

# Israeli Attacks on Hodeida: Geopolitical Consequences Go Beyond Houthis

Situation Assessment

**Political Analysis Unit**

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## Introduction:

On July 19<sup>th</sup>, the armed Houthi group successfully carried out a drone attack on Tel Aviv, killing one Israeli and injuring others. The attack took place just 100 meters from the U.S. embassy. In retaliation, Israel conducted strikes the next day on the port and oil storage facilities in Hodeida, a city under Houthi control in western Yemen. Israeli leaders described the (Outstretched Arm Operation 1 (as an attempt to deter Israel's enemies in the region.

After the Israeli attack on Hodeida, the Houthis began to politically capitalize on the event, despite their economic losses they suffered. The Houthis, who rely heavily on customs revenue to sustain their war machine, intensified their nationalist rhetoric against the “Western imperialism supported by the Gulf,” particularly in light of the brutal Israeli war on Gaza, which had led to the death of over 39,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and left over 100,000 injured or missing.

The Houthis vowed to retaliate against the Israeli strikes, leading Israeli leaders to warn that any Houthi response would prompt a broader retaliation from Tel Aviv on Yemeni territory. The internationally recognized Yemeni government condemned the Israeli attacks on the port of Hodeida, warning that the chaos instigated by Israeli and Iranian could plunge the region into war.

The fires at the oil storage facilities in Hodeida port burned for more than seven days, resulting in losses exceeding \$300 million<sup>2</sup>. Among the damages were over 150,000 tons of oil derivatives stored in the 38 facilities targeted by Israeli airstrikes.

### International Concerns over War Expansion:

It is notable that the Houthis rely on Iranian weapons to continue their attacks in the Red Sea and to target occupied areas in Israel. The situation is becoming increasingly complicated as U.S. intelligence fears that Russia may intend to supply the Yemeni armed group with advanced technology. Such a move could escalate the proxy conflict between major powers—a scenario that neither the Yemeni government nor the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, which are U.S. allies— want to see.

The Israel's attack, about 2,000 kilometers from Gaza, risks expanding the conflict beyond the Gaza Strip, potentially drawing the region closer to a broader war. Although it may not have the same impact as the assassination of Hezbollah leaders in Beirut and Tehran, it will place Yemen and the national security of the Arabian Peninsula at the center of a wider conflict. This is despite the Gulf States' continued policy of neutrality in these events.

On the other hand, Operation “Outstretched Arm” failed to achieve any strategic gains for the Israeli occupation. While it might increase the political points for Netanyahu among domestic constituencies in Israel, it ultimately provided the Houthis with widespread support inside Yemen and across the broader Arab world.

1 “WATCH :Operation’ Outstretched Arm - ‘IDF footage from airstrike on Houthi port in Yemen “Published on 22/7/2024 See26/7/2024

<https://youtu.be/7/CRcwnYs42E>

2 Israel Shamay/Makor Rishon “Israel’s Yemen strike caused millions in damage to Houthis ”Published on 26/7/2024See26/7/2024

<https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/07/25/israeli-strike-in-yemen-caused-hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars-in-damage-to-houthis/>

## Targeting Houthi Assets:

Since November, the Houthis have been carrying out attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and nearby waters. The group later, announced an expansion of these attacks to include the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. The attack on Tel Aviv marked the first confirmation of the Houthis' ability to conduct attacks in the Mediterranean, demonstrating their military advancements, which are backed by Iran, despite the ongoing U.S./British and Western campaigns against the armed group since the end of last year.

With reports emerging about potential Russian—and possibly Chinese—support for the Houthis, concerns are growing about the future of the region's national security as the Houthis' capabilities increase. This concern is heightened by the West's failure to effectively address the armed group, not only since the beginning of this year but even in supporting their Gulf allies over the past decade. The U.S. and Western capitals pressured for the signing of the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, which prevented government forces from taking control of the strategic port of Hodeida.

Yemen imports 85% of its food, and 75% of its population relies on humanitarian aid, most of which passes primarily through the port of Hodeida. For this reason, the U.S. and the Yemeni government have avoided targeting the port, despite previous past accusations that it was being used to receive Iranian weapons and launch attacks on commercial vessels. In reality, there is no evidence to support claims that the Houthis are receiving weapons through the port or using it for maritime attacks. However, the Houthis do use areas within Hodeida governorate and its strategic islands to smuggle weapons and launch sea-based attacks. Thus, the Israeli strikes were not directly linked to Iranian weapons, as Israeli leaders claimed, but rather to targeting the strategic assets of the Houthi armed group.

Revenues from the port of Hodeida account for more than 40% of Yemen's port income<sup>3</sup>, largely from oil derivatives revenues. The Houthis impose taxes and customs duties of around \$122 per ton on fuel imported through the port<sup>4</sup>, earning nearly \$84 million per month from fuel revenues, approximately \$1 billion annually. Due to the Israeli attacks, the Houthis' ability to import oil derivatives into their controlled areas will be significantly hindered. Reports indicate that the Israeli occupation airstrikes destroyed five cranes, a power station, and 37 oil storage facilities, reducing the port's fuel storage capacity from 150,000 tons to 50,000 tons.

The Israeli airstrikes on the port of Hodeida aimed to weaken the Houthis by targeting their financial lifeline—which aligns with the United States' goals to pressure the group and cut off its financial resources, forcing them to halt attacks in the Red Sea. Despite the substantial economic losses, the port resumed operations just days after the attacks, and the Houthis can still use the Ras Isa port to import oil derivatives. The Israeli leaders likely targeted this high-profile civilian site to create political impact by increasing internal pressure on the Houthis and raising society's anger against their attacks. Yet, this strategy backfired, as it only strengthened the Houthis' propaganda that they are fighting against the U.S. and Israel—a mistake similar to those made by U.S./British airstrikes on Yemeni territory earlier this year.

<sup>3</sup> Asharq Al Awsat, "Yemeni Ports Revenues at 52\$ Million in 3 Months" Published on 16/11/2019 See 27/7/2024 <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1994131/yemeni-ports-revenues-52-million-3-months>

<sup>4</sup> to spoke port the through imports who businessman a and port Hodeida the at official An

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“Abaad” on 16/02/2022 in a meeting in Sana'a

## Gains for the Houthis:-

The economic losses appear manageable for the Houthis, especially given the significant political gains they have achieved. In a televised speech<sup>5</sup> the day after the attacks, Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi said, “We are very pleased with this direct confrontation between us and the Israeli enemy.” The unprecedented attacks on the port of Hodeida play directly into the Houthis’ longstanding propaganda, validating their slogan, “Death to America, Death to Israel,” and fulfilling a long-held dream since the group’s founding in the early 2000s. Here are some of the key gains the Houthis have made from these attacks:

### ● Mobilization and Support:

Much like the U.S.-British airstrikes in January, the Israeli attacks have aligned the Houthis’ objectives with the Palestinian cause, which has strong support in Yemen. The Houthis use this alignment to gain domestic support and reaffirm their narrative of confronting the Israeli occupation, thereby enhancing their ability to mobilize and recruit more fighters. Reports indicate that since the Red Sea attacks began, the Houthis have recruited tens of thousands of young men eager to fight against the Israeli occupation, reversing a significant decline in their recruitment capacity over the past three years. This surge in recruitment could threaten their local adversaries and potentially escalate conflicts in the oil and gas-rich regions of eastern and southern Yemen, where there has been a recent buildup of fighters on the front lines.

### ● Political Leverage against External Powers:

Since the start of the Israeli war on Gaza, the Houthis have used their Red Sea attacks as a propaganda tool to condemn the Arab, particularly Gulf, response and stance on the war. They accuse the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, of supporting U.S./Israeli attacks on Yemeni territory and have threatened to resume targeting Gulf facilities to extract political concessions. This strategy has already yield results, as the Houthis secured a “de-escalation” agreement among competing Yemeni parties, which includes concessions like canceling the Yemeni Central Bank’s measures and allowing flights without prior monitoring.

### ● Suppression of their controlled areas and evasion of people’s rights:

The Israeli airstrikes provide the Houthis with a means to silence any criticism directed at the group in their controlled areas. They have used accusations of collaboration with “Israeli intelligence” or allegiance to Zionism as a pretext to imprison dissenters. Following the U.S./British airstrikes, dozens of employees from UN agencies and former staff of Western embassies have been arrested on charges of working for U.S. and Israeli intelligence. In a speech after the Israeli attacks, the Houthi leader stated, “One of the most important benefits of these events and their outcomes is the opportunity to reveal people’s true colors. With the Israeli enemy now directly involved in aggression against our country, it’s one of the greatest opportunities to discern who is a true believer and who is a hypocrite in every sense of the word.»

<sup>5</sup> The official Houthi website“ ,Abdul-Malik al-Houthi :We are very pleased with the direct battle between us and the Israeli /American enemies ”,published on 21/7/2024 and accessed on28/7/2024

[694893/archives/ye.com.ansarollah.www//:https](https://694893/archives/ye.com.ansarollah.www//:https)

Like other armed groups govern in a de facto state, the Houthis prefer to remain a state of ongoing war to avoid the responsibilities of governance, such as paying salaries, providing services, and upholding rights and freedoms. This state of perpetual conflict also allows them to justify their failure to manage the territories under their control by blaming war conditions. As a result, in the coming days, the Houthis are likely to divide people in their controlled areas into “with us or against us,” considering any criticism, no matter how minor, as a hostile act in favor of the Israelis and Americans.

### Enhancing Presence in the Iran Axis:

Contrary to Israeli claims, the strikes are unlikely to significantly weaken the Houthis’ supply chains for Iranian weapons. Components for missiles, drones, and remote-controlled boats do not require major ports to reach Yemen. In fact, the Israeli attack is likely to increase the flow of weapons to the Houthis, as the Yemeni group was the third-largest importer of Iranian weapons last year.<sup>6</sup>

The Israeli attack also emphasizes the Houthis’ success in solidifying their position within the regional axis led by Iran<sup>7</sup>. Tehran’s support has enabled the Houthis to conduct attacks on Israel and disrupt trade in the Red Sea, positioning the Houthis as a key players in Iran’s broader regional strategy. The Red Sea attacks have elevated the Houthis’ status within Iran’s “Resistance Axis,” especially after the group felt sidelined following the March 10, 2023, agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, brokered by China.

The Houthis have presented themselves as a significant actor who, with the right military capabilities and technology from Iran, could surpass Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Iran built from the ground up and relied on as a cornerstone of its regional influence. The Houthis have emphasized this since they began their Red Sea attacks in November last year.

### Ambitions of Becoming a Regional Power

The Houthis see the recent Israeli, as well as earlier U.S. and British, attacks as an opportunity to elevate their status from a “rebel militia fighting against a legitimate government” to a significant regional force capable of influencing the policies of key countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They are working to shed their longstanding image and establish themselves as a regional power.

This ambition is reflected in their efforts to build a long-term presence in Iraq and collaborate with Iranian-backed militias there, using the Resistance Axis as a platform to achieve their goals. The Houthis reject comparisons to Hezbollah, with senior Houthi leader Abdul-Malik al-Ajri declaring that his group will be “stronger and larger” than the Lebanese group, which is also supported by Iran<sup>8</sup>.

6 SIPRI, “Trends in International Arms Transfers 2023,” Published March 2024 See 04/04/2024 [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs\\_2403\\_at\\_2023.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf)

“Strategy,” published on 15/5/2024 and **Iranian in Sea Red the and Palestine**“, Adnan ,Hashim v accessed on 30/7/2024 at :<https://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/112702>

8 Robert F .Worth“ The Houthis Are Very ,Very Pleased” Published 09/03/ 2024 See 04/04/2024 at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2024/03/houthis-yemen-war-palestine/677637/>

## Regional Geo-Political Consequences:

The Houthis' recent gains and maneuvers represent troubling developments in the already complex crises of the Middle East, particularly concerning the national security of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The situation has grown more complicated and challenging, especially following Israel's unprecedented attacks on the Arabian Peninsula. The absence of a rapid, strategic action plan to address these crises only exacerbates the situation.

### ● Yemen as a platform for Message Exchange:

Israel's attack on Hodeida, located 1,600 miles away from the occupied Palestine, emphasizes the worse sense of insecurity among settlers, and proves the failure in achieving its military objectives in Gaza. The decision to strike Hodeida's port, using a show of force that involved 20 fighter jets, most of them F-35s, was intended to establish deterrence. Israeli leaders were clear about their primary goal, stating that "the fires that is currently burning in Hodeida, is seen across the Middle East ". Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant emphasized that this action was a message to the region "The Houthis attacked us over 200 times. The first time that they harmed an Israeli citizen, we struck them. And we will do this in any place where it may be required"<sup>9</sup>. This was particularly a specific message to Iran, which is 620 miles away that Israel's reach remains long and precise, and its resolve has not diminished.

On the other hand, the Houthis' attack on Tel Aviv was a clear message of their ability to reach the Mediterranean Sea—a capability that had previously been in doubt. It also served as a message to Israel that if a war were to break out with Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Yemeni armed group could influence the balance in favor of the "Resistance Axis.»

If the conflict in Gaza continues, especially with the potential arrival of a Republican administration in the White House, we could see an exchange of messages between Israel and the U.S. on one side, and Iran and its proxies on the other, in Yemeni territory.

### ● U.S.-Russian Conflict:

Amid escalating tensions, Russian President Vladimir Putin has threatened to support armed movements against the Americans if aid to Ukraine increases. U.S. intelligence reports suggest<sup>10</sup> that Russia might supply the Houthis with advanced anti-ship missiles, further complicating the situation. There are also reports of Russian military advisors in Yemen, providing the Houthis with guidance on Red Sea operations<sup>11</sup>. This potential step could transform Yemen from a regional proxy conflict between Gulf countries and Iran into a proxy war between major global powers, raising the risk of Yemen becoming a battleground in broader geopolitical conflicts, with dire consequences for its civilian population<sup>12</sup>.

The Houthis have already announced the development of their naval capabilities since No-

<sup>9</sup> Tom Spender and Paul Adams " Israel strikes Houthis in Yemen after drone hits Tel Aviv "Published 2024 /20/07 See 30/07/2024 at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3g68g11445o>

<sup>10</sup> Michael R .Gordon and Lara Seligman " U.S .Launches Effort to Stop Russia From Arming Houthis With Antiship Missiles" Published 19/07/ 2024 See 20 /07/2024 <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-launches-effort-to-stop-russia-from-arming-houthis-with-antiship-missiles-98131a8a>

<sup>11</sup> Natasha Bertrand and Katie Bo Lillis ,CNN " Russia pulled back weapons shipment to Houthis amid US and Saudi pressure" Published 02/08/ 2024 See 02 /08/2024

<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/02/politics/russia-weapons-houthis-saudi-arabia/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Gerald M .Feierstein ,Fatima Abo Alasrar " The geopolitical implications of Houthi attacks and Israeli retaliation" Published 23/07/ 2024 See 24 /07/2024 at <https://mei.edu/publications/geopolitical-implications-houthi-attacks-and-israeli-retaliation>

vember, including the introduction of explosive-laden “unmanned submarines,” marking a strategic shift aimed at enhancing their ability to disrupt vital maritime routes in the Red Sea and beyond. If Moscow supplies the Houthis with advanced naval weapons, it will significantly heighten the threat they pose to regional security.

## Gulf States under Pressure

The drone that traveled from Yemen to Israel was not particularly advanced; it seemed to be a modified version of the Samad-3 drone, which was introduced in 2019 and has been used in previous attacks against Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Houthis claimed that the drone used in the Tel Aviv strike was a new model called “Yafa,” boasting stealth capabilities. However, experts noted that the modifications only extended its range by 300 miles compared to the Samad-3. This was a clear message to Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and their Yemeni allies that if the conflict resumes, future attacks could be more precise.

Prior the Israeli strikes on the port of Hodeida, the Houthis had been threatening Saudi Arabia, sharing images of its airports and ports, and accusing it of aiding the Israeli occupation by imposing an economic blockade through Yemen’s central bank measures. The Houthi leader even threatened to target Riyadh’s Vision 2030 projects. However, after the Hodeida strike, Saudi Arabia declared that it “will not allow its airspace to be exploited by any party, a stance taken since the start of the conflict and shared by most Gulf Cooperation Council countries.” However, if the conflict escalates between Israel and its regional proxies following the Israeli strikes in Hodeida, Beirut, and Tehran, maintaining neutrality may not be as advantageous for Gulf countries, particularly regarding Yemeni case.

The Houthis’ naval attacks sent a clear message that they are operating freely and aggressively beyond their borders without fear of repercussions, rendering threats to target Yemeni territories ineffective. In his speech following the Israeli strike, the Houthi leader stated, “Yemen has nothing more to lose after the years of war.” This underscores the challenge of dealing with non-state actors who operate with a zero-sum mentality. The Houthis aim for total control of Yemen and aspire to establish themselves as a regional power on par with Saudi Arabia, or, failing that, to bring about the country’s complete devastation.

As a result, the Houthis are likely to continue their Red Sea attacks, potentially expanding them to target neighboring countries and international interests beyond the nearby seas. They may use these attacks as leverage to achieve their political goals, placing ambitious development projects in the region under significant security threats. However, acceding to the demands of the armed group would not guarantee the safety of these projects for Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, who have significant regional ambitions. Instead, they would remain vulnerable to the whims of the Houthis.



## Pillars of U.S. Policy:

Since October, the Biden administration has articulated a strategy for the region based on three pillars: protecting maritime routes, preventing the expansion of the war from Gaza, and maintaining diplomatic options to end the war in Yemen. The U.S. launched the “Guardian of Prosperity” operation to protect ships in the Red Sea, followed by “Poseidon Archer” to carry out strikes in Yemen targeting Houthi sites and storage facilities<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, Washington has provided Israel with unwavering military and political support despite the war crimes committed in Gaza, framing its policy of preventing conflict expansion as support for Israel rather than regional protection. However, the administration has failed to pair its military strategy against the Houthis with a political one, leading to the failure of its operations to halt Houthi attacks.

The Israeli strikes on Hodeida have undermined the core of U.S. strategy, sending a message to Washington that “Your operations in Yemen are not enough.” In a secret message, the commander of U.S. Central Command called for a broader approach against the Houthis, including economic and diplomatic measures alongside military actions. American experts have also suggested targeting Houthi leaders, which could escalate Yemen’s internal conflict and intensify the Houthis’ retaliatory campaign in the Red Sea<sup>14</sup>. It appears that the U.S. will develop a more comprehensive strategy to confront the Houthis in the coming phase, not only by targeting their leaders but also by formally designating the group on par with Al-Qaeda<sup>15</sup>.

## The Houthis’ Standing in Tehran:

The Israeli attacks have significantly enhanced the Houthis’ standing within the “Axis of Resistance” and in the eyes of the Iranian regime. Tehran now views the Houthis as a crucial frontline force in the fight against Israeli occupation and the U.S. presence in the region. For most of its 30-year history, the Houthi movement operated as a local armed group with limited resources, not seeing itself as a central player in Iran’s “forward defense” strategy against distant threats<sup>16</sup>. This left the Houthis concerned about being abandoned after the 2023 Riyadh-Tehran agreement brokered by Beijing. However, their recent attacks in the Red Sea have given them added leverage, and the Israeli strikes have validated their ability to disrupt trade flows and divert the attention of Iran’s regional and global rivals, thereby elevating their role in Iran’s strategic plans. <sup>17</sup>

This development indicates that efforts to draw the Houthis away from Iran through financial, political, or economic incentives—or to distance Tehran from Yemen via economic projects—are unlikely to succeed in pulling the Houthis out of the “Axis of Resistance.”

<sup>13</sup> «The Western Strategy in the Red Sea and Deterrence Options,» Abaad Center for Studies and Research, published on ٢٠٢٤/٧/١٩ and accessed on ٢٠٢٤/٧/١٩ at <https://abaad-studies.org/en/strategies/topic60120/>

<sup>14</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Lara Seligman “U.S. Launches Effort to Stop Russia From Arming Houthis With Antiship Missiles” Published 19/07/2024 See 20/07/2024 <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-launches-effort-to-stop-russia-from-arming-houthis-with-antiship-missiles-98131a8a>

<sup>15</sup> Chris Boccia “Red Sea tensions reach new high as US weighs terrorist designation for Houthis” Published 24/07/2024 See 03/08/2024 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/red-sea-tensions-reach-new-high-us-considers/story?id=112113059>

<sup>16</sup> Alex Vatanka “Whither the IRGC of the 2020s? Is Iran’s Proxy Warfare Strategy of Forward Defense Sustainable?” New America 2021, p20 <https://tinyurl.com/22/k8uhh6>

<sup>17</sup> Hashim Adnan “The Iranian Strategy in the Red Sea :Objectives and Tactics” (Abaad Center for Studies and Research), published on 4/5/2024 and accessed on 31/7/2024 at <https://abaadstudies.org/strategies/topic/60109>

## A New Alliance against Iran and Its Proxies:

Following the strike on Hodeida port, the Israeli military stated, “We are engaged in a multi-front war: Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, as well as the Houthis in Yemen—all of Iran’s proxies, including Iran itself.<sup>18</sup>” Additionally, Israel’s Foreign Minister called on the United States to lead a coalition to confront the Houthis and Iran<sup>19</sup>. The escalation resulting from Israeli operations in Tehran and Beirut is likely to strengthen the formation of this new alliance, especially if Iran, its proxies, and Israel continue to exchange attacks.

The potential formation of a coalition to counter Iran and its proxies<sup>20</sup>—how it might develop, its scope, and whether Gulf States will participate—will be a central question in the coming months, both during the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza and in the subsequent phase. Such an alliance could fundamentally reshape the region.

### Conclusion:

Intervening in Houthi affairs has consistently proven to be complex and fraught with challenges, even when seemingly justified. The Israeli attacks, driven by an aggressive response, only heighten tensions and push the region closer to a broader conflict. Solutions imposed from outside the region do not enhance security; instead, they invite further international involvement. To avoid these consequences, the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf require regional agreements, particularly those focused on restoring balance by empowering conflict-affected coastal states like Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. A swift and effective political strategy is needed to limit the military and political influence of Iran’s proxies while simultaneously distancing Israel from determining the region’s fate. In fact, Israeli and American strikes have contributed to increasing the popularity of Iran-aligned militias in the region.







<sup>18</sup> Amos Harel “Israel’s Next War” Published 23/07/ 2024 See 03 /08/2024 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/israels-next-war-hezbollah-lebanon>

<sup>19</sup> Dan Williams “Israel Ready to Hit Houthis Again While Urging US to Take Lead” Published 25/07 2024 See 08/2024/ 03 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-25/israel-hamas-war-foreign-minister-israel-katz-says-houthi-targets-identified>

<sup>20</sup> Garrett Nada ;Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen ;Robert Barron “What the Houthi-Israel Exchange Might Mean for Escalation in the Middle East” Published 24/07/ 2024 See 03 /08/2024 <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/07/what-houthi-israel-exchange-might-mean-escalation-middle-east>



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