TAL SHIAR DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

UNCLASSIFIED//AOR SAUDI ARABIA, YEMEN

Saudi-Backed PLC First Emergency Division Launches Ground Offensive Against Houthis in Northern Yemen

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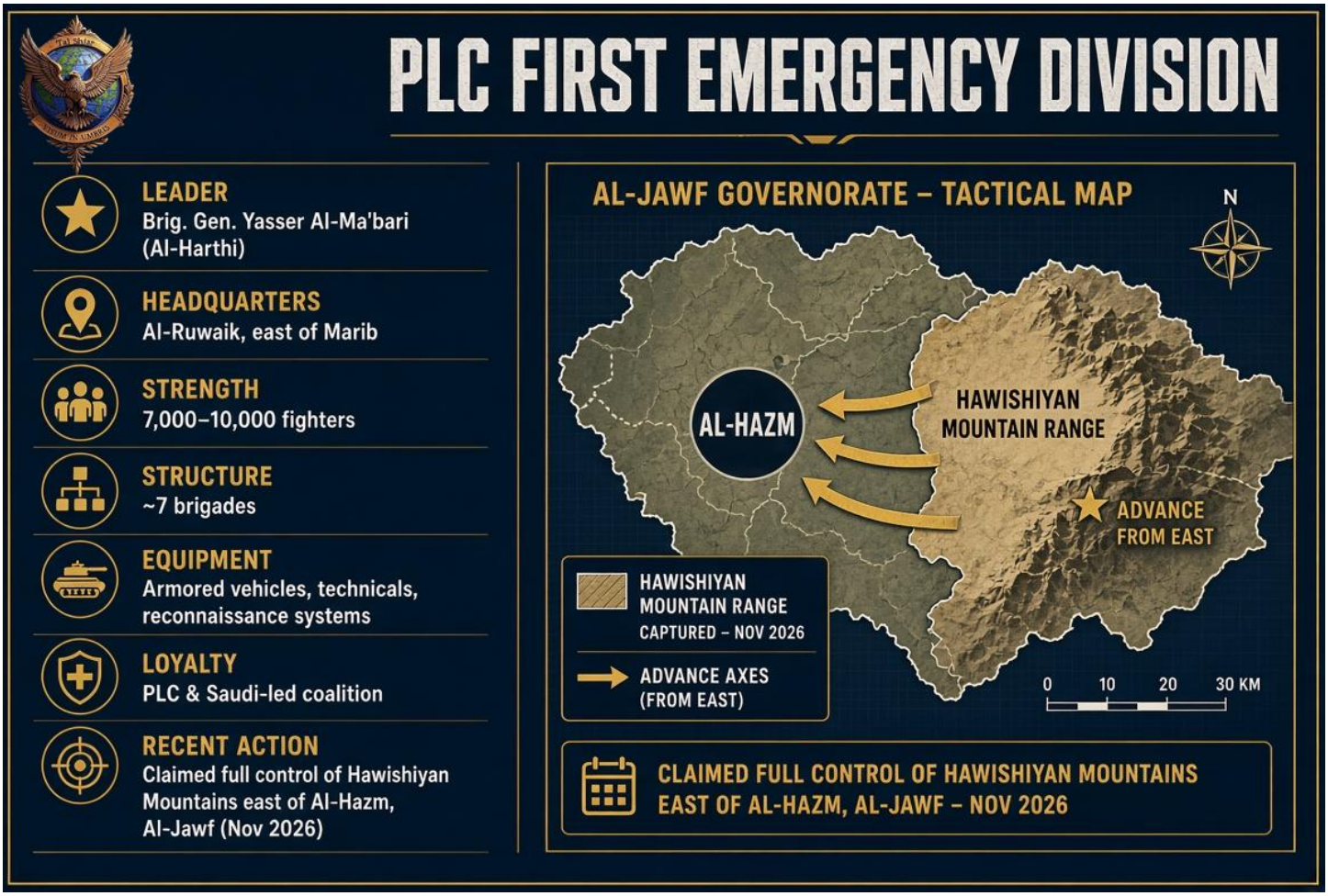
We assess that the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council's (PLC) First Emergency Division is a relatively cohesive combat formation of roughly 7,000–10,000 fighters that has shown improved operational capability in northern Yemen. It remains loyal to the PLC and the Saudi-led coalition while operating with significant autonomy under Saudi oversight. It recently claimed an offensive in north Yemen where they seized the Hawishiyan mountain range in the Al-Jawf governorate. If true, it would mark a notable tactical gain under the Saudi-led Operation Dawn. The division's size, equipment, and positioning make it a priority target for Houthi forces and a key instrument for Riyadh's efforts to rebuild centralized anti-Houthi military capacity. The unit doesn't fit cleanly into a classification type like pure armor or mechanized divisions. Instead, it functions primarily as a hybrid rapid-response, light infantry, and internal security/gendarmerie force capable of conducting offensive operations.



- The First Emergency Division is headquartered in the Al-Ruwaik area east of Marib and is led by Brigadier General Yasser Abdullah Al-Ma'bari (also known as Yasser Al-Harthi), a former officer in the Sa'iqa and Republican Guard who previously fought on the Saada fronts. It comprises approximately seven brigades formed by reorganizing earlier Azal Axis units plus new recruits, with equipment including armored and combat vehicles plus reconnaissance systems.

- Overall Yemeni Emergency Forces number around 30,000 fighters across six divisions (roughly 22 brigades). The First Division is among the largest and most deployed, with primary loyalty to the PLC structure while receiving direct Saudi training, arming, and funding. It has previously supported operations in Hadramawt.

- In late early November 2026, the division's claimed full control of the strategic Hawishiyan mountain range east of Al-Hazm after multi-day clashes with Houthi forces. The advances were part of Operation Dawn of Yemen (launched 5 October), with reports of captured fighters, seized weapons, destroyed vehicles, and subsequent successful repulsion of a Houthi counterattack,



Saudi Support to the First Emergency Division

We assess that Saudi Arabia provides the First Emergency Division with decisive enabling support—salaries, training, logistics, intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance (ISR), and close air support—that underpins its recent battlefield performance. This support is channeled through the Saudi-led coalition's Joint Forces Command and is part of a broader effort to professionalize PLC forces after earlier fragmentation. Without sustained Saudi air and logistical backing, the division's ability to seize and hold high ground such as the Hawishiyan range would be severely constrained.

- The Saudi-led coalition has deployed approximately 100 fighter jets to provide round-the-clock air support and has conducted hundreds of strikes against Houthi targets since the launch of Operation Dawn of Yemen, according to Coalition spokesman Maj. Gen. Turki al-Malki and multiple media reports. Ground advances in Al-Jawf have been accompanied by reported airstrikes destroying Houthi vehicles and fortifications.

- Saudi Arabia funds salaries for multiple PLC-aligned formations (including those previously supported by the UAE), supplies equipment and training, and maintains operational oversight via officers embedded in Joint Forces Command structures, according to PLC Chairman Rashad al-Alimi statements and reporting by Al-Mahriah Net and Middle East Institute analyses. Emergency Forces specifically receive Saudi logistical and financial support while operating under coalition supervision.

- Persistent ISR and targeting support enable precision strikes and real-time coordination. U.S. intelligence and refueling assistance has been reported as quietly available to Saudi operations, while British air-to-air refueling supports defensive Saudi sorties, according to Al-Monitor and UK government statements. Houthi claims of downing Saudi reconnaissance platforms in the Al-Jawf area further indicate active ISR activity over the front.

Conclusion

The First Emergency Division has emerged as one of the more effective Saudi-backed PLC formations in the current phase of fighting. Its claimed seizure of the Hawishiyan range demonstrates improved coordination between Yemeni ground forces and Saudi air/ISR assets under Operation Dawn of Yemen. However, the unit remains heavily dependent on continued Saudi funding, logistics, and air support. Sustained Houthi pressure, potential supply challenges, and the broader fragmentation of anti-Houthi forces mean that tactical gains in Al-Jawf are unlikely to translate into decisive operational success without deeper integration of PLC military structures and uninterrupted external enabling.





Tal Shiar was founded by Nadeem Iqbal, a national security expert who served over 16 years as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense from 2006-2022. His career began as a counter-insurgency analyst on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (2006–2013), followed by 9 years as a military analyst in the Syria Branch (2013–2022). He deployed five times in support of combat operations (3× Afghanistan, 2× Iraq), including two rotations with Special Operations Forces focused on counter-terrorism missions in the CENTCOM theater. Additional roles included rotations to CIA Headquarters as the military analyst for the DNI Middle East Task Force and served as the Syria Country Director for Office of Secretary of Defense Policy (OSDP). He was recognized with Joint Civilian Commendation/Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal(x3), the Secretary of Defense GWOT Medal, DoD Expeditionary Award and the OSD Excellence Award.