Why Do Houthis Curse the Jews?

By David Andrew Weinberg

The Yemeni Embassy in Washington recently released a report featuring primary source documents on the core ideology of the Houthi insurgents who seized Yemen's capital in 2014. That report, authored by Embassy official Salem Baafi, makes a case that antisemitism and other forms of hate form an essential part of the worldview and motivation of Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The Houthis' oft-invoked slogan is itself antisemitic. While their Iranian patron encourages chants of "Death to America, Death to Israel," the Houthis' own motto goes one step further, proclaiming "Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews." Advocates for the Houthis have argued that this radical language is just for show, that the Houthis "do not really want death to anyone," and this slogan is "simply against the interference of those governments."

Yet the Houthis' own foundational documents suggest that this commitment to hating the Jewish people is genuine. Chillingly, they even make an argument for genocide against the Jews in their official doctrine.

Houthi Doctrine

Yemen's Houthis officially refer to themselves as Ansar Allah, meaning the Partisans of God. Hailing from the Zaydi minority Shiite sect, the organization emerged in the early 2000s out of a religious revivalist movement in northern...
Yemen called the Believing Youth. At that time, a charismatic figure from one of the movement's leading families named Hussein al-Houthi returned from study in Iran and Sudan and began to amass a following with his fiery sermons.

These sermons form a compendium thousands of pages long that provides a window into the formative moment when the Houthis made their leap from religious revivalism to armed rebellion, and that was the focus of Baafi's report for the Yemeni Embassy. Although Hussein al-Houthi was killed in 2004 during the group's first uprising against Yemen's government and was succeeded by his brother Abd al-Malik, those collected sermons still play a central part of the group's ideology – for example, taking up main sections even today on the website of Ansar Allah and its main television network al-Masirah.

For one, these sermons reveal how the group's slogan came to be. Preaching to a school hall in January 2002, Hussein al-Houthi announced they had the "great honor" of being the first to speak a chant spreading "wrath" against America, Israel, and Jews. He noted he had included the Jews "because they are the ones who move this world, who spread corruption in this world."

Struck by Baafi's report, ADL independently collected and examined the sermons it cited regarding Jewish people to confirm the documents' authenticity. The following is a more in-depth examination of one of these particular sermons by Hussein al-Houthi that ADL independently verified, and that presents his most detailed arguments about the Jewish people.

**Hussein al-Houthi's Quds Day Sermon**

Three months after 9/11, Hussein al-Houthi portrayed that attack as a Jewish conspiracy and suggested Osama bin Laden was probably hiding out in an
American hotel. Worse, in that lengthy December 2001 sermon for the Iranian-inspired occasion of International Quds Day, Hussein al-Houthi went so far as to make a case to his followers for genocide against the Jews.

Unsurprisingly, part of this incitement was directed at Israel, which he called a "cancer" requiring "elimination and eradication." Labeling Israel a "greedy Jewish state," he said it seeks conquest from the Nile to the Euphrates River, as well as Mecca and Medina.

But on top of that, Hussein al-Houthi proclaimed in this sermon that the Arab and Muslim nations "will not be delivered from the evil of the Jews except by their eradication, and by the elimination of their entity" Israel [emphasis added]. In addition, he described the Jewish people using dehumanizing and demonizing language, calling them filthy and likening them to apes and pigs as well as to Satan. Additionally, he tried to paint the Prophet Muhammed as an anti-Jewish role model in this regard, asserting he too "was able to eliminate the Jews."

Al-Houthi went so far in this sermon as to blame the Jewish people for every malady in the world today, claiming "the Jews are really ruling the world." He blamed scheming Jews for the excesses of both capitalism and Communism in practically the same breath, including Yemen's own economic hardships. He suggested that Jews "manufacture world opinion in the countries of Europe, America, Asia, and beyond," and he accused them of being preoccupied with falsifying knowledge, culture, information, and even life itself in the Muslim world, broadcasting Jewish propaganda into every household and every mosque.

Hussein al-Houthi also explained in this sermon why his followers call Jews cursed. Claiming that the Jews knowingly rejected a divine message from Muhammad, he concluded they "deserved to be damned." That the Quran...
warned about the Jews’ “overwhelming danger if they turn to the side of evil,”
and that, once the Jews rejected Muhammad, evil became “their dominant
characteristic in all parts of the world.”

Al-Houthi proclaimed that “as the righteous sect,” Zaydi Muslims have “a great
responsibility” to “be more conscious than the Iranians, more than Hezbollah,”
to create “educational curricula that teach our sons... to bear enmity toward
the Jews and the Christians” and then to spread that consciousness to all
Muslims. Because in al-Houthi’s worldview, hatred toward Jews is divinely
mandated, and knowing one’s enemies “is to know the solution."

**The Consequences of Houthi Doctrine**

Baafi argues that Hussein al-Houthi’s worldview now drives his successors to
“target and hurt the most marginalized people in Yemen... seeking to eliminate
all it deems unworthy,” such as the small number of Jews and Baha’is in
Yemen, while committing other abuses against women and children.

This would seem to track with the fate of Yemen’s Jewish community, whose
numbers crashed in recent years from the prior best estimate of 200 to the
latest tally of just 43 individuals.

In the Houthis’ northern stronghold of Saada, they gave the last 70 or so Jews
ten days to flee in 2007 or face physical harm. Most relocated to Yemen’s
capital, Sanaa, but in 2014 the Houthis seized power there, too. The next year,
Houthi officials publicly beat two boys in Sanaa for refusing to disavow their
Judaism.

It would seem the cause for this dehumanizing mistreatment is quite clear.
Indeed, when a *New York Times* reporter and his translator visited some of the
last Jews of al-Raida under Houthi rule, a villager asked them “what are you
doing with that dirty Jew?” When they answered “he's a human being, after all,” the villager responded “No he's not” because “God has damned him.”

Yemen is home to the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. Eighty percent of Yemenis need humanitarian or protection assistance, and for 14 million this need is acute. In that context, Yemen’s last Jews are arguably a rounding error on the margins of pervasive human suffering.

Nonetheless, this small Jewish community’s tragic experience provides another painful reminder that when an antisemitic firebrand tells the world his plan, those threats must be taken seriously.

So when the Houthis routinely chant that they seek to destroy Israel – and America – we should believe them. Of course, we should be grateful that they lack the capability to do so. Yet we should also keep in mind the Houthis’ cautionary example when their Iranian sponsor propagates similar genocidal threats, not just in their schoolbooks but on ballistic missiles as well.

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