

## THE NEXT ESCALATION WITH THE HOUTHIS

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**Abstract:** *The Republic of Yemen is known to be facing a number of conflicts with Western countries. The maritime areas along the coast of Yemen are recognized as a strategic area of great importance in international trade. Indeed, goods from many countries use this water corridor as a shortcut to European countries as a transit area. In addition, most of the petroleum products entering the world market are shipped to developed countries through this strait.*

*But now the conflicts in this geopolitical location pose a serious threat to the world market and the US and UK in collaboration with the opposition to these terrorist actions are launching a series of strikes against the Houthis operating in Yemeni territory. The reason for this is that the Houthis do not allow all ships belonging to Israel or entering Israeli ports to pass through this shortcut.*

**Keywords.** *Yemen, the Gulf of Aden, Bab el-Mandeb strait, Houthis, Red Sea, international maritime route, Suez Canal, USA, UK, Israel, Iran, Middle East, western coalition, missile, oil, trade, shipping.*

**Аннотация:** *Известно, что Йеменская Республика столкнулась с рядом конфликтов со странами Запада. Морские районы вдоль побережья Йемена признаны стратегическим районом, имеющим большое значение в международной торговле. Ведь товары многих стран используют этот водный коридор как короткий путь в европейские страны в качестве транзитной зоны. Кроме того, через этот пролив в развитые страны поставляется большая часть нефтепродуктов, поступающих на мировой рынок. Но сейчас конфликты в этом геополитическом месте представляют серьезную угрозу мировому рынку, и США и Великобритания в сотрудничестве с оппозицией этим террористическим акциям наносят ряд ударов по хуситам, действующим на территории Йемен. Причина этого в том, что хуситы не позволяют всем судам, принадлежащим Израилю или заходящим в израильские порты, проходить по этой короткой дороге.*

**Ключевые слова.** *Йемен, Аденский залив, Баб-эль-Мандебский пролив, хуситы, Красное море, международный морской путь, Суэцкий канал, США, Великобритания, Израиль, Иран, Ближний Восток, западная коалиция, ракета, нефть, торговля, судоходство.*

Situated in the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula, the Republic of Yemen has borders with Oman to the northeast and Saudi Arabia to the north. The country is considered one of the key states that can de facto control the Gulf

of Aden. Why is this water corridor so important and why Houthis group is going to hinder to world trade?

The Gulf of Aden and Bab el-Mandeb strait has grown into an essential maritime place between Africa, Asia, and the Middle East because of its advantageous coastal location, which acts as a gateway between the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea. The strait known as Bab el-Mandeb, which stretches 70 miles in length and 20 miles in width from the Horn of Africa to the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, forms the southern entrance to the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. Yemen borders it on the east, and the states of Eritrea and Djibouti border it on the west. The waterway is a part of the crucial Suez Canal maritime route, which connects the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas in the Indian Ocean, with 33,000<sup>108</sup> boats traveling through the gulf and strait annually. Persian Gulf oil is frequently delivered along this route, making the gulf a vital waterway for the global economy. The Gulf of Aden is crossed by around 17%<sup>109</sup> of the world's seaborne petroleum as it travels to local refineries or the Suez Canal. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, that's about 4.5 million barrels <sup>110</sup>of oil a day that comes from the Gulf and Asia.

Who are the Houthis?

Encouraging Yemen's Shiite Muslim minority, the Houthis are an armed political and religious force.

They have declared them to be part of an Iranian-led "axis of resistance"<sup>111</sup> opposed to Israel, the U.S. and the rest of the West - alongside other armed groups such as Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah movement.

Known formally as Ansar Allah ("Partisans of God"), they originated in the 1990s<sup>112</sup> and derive their designation from the movement's original founder, Hussein al-Houthi. Their current leader is his brother, Abdul Malik al-Houthi.

The U.S. claims that Iran funds the Houthis, but Iran denies supplying the Houthis with armaments and says it only provides them with political support.

The Red Sea coast and the northwest of Yemen, including Sana'a, are under the Houthi's authority. Most of Yemen's population lives in these areas, where the Houthis maintain a de facto government that imposes taxes and issues currency.

Houthis hindrance to naval route

<sup>108</sup> The Gulf of Aden. <https://dg.dryadglobal.com/gulf-of-aden-0#:~:text=The%20Gulf%20of%20Aden%20marks,more%20than%20irregular%20maritime%20traffic.>

<sup>109</sup> Atlas Magazine. *Maritime piracy: the special cases of the Gulf of Guinea and the Gulf of Aden*. October 31, 2023. <https://www.atlas-mag.net/en/category/tags/focus/maritime-piracy-gulf-of-guinea-gulf-of-aden>

<sup>110</sup> Candace Dunn. *The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint*. November 21, 2023. <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=61002>

<sup>111</sup> Nancy Ezzeddine and Hamidreza Azizi. *Iran's Increasingly Decentralized Axis of Resistance*. July 14, 2022. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/07/irans-increasingly-decentralized-axis-of-resistance/>

<sup>112</sup> Wilson Center. *Who are Yemen's Houthis?* July 7, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/who-are-yemens-houthis>

However, there is currently a war going on in the Gulf of Aden. After seizing a commercial ship in the Red Sea on November 19, the Houthis have subsequently used speedboats, drones, and missiles to assault almost two dozen more vessels. U.S.-led naval forces have prevented many of those strikes. The Houthis claim their intended targets are ships owned, flagged or controlled by Israel, or heading for Israeli ports. However, many of them have no ties to Israel.

Major shipping corporations have stopped using the Red Sea, through which nearly 15%<sup>113</sup> of global seaborne trade passes through the Red Sea—including 8% of global grain trade, 12% of seaborne-traded oil, and 8% of the world's liquefied natural gas trade.<sup>114</sup>

For transit via Egypt's Suez Canal, this path is essential. The suspension of international marine traffic in the Red Sea coincides with a rise in attacks by militants from Yemen known as the Houthi group, who are backed by Iran and possess advanced weaponry. The sudden shutdown of this significant seaborne trade line has led to intensified naval deployments by the U.S., Britain and their allies in the Middle East. There is also conjecture on potential military actions aimed at the Houthis in Yemen in an attempt to restore unimpeded transit.

Although the attacks have been ongoing for weeks, they have lately become more intense. In addition to threatening to strike a ship, the Houthis attacked one ship with a drone and fired two ballistic missiles on December 15. Notably, one of the missiles impacted the ship, marking the first ever successful launch of an anti-ship ballistic rocket by the Houthis in Yemen. Subsequently, on December 16, the U.S. Navy battleship USS Carney captured and downed 14 drones<sup>115</sup> over the Red Sea.

The major shipping corporations consequently declared that their vessels would evade the Suez Canal in both the directions until the safety of passage through the Red Sea was ensured. Thus, Houthi attacks in Yemen on Israeli-related merchant ships are forcing companies to divert their routes to the historic trade route between Europe and Asia via the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) (Picture – 1).

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<sup>113</sup> **The White House.** *A Joint Statement from the Governments of the United States, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.* January 3, 2024. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/03/a-joint-statement-from-the-governments-of-the-united-states-australia-bahrain-belgium-canada-denmark-germany-italy-japan-netherlands-new-zealand-and-the-united-kingdom/>

<sup>114</sup> **Hon Anthony.** *Joint statement from the governments of the United States, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.* January 4, 2024 <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-governments-united-states-australia-bahrain-belgium-canada-denmark-germany>

<sup>115</sup> **Heather Mongilio.** *U.K, American Warships Shoot Down Houthi-Launched Drones in Red Sea.* December 16, 2023. <https://news.usni.org/2023/12/16/u-k-american-warships-shoot-down-houthi-launched-drones-in-red-sea>



Picture – 1<sup>116</sup>

### The economic impact of the issue

The crisis in the Red Sea has led to a tremendous surge in the price of shipping. For instance, transporting a 40-foot container (66 cubic meters) from Asia to Northern Europe now costs \$4,000 - an increase of 173% since the attacks began. It also affects the cost of insuring ships. For example, if a ship is valued at \$100 million, insurance used to cost between 0.1% and 0.2%, which was about \$100,000-200,000. Now, with a 0.5% rate increase, the cost of insurance would be \$500,000. Thus, the increase in the cost of insurance for a vessel of this value would be between \$300,000 and \$400,000.<sup>117</sup>

Global shipping in the Red Sea accounts for 12 percent of world commerce as an approximate \$1 trillion in global shipping flows through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, each year.<sup>118</sup>

### Western coalition attack to the strait terror

<sup>116</sup> **The Associated Press.** *Attacks in the Red Sea bring the old trade route between Europe and Asia into consideration.* December 21, 2023. [https://i0.wp.com/www.middleeastmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AA-20231221-33244072-33244071-ATTACKS\\_IN\\_THE\\_RED\\_SEA\\_BRING\\_THE\\_OLD\\_TRADE\\_ROUTE\\_BETWEEN\\_EUROPE\\_AND\\_ASIA\\_INTO\\_CONSIDERATION-scaled.jpg?ssl=1](https://i0.wp.com/www.middleeastmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AA-20231221-33244072-33244071-ATTACKS_IN_THE_RED_SEA_BRING_THE_OLD_TRADE_ROUTE_BETWEEN_EUROPE_AND_ASIA_INTO_CONSIDERATION-scaled.jpg?ssl=1)

<sup>117</sup> **Middle East Observer.** *Amid Gaza war, spot container shipping rates soar 173% on Red Sea diversions.* January 5, 2024. <https://middleeastobserver.org/2024/01/05/amid-gaza-war-spot-container-shipping-rates-soar-173-on-red-sea-diversions/>

<sup>118</sup> **AL JAZEERA.** *UN Security Council demands Houthis stop Red Sea shipping attacks.* January 11, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/un-security-council-demands-houthis-stop-red-sea-shipping-attacks#:~:text=The%20Red%20Sea%20links%20the,through%20the%20strait%20every%20year.>

US and partner forces carried out military strikes against army installations in Houthi-controlled parts of Yemen following a series of assaults launched by an armed rebel militant group against merchant vessels navigating the Red Sea on January 12.

The assaults occurred after the Houthis began the heaviest offensive against shipping in the Red Sea, one of 27 such attacks since November 19<sup>119</sup>.

Government officials announced that 21 missiles and drones were shot at military and merchant ships near the Bab al-Mandab Strait, the southern bottleneck of the Red Sea, and U.S. and British warships struck them off course.<sup>120</sup>

The United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands provided non-operational support for the coalition airstrikes. They launched for Houthi missiles, rockets, radars, and drones that were being utilized to attack vessels that were sailing in international sea lanes.

“These targeted strikes are a clear message that the United States and our partners will not tolerate attacks on our personnel or allow hostile actors to imperil freedom of navigation,”<sup>121</sup> Biden said of the attacks by air and sea.

The strikes targeted almost 30 facilities in Yemen with more than 150 munitions, U.S. Lt. Gen. Douglas Sims, director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>122</sup>

### Conclusion

To summarize all the above arguments, it can be said that this war will not last long as the Houthis will not be able to cope with the pressure from western allies such as the US and UK. However, the attacks by the Houthi group on international shipping have had a huge impact as merchant ships have changed their routes which take an extra 10-14 days to circumnavigate the entire African continent. This is costly, affects rising commodity prices, and likely threatens the energy security of European countries.

Therefore, Western allies are now forced to address this problem by destroying or weakening the Houthis and have launched several missiles at their positions.

In addition, the U.S. has deployed about a dozen air defense systems in Middle Eastern countries ahead of Israel's expected ground invasion of Gaza to prevent the Houthis from launching rocket attacks against Israeli forces.

However, Iranian authorities will continue to support the Houthis with arms and financial aid to achieve their goal in the region.

<sup>119</sup> **Ruxandra Iordache.** *Middle East crisis: Houthis say U.S., U.K. will pay a 'heavy price' after Yemen strikes.* January 12, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/12/live-updates-latest-news-on-the-middle-east-and-the-red-sea-crisis.html>

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<sup>121</sup> **The White House.** *Statement from President Joe Biden on Coalition Strikes in Houthi-Controlled Areas in Yemen.* January 11, 2024. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/11/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-coalition-strikes-in-houthi-controlled-areas-in-yemen/>

<sup>122</sup> **U.S. Department of Defense.** *Director of the Joint Staff and Pentagon Press Secretary Hold an On-Record, Off-Camera, Telephonic Press Briefing.* January 12, 2024. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3644929/director-of-the-joint-staff-and-pentagon-press-secretary-hold-an-on-record-off/>



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