syria after the use of poison gas there, coupled with its

sudden announcement it had conducted secret nuclear talks with Riyadh's nemesis Iran, further alarmed the Saudis.

"If the operation is successful, I think we will see a major turn in Saudi foreign policy. It's going to be assertive, become more aggressive in dealing with the Iranian expansionism," said Mustafa Alani, an Iraqi security analyst with ties to the Saudi Interior Ministry.

Officially, the airstrikes were carried out in direct response to a formal request by Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's foreign minister

earlier this week for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) military assistance in fighting the Houthis.

But for Saudi Arabia, the decision to form a coalition to take military action in Yemen has less to do with supporting the Hadi government than it does with providing diplomatic cover to take on what it considers to be the its biggest external threat - an increasingly aggressive Iran determined to firmly establish its hegemony in the region.

For more than 30 years, the Saudis have been engaged in a strategic rivalry with Iran for power and influence in the Middle East. Built largely upon sectarian and ideological lines, with Saudi Arabia as leader of the Sunni Arab world and Iran as the leader of the Shia crescent, it has been played out in a series of hot and cold proxy wars throughout the region - in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain.

But Iran's extension of that influence into Yemen, vis-a-vis the Houthis, was a line the Saudis could no longer tolerate.

Consider also, that Iran has significantly strengthened its position in the region over the last several years at Saudi Arabia's expense, particularly in Iraq. For that very reason, Saudi Arabia, which looks at the Houthis as nothing more than an Iranian proxy, has no choice but to draw the line on their southern border.

# KEY PLAYERS IN YEMEN

**PRESIDENT MANSOUR HADI**  
Having formally assumed power three years ago, his support comes mainly from Sunni tribes in the south, ties to parts of the military and some militia groups.

**ALI ABDULLAH SALEH**  
The former president is widely believed to be aligned with the Houthis against Mr Hadi.

**HOUTHIS**  
Mainly from northern Yemen, and part of the Zaidi offshoot of Shia Islam.

**AL-QAEDA (AQAP)**  
Seen by Western powers such as the US as one of the most dangerous branches of Al-Qaeda, they oppose both the Houthis and the government of Mr Hadi and have staged a number of attacks from their strongholds to the south and south-east.

**SUNNI TRIBES**  
Individual Sunni tribes also control their own parts of Yemen, opposed to the Shia Houthis. But there is no



Mourners on wheelchair pay their respects to Singapore's late former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew where he lies in state at Parliament House in Singapore, yesterday. Tens of thousands of Singaporeans braved waits of up to 10 hours outside parliament yesterday to pay their last respects to founding leader Lee Kuan Yew, despite appeals from overwhelmed officials to honour him elsewhere.

# Maldives jails ex-defence minister

AFP, Colombo

The Maldives' former defence minister has been found guilty of attempting a coup and jailed for 11 years, his family and officials said.

The controversial criminal court found Mohamed Nazim guilty of smuggling dangerous weapons into the upmarket tourist destination with the aim of toppling President Abdulla Yameen.

Nazim's family said he had not received a fair trial following the verdict, which came out overnight Thursday and is likely to intensify fears of growing political repression in the honeymoon island nation.

The verdict came less than two weeks after the court convicted opposition leader Nasheed under anti-terror laws for ordering the arrest of a chief judge in 2012 when he was president and sentenced him to 13 years in jail.

President Yameen sacked Nazim in January shortly after police raided his flat in the capital Male and seized documents as well as a pistol and ammunition.

He was also accused of engineering a fire at the main desalination plant serving the island capital Male that triggered a water crisis in December.

# Indian president confers Bharat Ratna to Vajpayee

TNN, New Delhi

Former prime minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been conferred with India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna by the President of India Pranab Mukherjee at his residence on 6 Krishna Menon Marg in New Delhi.

Vice President Hamid Ansari and Prime Minister Narendra Modi also attended the ceremony.

Several top cabinet ministers were also present at the function.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh and finance minister Arun Jaitley also expressed their happiness at Vajpayee being conferred the Bharat Ratna.

Vajpayee was the first non-Congress leader to serve India for a full five-year term from 1999 to 2004.

Vajpayee is the seventh prime minister to receive the award after Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Morarji Desai, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Gulzarilal

Nanda. Earlier on Friday, speaking to reporters, the home minister said Vajpayee is not only just an Indian statesman but an international icon who is respected and loved by everyone.

"Atalji's name evokes a sense of respect and reverence in every heart," he said, adding that it is a matter of immense happiness for the whole country that Vajpayee is being bestowed with the Bharat Ratna.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee tweeted: "Happy that Atal Ji is being conferred Bharat Ratna today. A truly great statesman who richly deserves honour. I wish him well..."

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan tweeted his congratulations: "Heartiest congratulations to our revered mentor & beloved Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji for being conferred with 'Bharat Ratna' today."



# SAUDI-LED OFFENSIVE ON YEMEN Pakistan unlikely to join coalition

## India sends ships to evacuate thousands of citizens

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan is ready to defend Saudi Arabia's "territorial integrity" but has not yet decided to join Riyadh's coalition fighting Yemen rebels, the defence minister said Friday.

Saudi Arabia began air strikes in Yemen on Thursday to defend the government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi from advancing Shia Houthi rebels.

Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the country would defend Saudi sovereignty "at any cost," but appeared to rule out any immediate Pakistani participation in the fighting, which has so far been confined to Yemen itself.

"We don't want to be part of any proliferation, we will try to contain it," Asif told parliament, adding that there was concern it could fan sectarian tensions in Pakistan and the Muslim world.

The Saudi ambassador in Washington said Thursday that Pakistan was among 10 countries ready to join a coalition to protect the Yemeni government.

Pakistan is a longstanding ally of Saudi Arabia with close military ties, but Islamabad has not yet committed to the operation, which has drawn strong criticism from its neighbour Iran, the major Shia Muslim power.

Meanwhile, India yesterday said it will send ships to Yemen to evacuate thousands of workers stranded there as the fighting intensifies.

Around 3,500 Indians are currently working in Yemen, which has been plunged into chaos by a Houthi Shiite rebellion that has triggered Saudi-backed airstrikes on the capital Sanaa.

Many are nurses from the southern state of Kerala, whose Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said New Delhi planned to send two ships to evacuate them.

India's government this week asked all its nationals to leave Yemen as a Saudi-backed coalition launched airstrikes.

# Suu Kyi ducks Myanmar army parade

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday snubbed a grand annual parade showcasing military strength for the first time in three years, as the country's army chief warned against "any disturbances to stability" in upcoming elections.

The veteran democracy campaigner, who has suffered a bout of minor ill health in recent days, was conspicuously absent from the Armed Forces Day ceremony.

She has attended for the last two years since she entered a fledgling parliament set up under the quasi-civilian government that replaced junta rule.

The 69-year-old, who was taken ill on a number of occasions during her gruelling 2012 by-election campaign, has recently ramped up her activities as the country prepares for crucial polls expected in early November.

Suu Kyi's party is expected to sweep the elections, seen as a test of democratic reforms, if they are free and fair.

But the Nobel laureate is currently barred from becoming president because of a provision in the junta-era constitution, which the military has resisted altering.

The election build up has coincided with rising fears that much lauded reforms in Myanmar are stalling, with recent police protest crackdowns fuelling concerns over the democratic transition.



Saudi Defence Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud (R) receiving Yemeni President Mansour Hadi upon his arrival at an airbase in the Saudi capital Riyadh on Thursday.

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