



The Yemen Review

November and December 2023

The Red Sea Front

November and December 2023



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies

is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover diplomatic, political, social, economic and security-related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

The Galaxy Leader, the vessel that was hijacked by Houthi forces in the Red Sea on November 19, moored off the Hudaydah coast on December 10, 2023 // Sana'a Center photo

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Executive Summary

Houthi military action in the Red Sea escalated dramatically during November and December, as the group announced the creation of a 'third front' against Israel in retaliation for its war in Gaza and military operations along the Lebanese border. Isolated attacks in October, nominally undertaken in solidarity with the besieged residents of Gaza, have mutated into a sustained campaign, with Houthi leaders now threatening to enforce a blockade of all ships headed to Israel through the area. Dozens of missile and drone strikes against maritime traffic have pushed the major shipping and oil companies to reroute their vessels. The attacks have been a public relations coup for the Houthis, who filmed the dramatic hijacking of the cargo ship *Galaxy Leader*, and have painted themselves as defenders of the Palestinian people. Regional powers have been hesitant to condemn the attacks, which were occurring near daily as of mid-December.

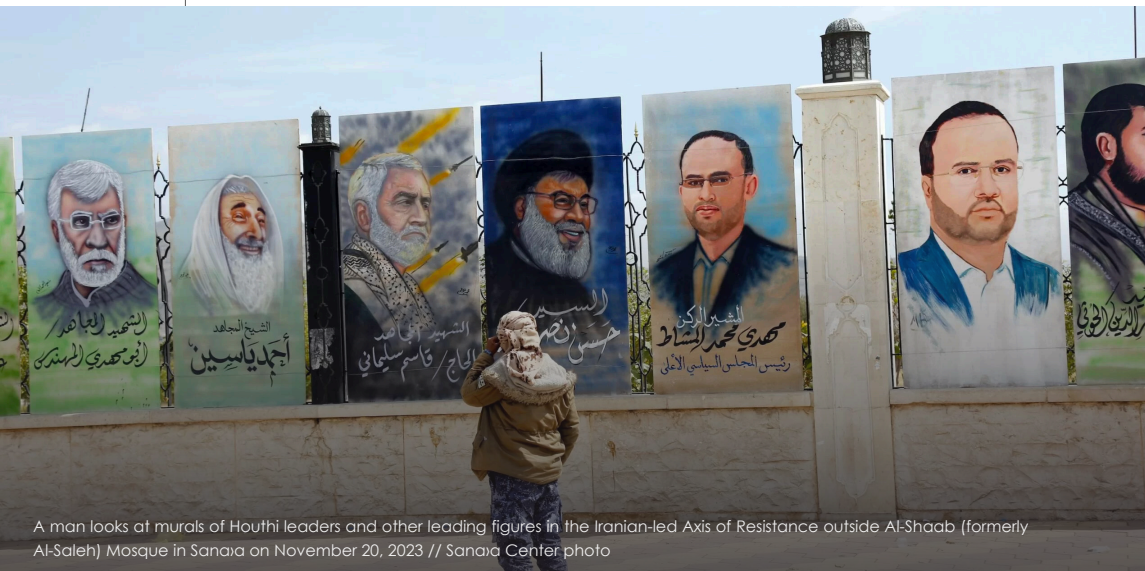
The response from the US and other Western powers has been cautious. The US has sent additional warships to the region, and the Pentagon announced the formation of an international task force to protect shipping, though the scope of coordination is not yet clear. Mindful of the popularity of the Houthis' stance, regional states have refused to officially join the response, with the sole exception of Bahrain. But the task force is unlikely to be the final word in the response. The US, Israel, or other Western nations may still launch strikes if Houthi operations continue unabated. At present they show no signs of stopping, and the group continues to work to improve its maritime power projection.

The Houthis have also continued to press on other fronts, launching an attack on Marib in early November. The operation was reportedly the largest in months, and the group has continued to send reinforcements and fortify its positions in the area. Its long-held interest in the governorate's strategic oil fields does not appear to have abated. The Houthis have also intensified military action in southern Hudaydah, perhaps looking to extend their maritime reach toward the Bab Al-Mandab Strait.

A Saudi-Houthi deal, which seemed imminent through much of November, now appears to be on hold. The scale and brazenness of Houthi attacks have given US and Saudi officials pause, even if they still wish for a settlement to be completed. With further military action likely, and the scale of the international response not yet clear, the Houthis' position vis-à-vis the peace process and the internationally recognized government is now less certain. Should they or the Saudis abandon peace talks, Yemen could face renewed military contestation between the Houthis and their opponents. For its part, the UN Special Envoy's office announced its continued support for the process.

The declining prospects of a deal, which reportedly promised massive Saudi financial relief in the form of public sector salary payments, has further imperiled the cash-strapped internationally recognized government. Saudi assistance promised to the government in August has not arrived, and the Houthis' Red Sea attacks have dramatically increased already high shipping costs, which are passed on to consumers. The country is particularly vulnerable to such fluctuations as it relies almost entirely on imported foodstuffs, and the economic harm from Houthi operations will be felt most intensely in Yemen. Nearing bankruptcy, the government may no longer be able to pay salaries in the new year. It has

already suspended FX auctions to finance basic commodity imports, and with its hard currency reserves exhausted, the value of the new rial has been falling since October. The government's options to raise revenues are limited. A proposal to sell discounted oil to an Emirati company drew intense backlash, though it is unclear what other avenues are available. The government's insolvency is perhaps most visible in its inability to provide electricity to the interim capital of Aden. The UAE sent an emergency fuel shipment in November to keep power plants running as an interim measure, but a long-term solution remains elusive.



A man looks at murals of Houthi leaders and other leading figures in the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance outside Al-Shaab (formerly Al-Saleh) Mosque in Sana'a on November 20, 2023 // Sana'a Center photo

Politics & Diplomacy

Red Sea Attacks Provoke International Response

The Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*) has thrust Yemen into the international **limelight** and put regional politics in turmoil with an escalating series of high-profile attacks on Red Sea shipping. The Houthis have launched dozens of drones and missiles at ships since October and captured the commercial ship *Galaxy Leader* in a striking airborne commando raid (see **Military** section). Declaring solidarity with the besieged Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza, the Houthi leadership has now **threatened** to attack any ships heading to Israel until the Israeli military offensive ceases. Major shipping lines and oil companies are now diverting their vessels round the Cape of Good Hope, as the West and regional powers consider their response.

The Houthis first fired on ships soon after the onset of the Israel-Hamas war, but it was unclear at first how far the group would go in its announced solidarity with the Palestinians. But with the surging death toll in Gaza **nearing 20,000** and continued tit-for-tat fighting on the Lebanese border, the Houthis have escalated operations dramatically, activating their primary deterrent capability with near-daily attacks, purportedly in an attempt to pressure the Israelis to stand down or for the West to intercede to halt the conflict. Neither seems likely, but the attacks have upended Yemeni politics, and a Saudi-Houthi peace deal that appeared imminent in November seems to have been put on ice for now. The group's motives are not entirely clear – the attacks may be intended to pressure Saudi Arabia over an apparent plan to normalize relations with Israel, to seek greater leverage in a deal on Yemen, or, as the Houthis claim, as means of pressuring Israel to end its deadly incursion into Gaza. There have been no casualties from the Red Sea attacks as yet, but the group's willingness and ability to jeopardize international trade raises the possibility of US or Israeli strikes and renewed consideration of the group's long-term role in governing Yemen.

At first blush, the Houthis appear to have risked the legitimacy conferred by a peace deal with Saudi Arabia on a series of largely performative and militarily ineffective attacks – most of the drones and missiles they have fired have been intercepted by Western warships. But the rapid deterioration of maritime security has been enough to divert shipping and disrupt supply chains, raising the prospect of inflationary effects around the world and putting further pressure on the Israeli economy. Some 30 percent of container ship traffic passes through the Red Sea and Suez Canal, and the waterway also serves as an important route for oil. The Israel-Palestine conflict remains a highly resonant issue in the Global South, with Yemen no exception – solidarity demonstrations continue to be held across the country. So even as the economic situation in Houthi-controlled territory continues to deteriorate, the group's stance on Palestine is wildly popular. Some Yemeni leaders have appeared reluctant to condemn their actions, and the Houthis' defiant rhetoric on Gaza, along with the international projection of military power, confer their own legitimacy on the group.

It is likely the Houthis have been further emboldened through their negotiations with the Saudis, during which they have been able to extract substantial concessions due to Riyadh's clear desire to exit the Yemeni conflict and secure their southern border through a comprehensive deal. The Houthi leadership may have calculated that neither the Saudis nor the West are willing to destabilize the status quo in Yemen with a peace deal so close at hand. They may yet be right. The Saudis have been largely silent on the attacks, and likely still hope to exert pressure on the Houthis through contacts with their Iranian backers, or through the types of economic and financial incentives they have promised in talks. Riyadh has now been in negotiations with the Houthis for over a year, and there is concern that if they are targeted with military action or punitive measures, it would put Saudi targets, including its vulnerable oil infrastructure, back in the crosshairs. To this end, Riyadh has reportedly urged the US to show restraint.

For its part, the UAE reportedly wants to take a stronger line, preferring that the US respond militarily and redesignate the Houthis as a terrorist organization. A group of Republican senators in the US Congress proposed a bill to do just that in November, and US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby recently stated that the White House was considering Houthi terrorist designations. The Emiratis, who back powerful military forces in Yemen, including the Giants Brigades and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), have long refused to entertain overtures from the Houthis, and have remained on the sidelines of the Saudi-Houthi negotiations. They lose little from the talks' postponement or collapse, and may prefer for the Houthis to instead be sanctioned and weakened militarily.

Unwilling or unable to convince the Israelis to agree to a ceasefire, the US finds itself in a difficult position, evident in its mixed and muted response. Intent on restoring maritime security in the Red Sea, but cautious of the fallout from a more robust military response, it appears to be trying to split the difference. The Pentagon has announced a multinational task force to protect shipping, but participation at present is limited to a handful of Western countries, Seychelles, and Bahrain. The terms of participation and coordination are not yet clear. Even the UAE has not officially joined the group, demonstrating the popularity of the Houthi stance in the Arab world and the hesitance of regional leaders to be seen taking Israel's side. Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) member and National Resistance forces leader Tareq Saleh declined a request by officials with the US Fifth Fleet to take part in the task force, as did the internationally recognized government. Omani officials reportedly attempted to engage the Houthis in negotiations, but privately told US Special Envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking that they refuse to press the Houthis without a ceasefire in Gaza. That the new multinational task force is being touted as a protective, rather

than a deterrent or coercive force, demonstrates either that the US shares Saudi concerns of destabilization in Yemen, or that it has been convinced to show a degree of patience, at least initially.

It is not clear how long such a position is tenable. If Houthi attacks continue at their current rate, the US – or Israel – will be tempted to respond militarily. They may already have decided to do so: at least 49 US and allied warships were in the vicinity of Yemen on December 20, from the Gulf of Aqaba through the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman. The US has reportedly amended its practice of dealing exclusively with the internationally recognized government, and drawn closer to the STC and Saleh's National Resistance forces, as one controls access to the Gulf of Aden and the other to the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The Houthis have put out feelers of their own to the Al-Subaiha tribes in Lahj, whose lands include Yemen's southern Red Sea Coast. At least publicly, the group remains unfazed: "They've tried us for nine years; if they want to do it again, we are here and ready," military spokesman Yahya Sarea said on December 20. Houthi leader Abdelmalek al-Houthi also warned in a speech that there would be no going back to the status quo ante if the US attacks, saying: "The Americans shouldn't think they can conduct attacks here or there and then send intermediaries to calm the situation down."

Saudi-Houthi Deal on Hold

The most consequential domestic effect of the Red Sea attacks has been to scupper what appeared in November to be the imminent announcement of a Saudi-Houthi deal on a comprehensive ceasefire. A declaration was expected as early as November 23, to mark the anniversary of the 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council initiative that sought to negotiate former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's exit from power. It would reportedly have included an immediate formal end to hostilities and the launch of the first phase of negotiations between the internationally recognized government and Houthi authorities. Unconfirmed reports suggested agreement had already been reached on oil and gas revenues and revenue from the ports of Hudaydah, which would have gone into a joint account administered by an economic committee. The Saudis would supposedly have paid public sector salaries as oil export infrastructure was repaired and brought back online.

The deal seemed as if it would go ahead even as the war in Gaza escalated and the Houthis began to target maritime traffic. Riyadh appeared to have largely succeeded in cowing its handpicked PLC into submitting to its terms, after months of acrimony. Saudi Defence Minister Khaled bin Salman called the governing council to Riyadh on November 15. "We discussed cooperation concerning the roadmap for the Yemeni parties, and I affirmed the kingdom's continuing support for the PLC and the importance of all Yemeni parties putting the national interest first in order to arrive at a comprehensive and lasting peace," he said in a tweet, which was accompanied by a photograph showed him meeting PLC chief Rashad al-Alimi and other PLC members. The US had reportedly cooled on the prospect of a deal with the Houthis but appeared to have given support for an agreement to go ahead despite its reservations.

But the resumption of the Israeli offensive in Gaza after a brief truce at the end of November, the massive escalation of Houthi operations, and the increasing reticence of the US about Saudi-Houthi rapprochement seem to have put the plans on hold. Tensions were already high – a number of recent border incidents suggested that not everyone in the Houthi camp looked favorably on the deal. Houthi leader Abdelmalek al-Houthi made a televised speech on November 14, claiming the US was threatening the Houthis with a resumption of the war, perhaps trying to set up a situation in which a Saudi-Houthi peace could be claimed as a victory over US malfeasance.

But he also took aim at Saudi Arabia for the **extraordinary efforts** it has taken to suppress public discussion of Gaza and any public expressions of sympathy. “The scene in Saudi Arabia, while Gazans are murdered, is a form of moral and humanitarian apostasy and contrary even to tribal customs,” **he said**, denouncing a series of international business conferences and cultural events in the kingdom as “the season of **dancing and depravity**.”

Growing US angst likely stems from a desire not to appear to be rewarding the Houthis for their attacks on Israel, as well as growing concern over the group’s capabilities and intentions. A report from a meeting of the US and Saudi ambassadors to Yemen said the US had requested a delay, and Ambassador Steve Fagin reportedly told STC chief Aiderous al-Zubaidi that the plans were too vague and conciliatory toward the Houthis. A diplomatic source familiar with ongoing US mediation efforts says Washington is still keen for the Saudi-Houthi deal to move forward, just not at the present moment. On the Saudi side, the desire to delay will have its limits: Saudi development plans demand peace on the southern border. If a ceasefire in Gaza allows the optics on Yemen to change, a deal could again appear imminent. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg has continued shuttle diplomacy between Riyadh and Muscat, where he met with Omani intermediaries, and his office **announced** that the UN remains committed to the peace process and agreement on a roadmap, publicly laying out the parameters of the proposed Saudi-Houthi deal.

Yet, the scale and boldness of Houthi military action may have permanently changed the calculus of the belligerent parties. Saudi officials may have thought they were locking the Houthis into a moderate position that would be the basis for future cooperation and nudge the group away from Tehran. But the Gaza crisis has turned the Houthis into would-be icons of resistance. If the US or Israel do launch strikes, they would likely leave the group in power, but further bolstered by claims that it went toe-to-toe with its sworn enemies and the most powerful militaries in the world. The hope, shared by both Saudi Arabia and the United States, that a Saudi-Houthi deal would lead to some form of normalization with the group as its more moderate wing rose to the occasion in meeting the responsibilities of governance now seems premature since the Houthis have this new outlet for military action. Moderates who visited Riyadh have likely lost the ear of Houthi leader Abdelmalek al-Houthi, as the group rides on a wave of popular support. Popular discontent over unpaid salaries still lingers, and the economic situation will further deteriorate as the attacks drive up the price of imports, but the Houthis have bought themselves time.

The US, and perhaps the Saudis, might also consider that if the Houthis are brazen enough to act like this now, there is no limit to what they might try to do in the future, not least if they continue to build up their military capabilities with Iranian help. In that scenario, Saudi appeasement will have entrenched a dangerous and volatile administration rather than helped to neuter it. Other Yemeni actors might also be encouraged to act if they perceive the Houthis as no longer palatable to the international community. The STC has notably changed its tone in recent weeks, as Al-Zubaidi appears at official events in his capacity as a member of the PLC, with his portrait aligned next to that of PLC chief Al-Alimi. **In public comments**, he has been careful to stay on script in affirming that military units in Aden operate under the Ministry of Defense, without specifically mentioning STC-controlled forces. Al-Zubaidi even tweeted in **English** on December 18, boasting that he had just visited Mayun Island and the Bab al-Mandab Strait area and was “working tirelessly with international allies” against “IRGC-backed Houthi hostilities” to protect the strategic trade route.

But as yet there is little to suggest that renewed conflict on the ground in Yemen would proceed differently than it has for the last decade. Houthi operations in Marib and Hudaydah have been escalating. Military sources on the government side say the Houthi forces could probably make a breakthrough in Marib if they wanted to, particularly if Saudi Arabia refrained from air strikes. It is important to remember that Saudi eagerness for a negotiated settlement came only after its coalition was wholly unable to remove the Houthis militarily. It will hesitate to renew that campaign absent conditions that greatly improve its prospects of success.

Renewed Speculation Over a New Prime Minister

Several years of backroom dealing and arguments over replacing Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed could finally come to a head in the coming weeks, as PLC leader Rashad al-Alimi tries to make a deal with STC chief Al-Zubaidi on a replacement. The main three figures in the running are former transport minister Badr Basalama; Finance Minister Salem Bin Breik; and oil minister Saeed al-Shamasi. It is not clear if Al-Zubaidi is on board with any of these options, but other PLC members have been kept out of the loop, and will likely be angry over any arrangement made behind their backs. When asked about the issue, PLC member Tareq Saleh seemed genuinely surprised, though the rumored replacements were publicized on social media [on December 6](#). Two other names have also been touted. One is PLC member Abdullah al-Alimi, a southerner with close ties to Saudi Arabia and on decent terms with the UAE, but he would likely find it difficult to win STC approval given his connections with the Islamist Islah party. Al-Alimi has also said in private he would want to retain his PLC status. The other is the current director of Rashad al-Alimi's presidential office, Yahya al-Shuaibi. Why Al-Alimi is trying to push the question again at this juncture is not yet clear.

Rival Factions in Hadramawt

An Emirati-backed faction of the Hadramawt Inclusive Conference (HIC) is attempting to restructure the group's leadership, following recent criticism of UAE-sponsored moves in the governorate. These include the "Scales of Justice" security campaign in early October, during which UAE-backed forces used heavy-handed tactics to target individuals accused of rioting and disturbing the peace, and reportedly tortured other Yemeni forces at a UAE-run military camp. Khaled al-Kathiri, a UAE-backed tribal sheikh and one of the founders of the HIC, is leading the charge to restructure the group, which is currently led by Amr bin Habrish. The governorate's Appeals Prosecution Office later accused Bin Habrish of "disturbing the peace and security" and Bin Habrish called on the PLC to conduct an impartial investigation into the allegations.

PLC chief Al-Alimi later held a meeting with members of the Saudi-backed [Hadramawt National Council](#), following the recent appointment of a 23-member presidium, and praised the body for uniting all Hadrami voices under one roof. Saudi Arabia is obviously keeping the council as a card up its sleeve to counter future UAE-STC attempts to escalate tensions in the governorate, though the new body is seen as a Saudi project parachuted in from Riyadh and lacking the grassroots presence of the Hadramawt Inclusive Conference. HIC leader Amr bin Habrish said in December he was not a member of the new council and had only heard about the presidium via social media, despite being initially supportive of the initiative. The Seyoun-based 1st Military Region – the force that the STC wants removed from the governorate – seems incohesive and weak at this point. Recent senior appointments by Al-Alimi have not been capable of uniting it as a military force, and its leadership is concerned that the Nation's Shield forces set up by Saudi Arabia are emerging as its replacement.

Other Developments in Brief

November 7: Save the Children **resumed activities** in Yemen after a 10-day suspension following the **death** of the organization's safety and security director, Hisham al-Hakimi, in a Houthi prison.

On November 14: the UN Security Council unanimously **adopted** Resolution 2707, which renewed the sanctions regime on Yemeni figures and entities until November 15, 2024, and extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts until December 15, 2024.

On November 14: Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani **announced** that Iran would appoint a new ambassador to Yemen if conditions in the country continued to improve. Iran has not had an ambassador in Sana'a since the death of Hassan Irloo in December 2021.

On November 28: A European Union delegation **arrived** in Aden and met with the government-aligned Central Bank of Yemen Governor Ahmed Ghaleb. The EU delegation, which was led by EU ambassador to Yemen Gabriel Munera Viñales and included the ambassadors to Yemen of France, Germany, and the Netherlands as well as the EU's deputy ambassador for Economic Affairs, pledged to continue supporting Yemen's central bank.

December 12: Minister of Communications and Information Technology Najeeb Mansour al-Awj **passed away** in a hospital in the UAE after suddenly collapsing.

December 12: Sarhad Fatah was **appointed** as the Deputy Head of Mission at the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General For Yemen (OSESFY). Fatah, who previously served as Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq to the UN in New York, replaces Muin Shreim.

December 19: Representatives from the US, EU, NATO, and a group of 44 allied partner nations released a **joint statement** condemning Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and calling on Houthi leaders to release the hostages of the hijacked Galaxy Leader vessel.

December 19: UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg traveled to Riyadh, where he **met with** PLC chief Al-Alimi and PLC member Othman Mujalli. Grundberg also met with Saudi Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed al-Jaber, UAE Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed al-Zaabi, and ambassadors to Yemen from the UN Security Council P5. The following day, Grundberg traveled to Muscat where he **met with** Omani officials and Houthi spokesperson and chief negotiator, Mohammed Abdelsalam. His office subsequently **announced** its continued commitment to the peace process and to getting the parties to agree to a path forward.



Pro-government army forces conduct a live fire training exercise in Marib al-Wadi district, Marib governorate, on November 15, 2023 // Sana'a Center photo by Abdelmajed al-Khudhami

Military & Security

Houthi Strategy Evolves in Red Sea Attacks

What was a surprising and uncharacteristic series of attacks by Houthi forces in the Red Sea in late October has now evolved into a highly coordinated naval offensive as Houthi forces continue to target Israeli-affiliated ships and territory, along with commercial vessels strategic waterway. Since the start of the conflict in Gaza in early October, Houthi forces have launched more than a dozen missile and drone barrages, hijacked a ship, and disrupted major international shipping routes by forcing companies to divert thousands of kilometers around the Cape of Good Hope – posing the question of *if* and *when* Israel and/or allied forces will retaliate.

Houthi strategy in the Red Sea region has witnessed several minor yet important shifts that affect who the group is targeting. Early November was characterized by similar types of attacks that Houthi forces launched in October, with the group claiming responsibility for missile and drone barrages targeting the Israeli port town of Eilat on November 1, 6, 9, and 14, and even downing an American MQ-9 drone in the Red Sea region on November 9. However, as the month progressed, attacks increasingly focused on interrupting international shipping in the Red Sea. On November 14, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea announced that the group would “not hesitate” to target any Israeli ships. Five days later, on November 19, Sarea updated this strategy – expanding the threat to any ships in the Red Sea flying the Israeli flag or operated or owned by Israeli companies. He also called on Red Sea countries to assist in identifying Israeli-affiliated ships, which often sail without flags. Within hours, Houthi forces hijacked the *Galaxy Leader*, a Japanese-operated cargo ship with links to Israeli billionaire Abraham Ungar. Houthi forces had reportedly attempted to intercept ships on three previous occasions in the two days prior, according to Houthi Naval and Coast Guard sources.

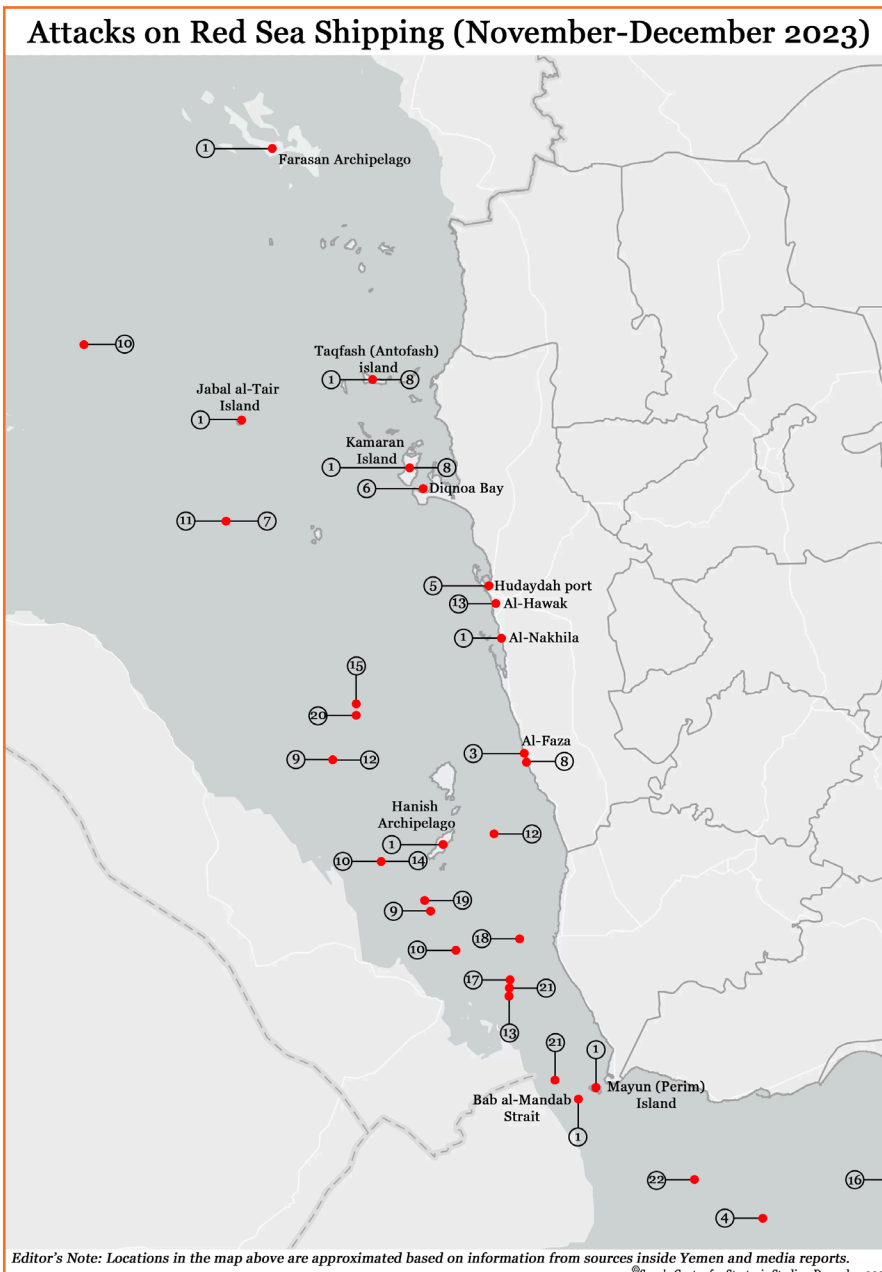
The hijacking was heavily publicized, with Houthi naval forces descending from a helicopter and surrounding the ship in a highly coordinated formation, and filming the assault for later broadcast. A number of countries and the UN Security Council condemned the attack, but no action has been yet taken to rescue the 25 crew members aboard. For their part, the Houthis have relocated the ship several times, moving it from an area near the port of Hudaydah to a location near the *FSO Safer's* replacement ship – *The Yemen* – before relocating it to a protected inlet known as Diqnoa Bay, according to Houthi Coast Guard forces. In mockery of the international condemnation, Houthi influencers released viral videos of the group's followers turning the ship into a spoil of war, calling the hostages "honored guests" and providing them with qat, and even offering trips to the ship's deck for holidaying tourists.

Following the hijacking, Houthi strategy seemed to focus once again on missile and drone attacks, with US warships shooting down drones launched from Houth-held territories on November 23 and 29. Suspected Houthi missiles also targeted the USS Mason destroyer after it captured five pirates – reportedly Somalis – who attempted to hijack the Central Park commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden. Another attack followed on December 3, when suspected Houthi missiles struck three commercial ships in international waters in the southern Red Sea, with the group later claiming that at least two of the vessels were linked to Israel.

On December 9, Sarea yet again publicized the widened scope of the Houthis' Red Sea strategy by announcing that the group would begin targeting all ships sailing to Israel, regardless of ownership. Between December 10-14, Houthi attacks reportedly targeted a French frigate, and cargo ships carrying flags from Norway, the Marshall Islands, and Hong Kong. The December 11 attack was the only one to hit its target, the Norwegian-flagged *STRINDA* tanker, setting fire to its hull. A US destroyer responded to the distress signal and assisted the ship, and no crew members were injured. In response to the attacks, some shipping companies denied Houthi claims they were sailing to Israel.

Tactically speaking, Houthi forces have begun to improvise naval maneuvers and incorporate geospatial technology and open-source intelligence in seeking out which vessels to target. Since at least November 12, Houthi forces have been training recruits for amphibious assault teams, with exercises including mock missile launches targeting decoy naval ships and simulated ship raids. Houthi naval brass have also met at least twice this month at the joint operations room in the port of Hudaydah to update patrol strategies. On November 27, commanders agreed that patrols would consist of three groups, with each group containing two speedboats, a communications boat, and a drone. The communications boats are equipped with an AIS international calling device, allowing the patrollers to call and address ships, while the drones reportedly collect coordinates and photos of ships and transmit them to land-based operation centers. Another meeting on December 4 stipulated that two boats would be added to naval patrol formations, which are responsible for placing sea mines should targeted ships refuse to cooperate or if the patrols are confronted by hostile warships. Houthi military leaders also confirmed that intelligence teams have been tasked with tracking ship coordinates and transmitting them to on-land "missile battalions" – an operation likely made easier by the dozens of booster devices that Houthi forces have installed on 4G towers in coastal Hudaydah, according to sources in the Houthi-affiliated Hudaydah Transportation Branch and the Houthi-run Naval Command and Control Room. The booster devices reportedly extend the range of maritime ship-tracking capabilities by approximately 20 nautical miles. A suspected Iranian intelligence vessel was also reportedly anchored in the southern and northern Red Sea on December 3 and 5, respectively.

What remains to be seen is how international powers will react. For nearly two months, Houthi aggression in the Red Sea has continued unabated: with the exception of US sanctions on certain Houthi individuals and an increased presence of **British, American, and Israeli** naval vessels, little offensive action has been taken to deter the group. However, an increasing number of shipping giants **announcing** their refusal to sail through the waterway may mean retaliatory action is imminent. The US announced a **maritime coalition** to confront the attacks on December 19 but seemingly faced challenges in rounding up participants, with the internationally recognized Yemeni **government** and most Arab partners refusing to officially join, though there may be behind-the-scenes cooperation. The limits of participation and coordination among the countries involved are not yet clear either. Such concerns may stem from Palestinian solidarity or strong warnings from Iran that such an entity in the Red Sea would create “**extraordinary problems.**” Omani negotiators reportedly **engaged** Houthi officials on December 16, but the group remains steadfast in its **policy** that military action will continue in the Red Sea until a ceasefire is reached in Gaza.



Timeline of Events

- 1 Early November to Present: Houthi forces launch regular patrols in the Red Sea from naval bases northwest of Hudaydah port, the Kamaran and Taqfash (Antofash) islands, and the Al-Nakhila coast. Patrols often roam international waters, extending south towards the Hanish Archipelago, Mayun (Perim) Island, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and north toward Jabal al-Tair Island and the Farasan Archipelago off the coast of Saudi Arabia.
- 2 November 23: The USS Thomas Hudner shoots down multiple “one-way attack drones” launched from Houthi-held territory in Yemen.
- 3 November 23-24: Three large ships arrive at Al-Faza port in southern Al-Tuhayta, each carrying approximately 30 tons of weapons and ammunition. Large areas around the Al-Faza coast are cordoned off and movement is prevented around Al-Majalis and Al-Tur villages.
- 4 November 26: US naval forces aboard the USS Mason capture five pirates – possibly Somali – after they attempted to hijack the Central Park commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden. Two suspected Houthi missiles target the USS Mason and the Central Park shortly after the attempted hijacking; the USS Mason shoots down a Houthi drone in the southern Red Sea.
- 5 November 27 and December 4: Houthi military commanders meet at the joint operations room in Hudaydah port to discuss ongoing naval operations.
- 6 November 29: Houthi forces relocate the hijacked Galaxy Leader ship to Dignoa Bay, about three nautical miles from the northern coast of Ras Issa Island. A naval launch garrison is located near the bay, and Houthi forces deploy missile batteries in the Dabra and Al-Qarya areas on Ras Issa Island to defend the area.
- 7 November 29: The USS Carney shoots down an Iranian-manufactured drone while escorting US-flagged ships in the southern Red Sea.
- 8 December 1-11: Houthi forces install booster devices on 4G towers in coastal areas under their control to extend the range of their maritime ship-tracking capabilities.
- 9 December 3: Houthi missiles strike three commercial ships in the southern Red Sea; the Houthis allege that two of the vessels were linked to Israel. The USS Carney destroyer shoots down three Houthi drones during the attack.
- 10 December 3-5: A suspected Iranian intelligence vessel anchors northwest of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and then seven miles west of the international shipping lane to the west of Jabal al-Tair Island. Local fishermen report that the vessel has a communications tower, which could be used to relay information about passing ships.
- 11 December 6: The USS Mason shoots down a Houthi drone in the southern Red Sea.
- 12 December 10: The French frigate Languedoc shoots down two Houthi drones using guided missiles near the Hanish Archipelago after it is targeted in two separate attacks.
- 13 December 11: A Houthi missile, reportedly fired from an air base to the west of Hudaydah airport in Hudaydah city's Al-Hawak district, strikes the Norwegian-flagged tanker STRINDA roughly 60 nautical miles north of the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The USS Mason responds to the STRINDA's distress call and helps put out a fire.
- 14 December 13: Houthi gunmen in speedboats and missiles target and miss the Marshall-Islands flagged Ardmore Encounter, which is carrying jet fuel, near the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The USS Mason shoots down a Houthi drone during the attack.
- 15 December 14: Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea claims the group struck the Hong Kong-flagged Maersk Gibraltar container ship with a drone. Maersk denies the claims, saying the ship was not hit.
- 16 December 14: Six suspected Somali pirates hijack the Maltese-flagged Ruen bulk carrier as it passes roughly 500 nautical miles east of Socotra. A Spanish frigate and Indian Navy ships follow the hijacked ship, which heads toward the Somali coast.
- 17 December 15: A boat of Houthi gunmen approach the Liberian-flagged MSC Alanya and demand it change course to Hudaydah port or risk targeting. The ship refuses to divert course and is allowed to proceed.
- 18 December 15: A Houthi drone strikes the Liberian-flagged Al Jasra, setting fire to its hull.
- 19 December 15: Two Houthi ballistic missiles target the Liberian-flagged MSC Palatium III, with one of the missiles hitting the ship, which starts a fire and knocks a container into the sea.
- 20 December 16: The USS Carney shoots down 14 one-way attack drones launched from Houthi territories, and the HMS Diamond shoots down another drone.
- 21 December 18: A suspected Houthi drone and ballistic missile strike the Cayman Islands-flagged Swan Atlantic chemical transport ship north of Al-Makha port, setting fire to the vessel. The USS Carney responded to the distress calls, reporting no injuries. An explosive object falls into the water near the Panama-flagged Clara cargo ship to the west of Bab al-Mandab.
- 22 December 18: Five small boats carrying unidentified gunmen attempt to intercept a cargo ship 50 nautical miles east of the Djiboutian coastal town of Obock. The ship requests assistance from a nearby Japanese naval vessel that manages to disperse the boats, allowing the ship to continue on course.

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Houthis Strike Marib, Attempt to Assassinate Govt Army Chief of Staff

Amidst the noise of the naval offensive targeting Israeli assets and Red Sea shipping and ongoing peace talks with the Saudi negotiators, Houthi forces on November 7 discretely launched one of the largest attacks on pro-government forces in Marib in several months. Clashes centered around the Al-Kasara front northwest of Marib city and killed at least eight pro-government soldiers and an unconfirmed number of Houthi soldiers. Houthi forces also reportedly **deployed** from Nihm district in northeastern Sana'a governorate to fronts around Marib city, and carried out military maneuvers near the Mas front in Medghal district. Pro-government forces reportedly had information about the Houthi offensive prior to its launch, according to a pro-government army source and tribesmen fighting alongside the army.

To the east in Wadi Abidah district, pro-government army Chief of Staff Shaghir bin Aziz **survived** an assassination attempt that pro-government officials blamed on the Houthis. Bin Aziz was reportedly **returning from** a meeting with Marib Governor and Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) member Sultan al-Aradah when a car bomb targeted his convoy near the Bin Qamad petrol station on the Safer road linking Marib city and Hadramawt's Al-Abr district. According to a local medical source, the blast injured at least two passengers in the convoy and four members of a family working on a nearby farm, but Bin Aziz walked away unscathed.

The days following the attack were relatively calm, with few major developments reported in Marib for nearly two weeks. By the end of November however, Houthis appeared again to be fortifying areas around Marib city and staging minor raids. On November 19-20, reinforcements were deployed in the Eastern Al-Balaq Mountain range and sites in the La'rif area to the west of Marib city. Houthi forces attempted to infiltrate government army camps in the area but were unsuccessful, according to pro-government military sources. On November 22, Houthi forces attacked pro-government forces in Serwah district's Al-Zour area. The following day, nearly 200 Houthi soldiers were deployed to the Ablah front in Marib's southern Al-Abdiyah district, according to local residents.

While Houthi delegates may be negotiating peace with Riyadh, the group still clearly has designs on the oil-rich governorate.

Houthis Target Joint Forces in Hudaydah

Coastal regions of Hudaydah southern were subject to intensified clashes this month as Joint Forces clashed with Houthi forces in southern Al-Tuhayta district, a region that sees regular exchanges of mortar fire but seldom reports high casualties. Typical frontline fighting between Houthi forces in the Al-Hajroufah area and Joint Forces soldiers stationed in the nearby coastal area of Al-Haymah occurred over a dozen times during the reporting period. Throughout the month, the longest gap in fighting took place during a mere four-day lull in hostilities between November 18 and 22. During the reporting period, both sides also engaged in back-and-forth shelling in the Al-Ghuwayriq area, to the north of Al-Haymah.

On November 10, Houthi forces advanced on Joint Forces positions in the Al-Haymah in a significant escalation, bypassing the frontlines of the 1st Zaranq Brigade and raiding a barracks of the UAE-backed 9th Giants Brigade. During the raid, Houthi soldiers seized two military vehicles before withdrawing. The clashes left one Houthi fighter dead and three wounded, while one Joint Forces soldier was killed and nine others were wounded. Tensions spiked again exactly one month later on December 10 when a Houthi drone strike targeted a barracks of the 1st Zaranq Brigade, killing two soldiers and wounding four others. According to a source in the government-aligned Al-Tuhayta Axis Command, PLC member Tareq Saleh visited the area and reportedly left less than one hour before the strikes. Looking forward, minor escalations like these are likely to remain commonplace.

Other Developments in Brief

On November 4: Houthi forces fired a ballistic missile that landed between the Al-Rawda and Al-Suwayda areas northwest of Marib city near a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), according to an IDP and an aid worker at the camp. No damage was reported but the explosion terrified residents.

On November 6: A man from Al-Bayda's Al-Zahir district, Ezzedin Saleh Mohammed al-Habji, allegedly **died** from torture in the Houthi-run Central Security Prison in Sana'a. Al-Habji was abducted by Houthi forces in August 2022 in Al-Bayda and spent time in prisons in Al-Bayda and Dhamar before being transferred to the Sana'a Central Security Prison, which is supervised by Abu Shihab al-Murtada. On November 14, another young man, Mohammed Ahmed Wabhan, was **declared dead** with reported signs of torture, after three years in a Houthi prison in Sana'a.

On November 13: STC chief and PLC member Al-Zubaidi held a **meeting** of southern military leaders with the commander of the Nation's Shield forces, Bashir al-Subaihi, in attendance for the first time. The meeting focused on recent political and security developments. The Nation's Shield forces were formed earlier this year by Saudi Arabia and placed under the command of PLC chief Rashad al-Alimi.

On November 20: The Yemeni Teachers Club **organized** a protest in front of the Attorney General's Office in Sana'a city to demand the release of the head of the club, Abu Zaid al-Kumaim, and several companions who have been detained and held without legal justification in Houthi prisons. The protesters also demanded the payment of their salaries. Houthi intelligence forces arrested Al-Kumaim on October 8 for organizing protests demanding the payment of teachers' salaries. Later, on November 29, members of the Houthi Security and Intelligence Services **arrested** Abdelkhaleq al-Hamati, the son of the vice president of the Yemeni Teachers Club, Professor Hayat Monassar, to force his mother to stop organizing protests demanding teachers' salaries. Monassar has been leading the Teachers Club since Al-Kumaim was arrested in early October.

December 9: Al-Qaeda claimed to have **conducted** a prisoner swap with "UAE mercenaries" in Shabwa; members of the Shabwa local authority **reportedly** traded two militants for the son of a government official and the son of a military commander who had been kidnapped several months ago. On December 13, Shabwa governor Awad bin al-Wazir al-Awlaqi **suspended** the governorate's Political Security and National Security directors over their roles in the exchange deal.



Food baskets prepared by the Houthi-run Zakat Authority in the capital Sana'a on November 22, 2023 // Sana'a Center photo

The Economy & Finance

Houthi Red Sea Attacks Increase Shipping Costs

Houthi Red Sea Attacks Increase Shipping Costs

The seizure of an Israeli-linked ship by Houthi forces in the Red Sea and repeated attacks on commercial shipping threaten to pile additional pressure on Yemen's economy by raising the costs of imports. Shipping to Yemen already incurs increased transport and logistics costs due to its designation as a "high risk" area. According to a 2021 UNDP [assessment](#), war premiums, covering the potential loss or damage to vessels, resulted in insurance costs for shipping to the port of Aden port to be 15 times the regular rate. These additional insurance costs, totaling more than US\$20 million per year, are ultimately borne by Yemeni consumers. While the full economic ramifications on shipping to Yemen following the Houthi seizure of the *Galaxy Leader* vessel and other attacks are not yet clear, analysts say the incident will lead to an increase in war premiums. The high risk area has now [been widened](#) to reflect the growing scope of the attacks and Houthi capabilities. Insurance costs had [doubled](#) by mid-December, and are likely to rise further. One local businessman [claimed](#) his freight rates had already gone up by 50 percent. The ramifications are intensified by Yemen's reliance on imported food – more than 80 percent is shipped in from abroad, mostly through the ports of Hudaydah. While the campaign has had a deleterious effect, Israel imports far more via the Mediterranean.

Purported Government-UAE Oil Sale Under Scrutiny

The revelation of a government plan to sell oil to an Emirati company at a significant discount has sparked outrage, with critics slamming the potential deal as a waste of the country's natural resources, while the government has defended the move as necessary to generate much-needed revenue. A leaked **document** from the Prime Minister's office from June revealed that the Ministry of Oil and Minerals negotiated a deal with Emirati company EMO to purchase 3.5 million barrels of crude oil from existing reserves in Hadramawt and Shabwa at a 35 percent discount, and another 14.5 million barrels of future oil production at a 30 percent discount. In exchange, **EMO** would provide petroleum derivatives to operate power stations in areas under government control.

The leaked document outlined the rationale for the deal, saying the government was in a critical economic situation, which limited its ability to carry out its basic mandate, provide minimum levels of public services, or regularly pay public sector salaries. Oil exports, the government's primary source of revenue, have been halted since Houthi drone and missile attacks on oil export terminals in October and November 2022. News of the potential deal sparked widespread criticism, with critics focusing on the secret nature of the agreement and the discounted prices. Media outlets **said** that the deal to sell 18 million barrels of crude oil would garner US\$1.1 billion, while at the global price the value of the oil exceeds US\$1.6 billion.

The deal also reportedly bypassed the usual approval processes, avoiding scrutiny from governmental or legislative bodies. Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalek Saeed has been called on to clarify how the sale was negotiated outside existing mechanisms for transparency and accountability. The deputy speaker of the government's House of Representatives has **demande**d a copy of the Supreme Committee for Oil Marketing's decision regarding the Emirati offer and the agreement signed with the exporting company. Further fueling the controversy, the sale of future oil production has never been carried out in Yemen before, and critics say the move could jeopardize the country's future economic sovereignty.

UAE Sends Emergency Fuel Shipment to Aden

An emergency fuel shipment from the UAE arrived in Aden on November 7 to power electricity stations in the interim capital, which has been experiencing regular blackouts for several months due to a lack of fuel. Emirati Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed Hamad al-Zaabi announced the fuel delivery following a meeting with PLC chief Rashad al-Alimi in Aden. The government-owned General Electricity Corporation (GEC) has issued several statements since late October warning that power stations in the city might be forced to completely shut down if no new fuel became available. According to the GEC, fuel supplies fell to as low as **4,000 metric tons** on October 28, an amount sufficient to sustain operations for only four days in Aden, Abyan, Lahj, and Al-Dhalea governorates. During the electricity crisis in Aden, which has continued since the summer, the GEC has repeatedly called on the government to intervene and expedite the provision of fuel to power stations. A separate **statement**, issued on November 2, appealed to security forces protesting in Zinjibar district in Abyan to allow the passage of tanker trucks bringing crude oil from Shabwa to supply the Petromasila power station in Aden.

The Emirati delivery is the latest effort by Abu Dhabi to support the electricity sector in government-controlled areas. In late 2022, the Ministry of Electricity and Energy and Masdar, a renewable energy company also known as Abu Dhabi Future Energy, **signed** an agreement to build a solar power station in Aden. Intended to generate 120 megawatts per hour, the project would also include the construction of transmission lines and conversion stations to transmit and distribute electricity to Aden's various neighborhoods. At the time, Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed **said** that the project should be completed by June 2023. Media outlets have recently indicated that construction of the power station is in its final stages, without clarifying when it will become operational. When complete, the project should help alleviate some of the government's dependence on imported fuel to operate power stations in Aden.

Aden and other governorates under government control began experiencing extended blackouts following the expiration of a Saudi fuel grant in April. In November 2022, the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY) began supplying the government with over 1.2 million metric tons of diesel and mazut, valued at US\$422 million, for electricity generation at more than 80 power stations. A new US\$1.2 billion Saudi grant was announced in early August 2023 to address the government's budget shortfalls, including the purchase of fuel to operate power stations, which is estimated to cost US\$75-100 million per month. The GEC confirmed the arrival of 13,000 metric tons of fuel at the port of Aden on August 22, but no further Saudi shipments have been announced. Regular protests in Aden and other governorates have criticized the government for failing to develop solutions to address the chronic electricity crisis.

Judiciary to Investigate Corruption in Aden's Electricity Sector

On November 5, Attorney General Judge Fawzi Ali Saif **referred** a complaint submitted against the government over corruption in the electricity sector in Aden to the Central Organization for Control and Accounting. The complaint was filed by the Preparatory Committee for the National Movement for Correction and Construction, a recently established STC-affiliated civic organization, and urged the Attorney General to initiate an impartial and transparent inquiry into issues within Aden's electricity sector. Despite the government allocating approximately US\$3 million per day to purchase fuel supplies to operate power plants across the south, blackouts remain persistent, provoking regular demonstrations by angry residents.

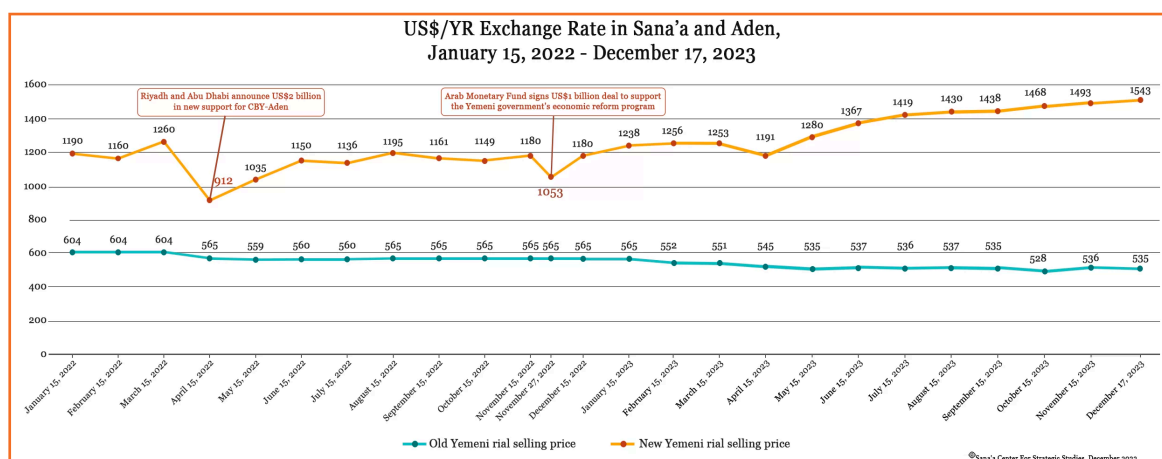
New Rials Continue to Lose Value

New rials in government-controlled areas continued to fall in value over the course of November and early December. They depreciated by over 1 percent, from YR1,521 in late October to YR1,542 per US\$1 as of November 12. They regained value toward the end of the following week, reaching YR1,505 per US\$1 as of November 19, before entering a new wave of devaluation, closing the month at YR1,533 per US\$1. The fluctuation follows a period of steep depreciation in October, where the currency lost more than 5 percent of its value, reaching lows not witnessed since late 2021. The trend has continued in December, with new rials trading at YR1,543 per US\$1 as of December 17. The currency, which was trading at Y\$1,544 per US\$1 on December 10, tumbled briefly to YR1,553 per US\$1 during the middle of the week before recovering days later.

The devaluation of new rials was sparked after the government-run Central Bank of Yemen (CBY-Aden) depleted its foreign currency reserves toward the end of October, forcing it to suspend the weekly foreign currency auctions that helped finance the import of essential commodities

and stabilize the value of the rial. A US\$1.2 billion Saudi grant was announced in August to finance the public budget and prop up the value of the Yemeni rial, but Riyadh has only released 1 billion Saudi riyals (roughly US\$267 million) as the first tranche. Since the delivery of the first installment of the Saudi grant, the CBY-Aden has held 14 FX auctions, selling US\$321 million from its limited foreign currency reserves to Yemeni banks to help finance the import of basic commodities and lessen downward pressure on the Yemeni rial. This has now been exhausted, and the delay in the delivery of new funds to replenish the CBY-Aden’s foreign exchange reserves is expected to drive up further depreciation in the new rials and trigger food price inflation.

Old rials in Houthi-controlled areas have remained stable, trading at YR535 per US\$1 on average over the reporting period.



WFP and Houthis Reach Agreement to Restart Food Aid

In mid-December, a UN employee based in Sana’a and a Western diplomat told the Sana’a Center that the World Food Programme (WFP) had reached an agreement with Houthi authorities to restart General Food Distribution in areas under the group’s control. The deal, which has not been announced publicly, was reportedly agreed with the Houthi-run Supreme Council for the Administration and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA) and will see aid directed to the most vulnerable families. The WFP will be given responsibility for identifying beneficiaries, and Houthi authorities have pledged to refrain from intervening in the allocation of food aid.

Even with an immediate agreement, the WFP noted that it could take up to four months to resume food assistance due to supply chain disruptions and given that food stocks in Houthi-controlled areas have been almost completely depleted. WFP food aid to government-controlled areas continues to the most vulnerable families, in line with adjustments made in August 2022.

On December 5, the WFP had **announced** the suspension of General Food Distributions in Houthi-controlled areas. The organization said the move was driven by limited funding and the absence of an agreement with Houthi authorities on a smaller program that would target the neediest families. The “difficult decision,” made in consultation with donors, came after nearly a year of unsuccessful negotiations with Houthi authorities to reduce the number of beneficiaries from 9.5 million to 6.5 million. Despite the very real negative ramifications of a cut of food aid

in Houthi-held areas, intransigence on the part of Houthi authorities did not come as a surprise. Previous arrangements granted the Houthis near **complete control** over aid entering areas under their control. The group was able to divert food aid to loyalists to curry political favor, **recruit** troops to the frontlines, or sell it on the black market at exorbitant prices.

Dozens of NGOs **criticized** the decision, saying it would impact up to 9.5 million people across northern Yemen, and the nuance of the negotiations was mostly lost on social media. After the WFP's announcement, pro-Houthi news outlets, politicians, and activists sought to frame the move as an act of US imperialism aimed at **punishing** the Houthis, and Yemenis as a whole, for standing against the Israeli military campaign in Gaza.

SCMCHA also **sought** to frame WFP's decision as a collective punishment of Yemenis in response to their solidarity with the Palestinian people amid the ongoing Israeli military assault on Gaza. On December 11, the Houthi-affiliated Secretary-General of SCMCHA, Ibrahim al-Hamli, **met with** the director of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Markus Werne, to discuss the recent termination of World Food Programme (WFP) aid in Houthi-controlled territories. In the meeting, Al-Hamli accused the UN of politicizing aid – which he said constituted a crime against humanity – while Werne responded that he was working with WFP officials to continue aid despite financial challenges.

While Government's Fiscal Crisis Deepens, Uncertainty Surrounds Public Revenues in Hadramawt

The internationally recognized government continues to contend with a stifling fiscal crisis, amid the cessation of oil exports following Houthi drone attacks on southern oil ports in late 2022 and a delay in the receipt of pledged Saudi financial support. Government customs revenues have also decreased markedly this year as commercial shipping has been increasingly diverted to the Houthi-controlled ports of Hudaydah following the lifting of coalition restrictions. Planned maintenance at the Marib refinery at Safer, which began on November 28 and is scheduled to take place over 25 days, has deprived the government of yet another source of revenue. Approximately 7,000-8,000 barrels of crude were refined daily at the plant and sold on the local market, with a portion of proceeds going to government coffers.

The PLC has yet to officially respond to Hadramawt Governor Mabkhout bin Madi's **decision** in late November to cease depositing Hadrami-generated public revenues to government-run Central Bank of Yemen (CBY-Aden) accounts. According to Bin Madi, the move came as a response to the failure of the government and Ministry of Finance to provide the local authority in Hadramawt with the funds allocated in the public budget to meet pressing service provision needs and other essential spending priorities. The local authority also accused the government of manipulating Hadramawt's share of oil sales revenues; an agreement was reached in 2019 for the governorate to receive 20 percent of revenues generated from hydrocarbon production in Hadramawt. Similar arrangements were also reached with Marib and Shabwa.

Bin Madi held a meeting with leaders from the Nahad tribe in Mukalla on December 5, during which Saleh bin Ali bin Thabit, the tribe's leader, expressed support for the decision to **withhold oil revenues** from the central government. However, the leader of the Second Hadrami Uprising, Hassan al-Jabri, chaired an emergency meeting of the group on December 8 and announced

that it would **escalate** efforts to oppose Bin Madi's move and called on Saudi-led coalition forces to support them "against conspiracies" in the governorate. Defense Minister Mohsen al-Daeri expressed sympathy with the governor's position, which aligns with the PLC policy of empowering local government, but said it had come as a surprise. "It's up to the central government to deal with the issue," **he said** during a December 8 meeting with the governor. International stakeholders have also weighed in. European Union ambassadors stressed the importance of depositing all public revenues regularly into CBY-Aden during a meeting with CBY-Aden Governor Ahmed Ghaleb **on November 28**, while British Ambassador Abda Sharif **discussed** the issue with Bin Madi during a meeting on December 6.

From a practical standpoint, the move only puts limited pressure on the Yemeni government – despite its dire financial situation – given that oil exports from Hadramawt, previously a major source of revenue, have been halted since November 2022 following Houthi attacks on oil export terminals. The government, which is currently struggling to cover the public sector salary bill and other essential spending needs, could be thrown an economic lifeline soon.

While a US\$1.2 billion Saudi grant was announced in August to finance the government budget, Riyadh has only released 1 billion Saudi riyals (roughly US\$267 million) as the first tranche. A senior government official told the Sana'a Center that Saudi Arabia may be planning to hold off on the release of the second tranche until the resumption of salary payments to public sector employees in Houthi-controlled areas, which is still a subject of negotiations between Riyadh and the Houthis, though these appear to have stalled. The government is unlikely to be able to pay the public sector wage bill in government-held areas after December, absent new financial support. Government sources have said that Saudi Arabia is expected to release the second tranche of its grant in January to rescue the government from imminent fiscal collapse and replenish its depleted coffers.

US Treasury Sanctions Houthi Financing Network

On December 7, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) **sanctioned** 13 individuals and entities accused of providing the Houthi group with tens of millions of dollars worth of foreign currency generated from the sale and shipment of Iranian commodities by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF). The sanctions targeted exchange houses and companies in multiple jurisdictions, including Yemen, Lebanon, and Turkey, as part of a network operated by Sa'id al-Jamal, a "Houthi and IRGC-QF financial facilitator" who was previously sanctioned in June 2021. The network allegedly served as a major conduit for Iran to send money to Yemen.

The Sana'a Center Editorial

Red Sea Conflict Gambles with Yemen's Future

With a series of drone and missile attacks targeting Israel and international shipping in the Red Sea, the Houthis seem to have succeeded in their long-held ambition to exercise regional power. The scale and impact of Houthi operations seems to have **surprised some observers**, who still tend to dismiss the group despite its survival through almost a decade of war against a US-backed Saudi and UAE military campaign.

It's hard to deny that Houthi operations are gaining them plaudits across the Arab and Muslim world. While it's not surprising that the authorities in Sana'a can mobilize thousands of people for **weekly demonstrations** in solidarity with Gaza, even domestic adversaries are praising the group. As one senior pro-government military commander recently said in private, "We should bury differences for the sake of Palestine." For the Houthis, this is a golden opportunity to capitalize on widespread support for the Palestinian cause to raise their flagging popularity inside territories under their control, while pressing their case to the outside world that they are the only effective authority in Yemen.

Israeli media now describes Yemen as a 'third front,' along with ongoing clashes with Hezbollah in the north, and the southern front in Gaza. With the army mobilized and communities along the northern border evacuated, the Israeli economy could shrink by as much as 15 percent in the fourth quarter. Part of this is due to the rerouting of cargo ships to avoid the Red Sea and increased maritime insurance costs. **All major** global shipping and logistics companies have now suspended activity in the waterway, which along with the Suez Canal accounts for at least 30 percent of all container traffic, causing delays and bottlenecks that are set to disrupt supply chains and inflate commodity prices **around the world**, just as the global economy recovers from the effects of the Ukraine war and the pandemic.

Western powers are particularly concerned about the global economic ramifications of Houthi operations in the Red Sea, and a military response could be in the offing. It would be wrong to take the US-led coalition to safeguard Red Sea shipping "Operation Prosperity Guardian" as a sign of unwillingness to confront the Houthis. Despite touting the formation of a global alliance of at least 20 countries to confront the group, Washington appeared only to bring in its closest Western allies and Bahrain, as Saudi Arabia and the UAE opted out, at least formally, though it is possible they are among at least eight countries that have **declined to be named publicly**. But the pressure within the DC Beltway to take military action is intense. The Houthis are seen as having gone too far, US prestige as the self-declared guardian of a "rules-based order" is on the line, and the Israelis are **openly threatening** to act unilaterally if no one does anything.

It's already possible to discern the outlines of a new approach to Yemen, even within the parameters of the much anticipated Saudi-Houthi deal. The United States seems to have turned a page and is now prepared to countenance closer cooperation with factions in the internationally recognized government. US Special Envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking has already

met leaders of the Southern Transitional Council to discuss maritime security in the Gulf of Aden, and Presidential Leadership Council member Tareq Saleh and his National Resistance forces have raised their profile as protectors of the Bab al-Mandab Strait from their Red Sea base of Al-Makha. In the medium to long term, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the United States could gradually increase arms supplies to anti-Houthi forces, with a view to checking the Houthis' ability to make further territorial gains, especially in coastal areas, and limiting their access to Iranian weaponry and technical expertise.

Publicly at least, the Houthis have seemed unfazed by the saber-rattling. Officials have vowed to continue the attacks until the Gaza offensive ends and have even threatened retaliation against US warships, which could have ominous implications for the deescalation of the past year and a Saudi-Houthi deal that is close to completion. "The Americans shouldn't think they can conduct attacks here or there and then send intermediaries to calm the situation down," Houthi leader [Abdelmalek al-Houthi warned](#). The pause in major hostilities since April 2022 has given ordinary Yemenis breathing space and hope for an end to their tragedy after nearly a decade of war. It would be a cruel blow if Houthi bravado over Gaza – as popular as it may be – allows movement toward peace in Yemen to dissipate. The longer maritime tensions continue, the more risk there is of deterioration in Houthi detente with Saudi Arabia and the UAE – there have already been public threats against [Abu Dhabi](#). And it shouldn't be forgotten that the hit to global trade affects Yemen too. Restricted access to Yemen will only make it more difficult for international aid agencies to operate and increase the price of basic goods. Western powers need to think long and hard about the impact of [military and economic measures, which might seem attractive as immediate responses, but](#) only hurt Yemen and the region in the long run.

Most of all, the conflict in Gaza needs to end for the sake of regional stability and to allow efforts to end the war in Yemen to move forward. The current conflict dramatically underscores the need for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue in accordance with international law and UN resolutions. Without a just and lasting peace, the region will see only further instability and violence.



A woman harvests corn in the Al-Dhabab area, west of Taiz city, on October 16, 2021 // Sana'a Center photo by Ahmed al-Basha

Commentary

War Passing Over Women's Bodies

Thuraya Dammaj

War innately ruins all that is civil within society, crashing economies, dismantling political systems, and invalidating human rights. In Yemen's conflict, women are seeing their rights stripped away faster than any other group.

For decades, feminist movements in Yemen achieved significant progress. The Women's League was one of the first civil society groups organized after South Yemen became an independent state in 1967, and it subsequently had a major impact on the young nation's policy design. Women helped **draft legal circulars** that increased the minimum age of marriage, required women's consent for marriage, protected women from domestic violence, gave women the right to apply for divorce, and automatically granted divorced women custody of their children. By 1990, South Yemen had elected **11 female members of parliament**. Education and employment opportunities for women were on the rise generally across Yemen. Yemeni women overall made great achievements during periods of relative stability from the 1960s until the Houthi takeover of Sana'a in 2014. But the ongoing conflict has dismantled much of that progress and revealed the fragility of previous achievements.

War affects all segments of society, depending on their position in the social and economic hierarchy, directly and indirectly. Women from lower social or economic classes experience an intersection of biases, compounding the hardship of war. Although women make up less than 50 percent of the population in Yemen, **80 percent** of internally displaced people (IDPs) are women and children. For several years, Yemen has been described as one of the worst places in the world to be a woman, steadily holding the **bottom ranking** in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

Apathy in the face of the backsliding of women's civil rights is almost worse than the inequality itself. In Yemen's war, the destruction of the civil sphere in favor of a militarized society has not engendered a sufficient response, on either the local or international level. Some of the most dramatic changes to public life in Yemen include the **exclusion** of women from public spaces, the quiet removal of women from the workforce, the disappearance of Yemen's independent press, and the erosion of civil society organizations. All of these changes have slipped by without causing public outrage.

Instead, public discourse in Yemen takes on a veneer of virtue in its open persecution of women. With this rhetoric, all gender-based discrimination is justified and any objections to women's slow exile from social life are silenced through fear of public shame. Women and girls are exploited by men in power and subjected to **physical, psychological, and sexual violence** as their means of subsistence, including salaries and job opportunities, are disappearing.

This **repression is evident** in areas under the control of the Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*) through official and unofficial policies that remove women from intellectual spaces and workplaces, and in the most extreme cases, completely trap women in their homes. At the same time, the internationally recognized government is clearly unable to enforce Yemen's laws and constitution, let alone raise its standards to meet international benchmarks for women's rights. There is an almost complete absence of protections for women and girls, despite the strong presence of international and local aid organizations.

The Body Politic vs Women's Bodies

Yemeni political actors, who normally disagree on all issues, manage to agree on neglecting the protection of women, reducing their rights, and expanding the forms of abuse they regularly encounter. While some call for reform and ostensibly raise the flag of gender equality, in practice they ignore the violation of women's rights. Since 2014, Yemeni women have been **murdered, tortured, disappeared, physically attacked, and arbitrarily arrested**. Women's **movement has been restricted**, they have been **excluded from public office**, and **gender segregation** has increased to levels previously unseen in the country. All groups wielding power in Yemen are complicit in neglecting their protection.

Religious discourse in all parts of Yemen is shifting, and the message coming from mosque pulpits is that women must be reined in. In this difficult time, women's bodies excite desires and thus uncontrolled women are a "serious threat" to society. In the Houthi-controlled areas in particular, religious doctrine is closely tied to government policies.

Groups of women activists, social leaders, and employees in Sana'a-based public institutions **signed a petition** in February addressed to the head of the Houthi-controlled authority, Prime Minister Abdelaziz bin Habtoor, describing a "systematic campaign against women, with the objective of excluding them from public office, restricting their activities, and isolating them in a manner that should not be tolerated."

The letter listed numerous problems that women face, including "legal circulars that are published from time to time that restrict and hinder the movement of women, either by requesting a *mahram* or imposing administrative procedures that obstruct women's ability to travel." A mahram is a male guardian that must accompany a woman who wishes to travel. It also noted that certain groups within the Sana'a-based government have "proposed abolishing the women's sectors of some ministries under the pretext of reducing government bureaucracy and job inflation," and that "Friday sermons that are focused on inciting congregations against Yemeni women, intimidating their families and warning them not to study at universities or go

to work out of fear for their modesty.” These activists warned that “segregation between male and female employees in some institutions and ministries, under the pretext of preventing gender mixing and a soft war, gives many the opportunity to dismiss women from their jobs.” Most of those who signed the letter live and work in Houthi-controlled areas, and some had close ties to the group. Women with connections to the group were subsequently pressured to condemn the petition and reverse their positions. Some **courageously refused** to retract their support and even went further, asking for their demands to be conveyed to the group’s highest political authority, the Supreme Political Council. The points mentioned in the petition were old complaints, but the fact that it was publicly signed by prominent women affiliated with the Houthis represents an irreversible step forward.

A few months after the petition was submitted, Abdelmalek al-Houthi, leader of the Houthi movement, **broadcast a speech** in July focused on women. He reiterated the group’s vision for women’s roles in society, saying it is “limited to tenderness, affection, and emotion, and if they have a contribution, it must be commensurate with their characteristics and circumstances,” defined by Al-Houthi as “affectionate” housewives.

Further violations against women followed his speech. On July 31, Sana’a University administrators dismissed **Dr. Samia al-Aghbari** from her position as the head of the Journalism Department, replacing her with a male colleague, Dr. Ali al-Buraihi, in response to her vocal rejection of a new policy that mandated the separation of male and female students. In late August, the Dean of the Sharia and Law department **accused** a female student of being homosexual, permanently expelling her from the university. On September 6, the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Sana’a University **removed** two female professors Dr. Khadija al-Haysami and Dr. Ashwaq Mughalis, and a male colleague, Dr. Ali al-Hawar, from the lecture schedule without explanation. They were replaced with unaccredited lecturers, including one without any university degree, handpicked by Houthi administrators.

The struggles women face in the areas under government control sadly don’t differ greatly from they face under Houthi rule. In government-run areas of Taiz, religious leaders, academics, politicians, and hardline activists led a massive campaign against Taiz University last June in response to its decision to include the topic of women’s development from a gender perspective among its Master’s programs. The campaign was **led by Abdullah al-Odaini**, a hardline cleric and member of parliament for the Islah party. Al-Odaini called for the Center for Women’s Development Research and Studies at the university to be closed for its adoption of progressive gender issues, which he claimed **encouraged** “the legalization of sodomy, adultery, homosexuality, moral decay, and rebellion against the family.” Al-Odaini added that the Council’s vote in favor of gender inclusion was, “a great crime, perhaps the most heinous crime Yemen has witnessed throughout its history.” Prominent Houthi official Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, did not hesitate to cross party lines and express solidarity with a cleric affiliated with their wartime enemy, saying he **supported** Al-Odaini’s confrontation against the “soft war and conspiracy to target Muslim societies.”

Although the imposition of **mahram** requirements in Houthi-controlled areas has gained international attention, similar restrictions and violations have occurred in government-controlled areas without triggering the same level of alarm. Journalist and activist Wedad al-Badawi **recounted** being stopped at a government-run security checkpoint in Marib in November 2022 when she was returning to Sana’a for not having a **mahram**, despite obtaining travel approval from Sana’a-based authorities. A member of Musaala, a Yemeni human rights organization, also reported the unwarranted detention of a female employee at a checkpoint run by pro-government forces in Marib, where her phone was taken and she was aggressively searched and verbally assaulted. Women face increased risks of **violence and unwarranted**

detention at checkpoints, and without functioning legal protections for women, authorities can act with complete impunity. In September 2021, security services in Marib raided the home of journalist and human rights activist Amat Allah Al Hammadi and arrested her without a warrant. Meanwhile, Security authorities in Aden have required women staying in hotels to have a mahram or a signed letter from their employer, though this is an informal practice and not a government policy. Several government officials noted attempts to address the restriction, citing a presidential directive issued in August to the Director General of Aden Police to formally remind hotels that they must allow women to reserve rooms unconditionally and that they are only legally required to present identification papers.

Civil Society Organizations: A Vanishing Resource

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Yemen have historically prioritized women's rights and have a long track record of speaking truth to power. Early in the war, CSOs banded together to release a statement warning that women and girls are “paying the heaviest price” for the war in Yemen, and underscoring the ways women could help in peacebuilding initiatives, particularly as mediators. CSOs continue to monitor violations against women, advocate for women's access to the judicial system, and amplify their voices in media and society, at both the individual and collective levels.

However, as the war has dragged on, CSOs have been increasingly targeted. Many activists and employees have been forced to flee Yemen, while others who remained have stopped their activism, changed their fields, or shifted to other organizations. The work of CSOs has been further weakened by donors cutting financial support and directing funding toward relief activities at the expense of programs focused on human rights.

In response to these threatening conditions and ongoing violations against women, many activists have abandoned independent work and organizations in favor of establishing coalitions, networks, hubs, and group initiatives for women to work together on peacebuilding. These coalitions serve as a form of collective protection and are a step in the right direction, but ultimately greater protections are needed.

Power in Numbers: Reclaiming Rights

CSOs serve as the primary countermeasure to the oppression of women, and other stakeholders active in Yemen must follow their lead by normalizing the inclusion of women. Organizations like the United Nations must bring women to the negotiation table and hire more women, especially in rural areas. International organizations need to resume financial support of civil society organizations, particularly those dedicated to advocating for women's rights, and protect them by bringing attention and condemnation – from the top down – when they are targeted.

If governments from both sides of the conflict are coming together to keep women down, civil society within Yemen and concerned organizations all over the world should unite to lift them up. This requires international censure and the organization of constructive dialogues to promote consensus among all parties. Yemeni women must be included throughout this process as they tirelessly push to claim their due legal protections and rightful place in society.

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Yemeni Coast Guard personnel affiliated with Tareq Salehis National Resistance forces patrol near the Bab al-Mandab Strait on December 6, 2023 // Sanaa Center photo

Commentary

From Mountain Fighters to Red Sea Disruptors: What the Houthi Attacks Mean for Yemen, the Region, and Global Stability

Eleonora Ardemagni

Increased Houthi attacks against maritime and coastal targets have generated an escalating series of national, regional, and international problems. Indeed, the maritime warfare that the Houthis have undertaken since 2016, with attacks rising in frequency and complexity since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October, has four interconnected implications. First, it deprives the internationally recognized government of oil revenues. Secondly, it undermines the rebuilding of the Yemeni Coast Guard. Third, it keeps neighboring Saudi Arabia on constant alert and poses a security threat to its oil infrastructure and Vision 2030 giga-projects. Fourth, it jeopardizes freedom of navigation in the southern Red Sea, which is rapidly changing the way the international community perceives the threat from Houthi-controlled territories as attacks increase in solidarity with Gaza. The group now **threatens** to prevent the passage of all ships heading to Israel.

The Trajectory of Houthi Military Capacity

The Houthis have gradually developed their maritime asymmetric warfare capabilities (anti-ship missiles; remote-controlled boats/water-borne improvised explosive devices; floating sea mines; hijackings), and aerial arsenal (rockets; drones; missiles) for use against maritime and littoral targets. They have achieved this despite their origins as an armed movement from the mountains. The bulk of the Houthi movement is from the northern city of Sa'ada, where its political-military leadership originates and is still based. Sa'ada lies in a mountainous valley at almost 2,000 meters above sea level, and the rugged terrain lent itself to the guerrilla warfare and attrition the group utilized in the Sa'ada Wars against the government between 2004 and 2010.

In their rapid expansion during the civil war, the Houthis seized Hudaydah, the main port city on the Red Sea, and now control the strategic islands of Kamaran, Ras Douglas, and Taqfash **off the Hudaydah coast**. This has provided the group with an **invaluable theater** for maritime projection, disruption, and area denial. Their evolution from a guerrilla movement to a more capable military actor wouldn't have been possible without the alliance of convenience with the power bloc of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the absorption of soldiers and materiel from the regular army and the Republican Guard. But the role of Iran has been decisive in providing the Houthis with smuggled weapons and expertise to project power into the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait. For the Houthis, maritime attacks are now tools of military and political pressure, as they are for Iran in the Northern Arabian Sea – since 2019, several Iran-linked **attacks** against oil tankers and commercial vessels have occurred close to the **Hormuz Strait** and the **Gulf of Oman**. The 2020 final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen **noted** “an increasing number of incidents involving suspicious approaches and attacks on civilian ships” by the Houthis in the Red Sea.

The Changing Geography of Maritime Attacks

In the last two to three years, the geography of Houthi maritime activity has changed. Between 2015 and 2017, the Bab al-Mandab Strait was the focus of Houthi maritime attacks, after they had seized most of Taiz governorate. But the Emirati-backed National Resistance forces, led by Tareq Saleh, retook control of the Bab al-Mandab area (including the coastal town of Al-Makha) in 2017, pushing the Houthis to withdraw northward. From then on, the main flashpoint moved to the southern Red Sea, close to the Houthi-controlled port of Hudaydah. Amid rising humanitarian concerns, the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement, signed in 2018 between the internationally recognized government and the Houthis, halted the offensive on the port city. Alongside numerous ceasefire violations along the front, the Houthis reneged on provisions for the mutual redeployment of forces from the ports of Hudaydah, Salif, and Ras Issa, and the channeling of port revenues to pay public sector salaries. Military positions in Hudaydah crystallized until 2021, when the Joint Western Forces (a Tareq Saleh-led coalition comprising the National Resistance forces, the remnants of the Tihama Resistance, and the Giants Brigades) withdrew from the coastline in November 2021 to redeploy to other fronts, helping the Houthis regain territory. In a demonstration of their renewed hold on the strategic area and their ability to disrupt navigation in the Red Sea, the Houthis staged a military parade in Hudaydah displaying **anti-ship missiles**.

Ramifications of Houthi Red Sea Operations

The first implication of Houthi attacks against maritime and littoral targets regards the economic war vis-à-vis the internationally recognized government. In October–November 2022, the Houthis – who do not control Yemen's major oil and gas fields – attacked two oil export ports in government-held areas with drones and missiles: **Al-Dhabba in Hadhamawt** and **Qana in Shabwa**. The strikes occurred while the Houthis were holding secret bilateral talks with Saudi Arabia, after failing to extract further concessions from the government in negotiations to extend a nationwide truce. The attacks did not damage infrastructure but prevented foreign tankers from entering the ports and onboarding oil, and forced the immediate suspension of nearly all oil exports. According to the government, the attacks resulted in **US\$1 billion** of prolonged loss of revenues, with a significant drop in oil export activity.

The second implication concerns the government-aligned Yemeni Coast Guard. Since 2016, the Coast Guard has been undergoing **a rebuilding process** supported by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as they pivot from preventing jihadi attacks to countering smuggling activities, mostly to and from Iran. But plans to rebuild a coherent and effective coast guard have little chance of success as long as the Houthis remain in control of the Hudaydah coast and its islands. This diminishes the stabilizing role Yemen could play – given its unique geography – in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Arabian Sea. Yemen has been a member of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a US-led multinational naval mission, since 2013. The US Ambassador to Yemen and the Commander of Centcom (the US Naval Forces Central Command and CMF) **met** in March 2023 with senior Yemeni Coast Guard officials and government representatives in Al-Mahra to discuss regional maritime security efforts and prospects for multilateral naval cooperation. A **small-boat operations course** for Coast Guard personnel will be organized in Bahrain (CMF's headquarters) to upgrade interoperability with regional partners. **In October 2022**, the Yemeni Coast Guard joined ships from Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Spain for a counter-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden led by Brazil under Combined Task Force 151.

The third implication is for the Houthis' power to influence the negotiating position of Saudi Arabia concerning Yemen. In 2020, the final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen stated that more sophisticated, longer-range uncrewed aerial vehicles and land attack cruise missiles had been deployed by the Houthis, mostly to attack targets in Saudi Arabia. According to the **panel**, "these attacks coincided with an escalation of regional and geopolitical tensions over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and seemed intended to force Saudi Arabia to adopt a more conciliatory approach towards the Houthis." As the Houthis step up attacks in the Red Sea, the Saudis are now **reportedly urging** the US to exercise restraint. They are worried that a more assertive American posture could cause the bilateral talks to collapse: for the kingdom, the main risk would be to have its territory and economic interests in the sights of Houthi missiles again. The parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nationwide ceasefire, **announced** by the UN on December 23, is a significant step; however, it isn't likely to produce a de-escalation effect in the Red Sea since the Houthis believe that they can gain more concessions at the negotiating table if they raise the threat level against regional and global interests. Securing the border and stopping attacks from Yemen were precisely the reasons that led Riyadh to support a nationwide truce in 2022 and start direct talks with the Houthis in the first place.

The fourth implication of Houthi attacks is the dilemma they generate for the United States and the international community. Maritime security is an issue of global concern, particularly in the busy sea lanes through the Red Sea, with far-reaching impacts on energy and commodities

markets. However, the US faces risks regardless of how it chooses to respond. On the one hand, if the Americans show restraint, as they have done so far, the Houthi threat to shipping will remain unchecked. On the other hand, if the US opts for expanded military action, or a stronger naval presence in the Red Sea under a resolute mandate to respond, (which doesn't seem to be the case with the recently announced Operation Prosperity Guarantor, which will operate “**under the umbrella**” of existing Combined Task Force 153), it must be wary of the potential fallout for the Saudi-Houthi talks and the region more broadly (e.g., the reaction of Iran and its proxies). In both cases, tight coordination with regional partners, starting with the Gulf states, will be a key step.

Eight years after the Yemen war began, the Houthis' hold on Hudaydah and their acquisition of maritime capabilities are no longer just a problem for Yemen and its neighborhood – they have implications for the whole world.

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