

PEPE&LARRY: Who Is Really Behind Saudi Arabia's War on Yemen

Pakistani jets did not fly over Yemen — and the foreigners inside Saudi Arabia's war are mostly American. That is what a senior source in Pakistan's military establishment told Transition Protocol in answer to five direct questions. In this special edition, Pepe Escobar, military analyst Larry Johnson and host Zulfiqar Ali take apart the story the world ran this week — and what could still drag Pakistan in. — Zero jets: asked whether any Pakistani aircraft entered Yemeni airspace, the source answered "None. Zero." On 8 October Pakistan's Information Ministry called the New York Times report of Pakistani jets "fake and fabricated". — The real count: 110 American advisors, two Pakistani radar specialists and two Turkish technicians, according to the source. CNN has separately reported more than 100 US military advisers supporting the Saudi campaign. — Mecca and Medina, not Najran: every Pakistani unit, the source says, is deployed around the holy cities, under Pakistani command. — Sanaa's warning: why Escobar says any move toward the border would make Pakistani forces "legitimate targets". — Saudi Arabia's money, Trump's pause on Iran until after 3 November, and what a senior Iranian source told the host two hours before we recorded. Sourcing note: the five answers and the 110 / 2 / 2 figures come from a senior Pakistani military source. The Iranian remarks are a senior Iranian source speaking to the host. Larry Johnson's account of damage at Abqaiq and on the East-West pipeline has not been independently confirmed. #Pakistan #SaudiArabia #Yemen #Houthis #Iran #PepeEscobar #LarryJohnson #TransitionProtocol

#Mr Z

Hello, everybody. Greetings to our global audience. Thanks to you, we have become a premier channel in the geopolitical arena, a rare privilege for us. And because of this privilege, we believe that we owe to you that anytime there are events taking place in West Asia that affect us directly, that we bring to you the commentary, the analysis from renowned members of our team who are founding members of this channel, military analyst Larry Johnson, global reporter Pepe Escobar, recognized for their talent, recognized for their integrity and access throughout the world and throughout the globe.

And that is the reason we are here, even though this is not a day on which we come to you on a regular basis. So if you like what we do, if you value the information we bring that is not available to you anywhere else, please hit the like and subscribe button. Go to Substack, become a paid member. That small contribution, for less than a cup of coffee, we will deliver this inside your mailbox two times a week for a whole month. So with that introduction, I will open the floor to Pepe, the global reporter whom you love and recognize, who is a founding member whom we value dearly. So go ahead, Pepe.

#Pepe Escobar

Well, thanks, Mr. Z. Larry, what a pleasure to be with you. Unfortunately, not face-to-face in Moscow. Thanks, everybody, our global audience. And once again, thank you all for making us reach 100,000 subscribers in four months. This is quite something. And what many people recognize, even though many people still don't understand what we do, many people recognize what we do. And we have in front of us a tremendously complex, nuanced problem, which needs clarification. It's the role of Pakistan in the Mecca Defense Alliance, and the fact that Pakistan, for all practical purposes, now is side by side with Saudi Arabia and Turkey in a direct clash with Ansar Allah and the Yemeni armed forces.

This is as serious as it gets. Well, this does not mean that Pakistan is attacking Ansar Allah directly. So there was a report that went all over the planet stating that in a sort of unmistakable way. What we're going to relay to you comes directly from the highest levels of the Pakistani military establishment. We asked them several questions, and they answered all our questions. This is very, very important. In the beginning, many of us were saying, "Is Pakistan really getting into this viper's nest on behalf of the—and now I am editorializing, this is my own position—the ghastly House of Saud?" Well, it's more nuanced than that.

So I'm going to read to you. I'm going to quote directly from our source. This is very, very important. This is an ultra-high-level source. So obviously, we cannot say anything that would point to what kind of source that is. But it's up there. And we asked him the direct questions. One, two, three, four, five questions. Okay, let's go. Number one: Have any Pakistani aircraft entered Yemeni airspace, including for interceptions, of course, counter-drone missions, or air support? His answer, flat out: none, zero. So basically, he said that no Pakistani aircraft was directly involved in all these operations.

He also said something that I had discussed before here at Transition Protocol and also with Mr. Z: Pakistani deployment in the province of Najran in southern Saudi Arabia. These are Yemeni lands, by the way. Najran is Yemeni land, is part of Saudi Arabia, was stolen by the British in 1934 and handed to Saudi Arabia. So, for all practical purposes, the Yemenis consider it Yemeni land. So there are no Pakistani troops in Najran province facing the Saudi-Yemeni border. His answer. And he also said that all the Pakistani units in Saudi Arabia are deployed in or around Mecca and Medina, which is something that we have been hearing from different sources in Pakistan and in all matches.

They are essentially around Mecca and Medina. No foreign personnel supporting the House of Saud in their war, or in the restart of their war against Yemen. We even have figures, very precise figures, according to our source: 110 American advisors, which is a lot, and it's more or less what is being reported in American mainstream media. Two, I repeat, only two Pakistani radar specialists, and also two, I repeat once again, only two Turkish technical support personnel. So that's it. It's essentially

an American support operation to the House of Saud. Question number two: Have any operational orders given to Pakistani personnel included targets or coordinates inside Yemen? His answer: no. Flat out. No such orders have been issued.

Third question: Does Pakistan retain control of mission tasking, or does it operate under Saudi or, once again, coalition of the willing rules? His answer: Pakistan controls its own forces 100%, including all aspects of mission tasking. So the Pakistani contingent responds to Pakistani command. This is very, very important. They are not submitted to the Americans or submitted to the ghastly House of Saud. Number four: Does the Pakistani command have direct visibility into the detachment's daily missions? He says, yes, of course, because the Pakistanis are supervising what the Pakistanis are doing. That's very, very good. No outside interference. And question number five, which is crucial.

Did Riyadh request offensive assistance? I'm sorry. And what answer did Islamabad give? Well, his answer, of course, it's a very complex question, but he gave as much detail as he could. But basically, he said Pakistan does not pursue offensive action against Ansar Allah. And this is the official Pakistani government position expressed by different levels of the Pakistani government. So this is very, very important because it proves, I would say, quite definitively, that the reports that were sent around the world by the New York Times, and also a very similar one by the Times of India, which probably did a cut and paste of the NYT report, are lies. I repeat, the New York Times was lying.

The New York Times in Islamabad or Rawalpindi, they don't have access to this level at the military establishment to have a confirmation of something at this level. And I can say, and Mr. Z obviously can say it with more authority than I do, that we do have this kind of access because we ask the questions directly to Islamabad and we receive five detailed answers. Okay, so this is our, let's say, the start of our conversation. There's much more, and I want to ask later on, Mr. Z, I want your observations first, and then I'll pass it over to Larry, because I want to ask Larry, on the American side, something ominous that may be in preparation for the next few weeks. Mr. Z, take it away, please.

#Mr Z

Everything that you said, 100%, 100% accurate. Anybody who has access to our broadcast can investigate it in any possible way that they can, and we welcome this kind of investigation because we stand on what we say, and we will not say anything that we totally, totally do not confirm directly from the sources. And I can assure our audience that this is privileged access, rare access given to us because the people who provide us this access, they respect the journalists who bring it to you, such as my dear colleague, Pepe Escobar, and my other dear colleague, Larry Johnson, founders of this channel.

A decision was made when we started this channel as to how this kind of information will be disseminated to the world, and the credentials of my colleagues, Pepe and Larry, were scrutinized by the military analysts, and they were recommended. So that is how we get this access. And I know for a fact that the New York Times does not even have access to five, six tiers below where we are obtaining this information. They will be directed to the press office, and that's about it. So the people we speak with are, in fact, setting policy, are, in fact, executing policy. Very, very important.

Not only are they making policy, they are executing the policy. So what was just provided to you by Pepe, we 100 percent stand behind that, and we invite everybody to scrutinize it in any way they can. Additionally, I can say, because I heard this directly from the people I spoke with, is that the people who provided whatever it is that the New York Times got are nowhere near any of the decision-making circles. If they were, they would be facing serious charges under Pakistani military law, which would apply to them because they were disclosing military secrets that they're not authorized... Yes. So that's what I have to say, Pepe.

#Pepe Escobar

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Z. Larry, very, very important. I would say this is the complement of what's happening around the Bab al-Mandeb and the Saudi Arabia versus Yemen war. And it's also, of course, linked to the U.S. against Iran war. You have some privileged information, if I'm not mistaken, of something that may be prepared by the Trump administration, which would lead to some sort of cancellation of the midterm elections, and how to get there, and how they're going to sell this to domestic public opinion, not to mention to the rest of the world. So, Larry...

#Larry Johnson

Take it away. Yeah. So let's start with why did this latest flare-up in this war between the Houthis and the Saudis begin? You know, when you go back, they've been at war at various times. And not just the Houthis, but you go back to the split between North and South Yemen. It goes back to the '60s. And then, as Pepe noted earlier, the war in the 1930s, which left the Saudis in control of three provinces of Yemen, thanks to the intervention of the Brits. Now, throughout all this, why did the Saudis attack Sana'a, you know, two months ago, following the funeral of Ali Khamenei in Iran? And the best information appears to be that it was at the encouragement of the United States.

And it was done for the express purpose that the Trump administration, in another desperate move, was trying to figure out a way to weaken Iran. And they falsely believed that Iran was running things in Yemen, that the Yemenis were nothing more than Iranian puppets. They failed to understand that the Houthis are quite independent. They will have a relationship with Iran, but they're not beholden to Iran. And so that started this new phase of war. What has happened in the

course of the last two months, but particularly over the course of the last two weeks, is we have seen the Houthis carry out more devastating attacks against Saudi Arabia than occurred in the war that was initiated back in 2015 and went on for about nine years.

The Houthis now are inflicting extraordinary damage on the Saudis, the House of Saud, which is sparking both internal chaos within the House of Saud, but also with other tribes that are scattered across Saudi Arabia, these Bedouin tribes. So what Yemen has—what the Houthis have now created—is a genuine existential crisis for the Saudis, out of which we see all this desperation. Now again, this blew up on the United States. Now, following up on some, I think one of the immediate risks that we face, and it goes beyond the war in Yemen, is that Israel may very well take military action to provoke a major response from Iran, and it could also involve the Houthis.

And to do this in order to give Bibi Netanyahu a justification to postpone the elections and say that it can't take place during a time of war, using sort of the Volodymyr Zelensky excuse in Ukraine. I wondered aloud yesterday, without having delved into it, whether or not Trump could also be entertaining such a possibility. But after talking with Robert Barnes, who is, I'll call him a constitutional scholar, the reality in the United States is the elections are handled at the state level. And so for Trump to get a coordinated effort among a majority of the states to postpone elections is just, you know, outside the realm of possibility. So what we're left with is, will Trump follow through on his promise made yesterday, or his statement?

I don't want to characterize it as a promise that he's not going to attack Iran until after the midterm election. Now, he just simply said he's not going to launch an attack prior to the midterm. That leaves up in the air that he may do it afterwards. And here's the problem: the United States does not have the combat power that it did on the 28th of February when it initiated this war against Iran. And anything it would try to do over a three-day period is not going to bring about Iran's collapse as the government of the Islamic Republic, nor the military power of the IRGC. What it will do is spark off a new round of escalation that will lead Iran to carry out more extensive and devastating strikes against U.S. targets and, most likely, Israeli targets at that point.

Now, while that will be going on, the Houthis will continue to drive forward. And they are defeating the Saudis. So we get reports that, you know, we saw it on Monday of this week. The initial reports claimed that the PLC, the armed wing of the government that's recognized by the West, had made these terrific advances and that the Houthis were fleeing in panic. Turned out that was a lie. Not only did they fail to advance in a professional way using artillery and controlled airstrikes, it was very chaotic, haphazard, and after a six-hour advance, they were immediately routed and forced to retreat all along the front.

And in tandem with that, you'll see Western reports touting, oh, they've destroyed this mobile launcher or that mobile launcher, and yet two hours later, Houthis are launching ballistic missiles from mobile launchers that have taken out the petrochemical facility in Abqaiq. And Abqaiq is important because that's really the wellhead for the east-west pipeline. Taking that out, along with

destroying four of the 13 pumping stations along that pipeline, has meant that Saudi Arabia is getting no oil out of Saudi Arabia. So I'll stop there.

#Pepe Escobar

Mr. Z, want to jump in?

#Mr Z

Yes, everything that Larry has said is 100% accurate, 100% verified by contacts that we have at the highest level. Repeatedly, we have to say that because it is in fact true, and we are proud and privileged to have that. Pakistan is not going to be engaged in any offensive action against the Ansar Allah. This comes from people who set policy. There is a meeting that is going to take place tomorrow between the Secretary General of the Mecca Agreement, a three-star ranking general based in Riyadh, and the chief of Saudi forces, the chief of Turkish forces, but they are going to be discussing defensive actions, not offensive actions. So Saudi is really placed not between Iraq and a hard place, but it's in the fire pit, and the characterization—very good one made by Larry.

And they are desperate. They are truly desperate. They are beseeching Pakistan to help them out. But Pakistan will not enter into that fray, into the hornet's nest, because Pakistan not only has a good sense of not doing that, Pakistan has 40 million Shiite people living in Pakistan, 100% supporting Ansar Allah, 100%. In fact, they have asked to go and fight on behalf of Ansar Allah. With that type of support from within Pakistan, Mohsen Naqvi being a very strong member of that community, a very strong member of the civilian government, very strongly allied with Asim Muneer, they're not going to do that. There is going to be a political backlash that will topple the government of Pakistan. I can say that with extraordinary confidence because I know that. So that is not going to happen.

#Pepe Escobar

And a similar process is happening in Turkey. If you follow, you know, everything that is coming out of Istanbul and Ankara, of course, there's a lot of popular pressure and a lot of people questioning the motives of Turkey, even if they are, once again, I think it's 24/7, saying, no, this is only defensive and all that. But there's an enormous backlash already in Turkey. So if we look at popular opinion in both Turkey and Pakistan, the absolute majority of Pakistanis and Turks are against this whole arrangement. If it stays defensive and far away from the front lines between the Saudis and Ansar Allah, maybe this can be contained. But the last thing both Pakistan and Turkey need is to get into a direct clash with Ansar Allah and the Yemeni armed forces. And I'm sure the leadership in both nations is fully aware of the consequences.

#Mr Z

100%. But I think it's worth mentioning, and I mentioned this briefly when we were speaking last time, a direct letter was delivered by the Speaker of the Ansar Allah Assembly to the Speaker of the Pakistani Parliament. It's an official letter. It was directly delivered.

#Pepe Escobar

Requesting mediation.

#Mr Z

Requesting mediation. And prior to that, other leaders of Ansar Allah had made a similar request. So Pakistan may in fact pick this up and may in fact decide to mediate and talk sense to MBS. I said this in our previous podcast, and I'm going to say it again. The real problem is not the Ansar Allah, Pakistan, Turkey issue. The real problem is MBS and Prince Khalid's issue—the infighting between those two, blaming each other, princes from both sides gathering around each other, tribes on both sides gathering around each other. And that is why we say, we have said it, that this may be the most serious threat to the House of Saud since it was founded by the Brits and the Americans, you know, 70, 80 years ago. It might actually result in a fall of the Saudi government. And that is what Ansar Allah really wants. They do not want... Yeah, go ahead.

#Pepe Escobar

But I saw some echoes from Sana'a, Mr. Z, that are quite worrying. They are, in fact, practically declaring war against the Pakistani forces. This is very, very serious. This requires, I would say, immediate diplomatic moves by the Pakistanis to defuse it. It could be via Iran. It could be directly between Islamabad and Sana'a to tell them, look, please try to understand the Mecca Defense Pact, etc. This is something that can be done with a little bit of swing. It's possible.

But this is very, very wrong because it's apparently being interpreted by the Yemeni armed forces as a Turkish and Pakistani declaration of war against them. And if we get there, then all bets are off. And of course, as long as the Pakistani forces, for instance, stay around Mecca and Medina, that's one thing. But if they get—our source, for instance, told us that they are not close to the Saudi-Yemeni border, and they better not go there because then they will become legitimate targets for the Yemeni armed forces. So this is a razor's edge. It's immensely dangerous.

#Mr Z

It is. And it is. And I'm not going to vote for the politics of anybody in Pakistan. We have never done that.

#Pepe Escobar

It's not the role of our channel. We don't meddle in internal Pakistani politics at all. We are dealing with real and privileged information. It's a completely different story.

#Mr Z

Absolutely.

#Larry Johnson

Let me just jump in. One thing I think has—the situation changed now over the course of the last two years. Two years ago, when the Saudis were flush with cash, oil's flowing out, money's flowing in, they're in a strong position because, you know, Pakistan sort of needed their help. What we're witnessing that was taking place now, which would then, I think, factor into how far Pakistan is willing to go in this relationship, is Saudi Arabia is running out of money. And, you know, let's put it in, like, personal terms. In the past, every time the Saudis went out for dinner with Pakistan, the Saudis bought—bought the best food, the best wine. Now that they're going out for dinner, the Saudis are telling the Pakistanis, "Hey, can you pick up the check?"

#Mr Z

Exactly, exactly, exactly.

#Larry Johnson

So that is, I think, going to factor into Pakistan's calculations about how far they want to get into bed with these guys right now.

#Mr Z

Not too far. Pepe and Larry, I tell you, information that I receive from people who make policy, who execute policy. And my last conversation with them was only a few hours ago, directly. So I cannot imagine that anything else has happened in the meantime that will change what I heard, because there is no incentive for them to tell us other than what the truth is. And they know that that is all that we do, which is verify what they say. We don't duplicate what they say. We don't echo what they say. We examine everything, and then we report it. And this is something that we believe is the value that we bring to our audience for their loyalty to us.

#Larry Johnson

I note that the reports about Pakistani involvement in military activities have come exclusively from Western sources.

#Mr Z

Yes.

#Larry Johnson

And so now we've got it from sources in Pakistan saying, "No, that ain't true."

#Pepe Escobar

That ain't true. Exactly. Yeah. Okay, so we won't. Right. Let's try a wrap-up. And I would like to talk to Larry once again. Larry could give us the perfect wrap-up in terms of—okay, a very straightforward question, Larry: How do you see the possibility of something extremely dangerous happening in the next few days?

#Larry Johnson

Oh, yeah. No, I think it's quite high. The desperation level of Israel is such that, you know, we saw it with this recent flydubai nonsense. You know, I found out something I didn't know: that every flight from UAE to Israel, the Israelis demand that they get the list of the crew, the names of the crew, and the names of the passengers 48 hours in advance so they can check them out. And we're supposed to believe that the Israelis missed this guy, definitely Al-Hamami, I think it is. Now, what also captures my eye in that is his name. I'm told that his name translates into bathroom. Exactly. And this became a meme all across the Arab world, because who took him out? The plumber. So when Israel stoops to those kinds of levels, I mean, it's almost like, you know, they deliberately selected this guy, which means public bath. Hammam, you know, in Arabic is public bath, and al-Hamami is bath attendant.

#Pepe Escobar

Yeah, yeah.

#Larry Johnson

And we're supposed to believe that this was just a coincidence. Yeah. So I think that in the coming days, we're going to see more acts of desperation, both by the Saudis, by the Israelis, and that the war that has been underway could expand.

#Mr Z

Well, I have one other thing to add on that, Larry, that I was discussing with you before we got on the air. And that is that I had the opportunity a couple of hours ago, just two hours ago, to speak

with somebody very highly placed within Iranian decision-making circles. And I was informed by this person, who speaks on behalf of the Iranian government, both military side and civilian side, that they are— first, he said something to me that raised my eyebrows. He said, "We have direct intel into what is going on in Washington and in Tel Aviv."

First time I heard that. And he said, "The moment we detect the slightest movement of any offensive action against us, we will have a surprise for anybody—anybody that does that—that they have not seen." And he said it could be in Tel Aviv, it could be in any of the surrounding Gulf states, and it could even be the naval assets of the United States. He was supremely confident, resolute. Not in any way did I detect that he was concerned about what might be coming their way. In fact, what I detected was that they would welcome it. Different vibe completely.

#Pepe Escobar

Because they are prepared for all the scenarios.

#Mr Z

All the scenarios, correct. So if Trump does make that mistake, he said, "We would welcome that." First time I heard it.

#Pepe Escobar

I think that's a wrap.

#Mr Z

Thank you, everybody, for tuning in to us. We will be back with A Week Ahead with Pepe on Sunday so that you can anticipate what is likely to happen. And we have the very best sources, so we bring you the very best news. Kindly hit the like and subscribe button, support us, go to Substack, become a paid member. We will deliver this twice a week inside your mailbox. So thank you very much.