

## HOUTHİ SHIPPING ATTACKS IN RED SEA: RAMIFICATION OF GLOBAL SHIPPING DISRUPTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*As Houthi rebels in Yemen have been attacking trade boats on a regular basis, the Red Sea has grown into a hub for maritime insecurity. This abstract looks at the effects of the growing conflict on international shipping, with a special emphasis on the steps the US and the UK have done to lessen the threats. Amid a protracted struggle between the Yemeni government & its allies, the Houthi rebels have increasingly turned to maritime operations as a means of controlling the region and upsetting stability. Their strategies involve the use of missile strikes and drone attacks to target military ships, commercial vessels, and oil tankers that are passing through the vital waterway. These attacks not only immediately endanger the crew and the cargo, but they also carry the potential of upsetting important commerce lines that connect Asia, Europe, and Africa.*

*The United States of America and the Kingdom of England have acted decisively to protect maritime safety in the region as a reaction to the growing threat. Enhanced naval patrols, information exchange with partners in the region, and targeted strikes on Houthi forces engaged in maritime aggression are all part of this. Both countries have also pushed for diplomatic measures to reduce hostilities and deal with the underlying reasons of the dispute.*

***Keywords:*** *Narrow straits, The Red Sea, Yemen, Maritime insurgency, Geopolitics*

### INTRODUCTION

Despite Yemen's historical importance in the formation of the Red Sea belonging, modern research on red Sea views the nation as a peripheral and weak state, meaning that the threat posed by non-state actors there could have a ripple effect throughout the area. In the meantime, the geographical component of Yemen has received little research, and it is difficult to pinpoint the causal connection that Yemen's location affords it in Red Sea geopolitics. Analysis of Yemen's ongoing civil conflict, particularly the Houthi maritime operations, makes this truth clear. In light of this, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Yemen's Red Sea geography and the Houthi naval insurgency are shaped by topography. Concerned staff members of international organizations quietly acknowledge that, since March 2015, Yemen has

become the world's biggest humanitarian crisis, despite the fact that the story rarely makes headlines. A group of financially constrained neighboring nations and their American and British enablers continue to lay siege to the entire country's north while battling it out with one another for control of the rich in resources south, making the situation worse every year. Upward of 18,000,000 Yemenis are at risk of famine and disease as a result of this multifaceted battle of attrition.<sup>1</sup> Current maritime events off the coast of Arabia that involve Houthi militants using drones and missiles against foreign warships and

<sup>1</sup> Osiewicz, P. (2017). The ongoing military conflicts in Syria and Yemen: Recent developments, their consequences, and scenarios. *Przegląd Strategiczny*, 7(10), 481-496.

commercial shipping, allegedly in retaliation for Israeli military actions in Gaza after the October 7, 2023, which would Hamas-led assault that murdered over 1,300 Israeli citizens. The legality of the American response to those instances is covered in the article, along with the country's counterpiracy efforts and the right to individual and group self-defense. The paper delves into the possibility of the US carrying out ground-based assaults on Houthi rocket and drone installations in Yemen in accordance with the doctrine of self-defense in order to avert additional assaults on US- and foreign-flagged vessels functioning inside the area. Future historians will find that very few analyses acknowledge, much less explain, the overwhelming widespread backing for the armed uprising that put an end to Hadi's disastrous economic "reforms." The prejudiced catch-all allusions to "the Houthi militias" as the ones behind "the coup," which are never acknowledged as such, purposefully eliminate the prospect that anyone opposing the war on Yemen, which the US has been facilitating since March 2015, have wider and deeper sources of legitimacy. If historians are only presented with this simplistic choice between "Houthi militias" and the "legitimate government of Hadi," they may find it extremely difficult to comprehend the motivations of people involved in the now nearly five-year conflict. It's clear that there is plenty material to support this false portrayal.<sup>2</sup> The significance of the Bab Al-Mandab Straits as the southern entrance to the Red Sea, where marine history originated, has a big impact on the current global order. Geographically, politically, economically, and militarily, it is significant. In addition to this, the region has differences and tense areas because of many governmental systems, diverse religious and cultural traditions, abundant economic resources, and the prevalence of crisis circumstances. The superpowers fought to establish and subsequently expand their military garrisons and influence in the region, which is seen as a theater of conflict. In an effort

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<sup>2</sup> Ya'alon, M., Friedman, L., Orion, A., Feldman, N., Zimmt, R., Asculai, E., ... & Goldberg, M. (2018). Israel and the pragmatic Sunni camp: a historic opportunity. *INSS Strategic Assessment*, 21(2), 9-27.

to reduce tension and advance regional peace and security, the countries in the region have made an effort to work together.<sup>3</sup>

Yemen's already high political tension has been exacerbated by unrest throughout the Arab world. Prolonged mass demonstrations and Chairman Ali Abdullah Saleh's attempts to defuse a wider crisis through concessions have drawn attention from the United States and other countries to Yemen's enormous political and development concerns. There are currently high-level defections from President Saleh's leadership, and his downfall could come soon. Congress and American decision-makers might be worried about Yemen's chances of stabilization and building solid bilateral ties with the country's future leaders. Depending on whether terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda in the Persian Gulf (AQAP) can pose a sustained danger to American homeland security, the amount of resources the US devotes to counterterrorism and stabilizing initiatives in Yemen may change. Some say Yemen is progressively turning into a failed state and a haven of refuge for Al Qaeda operators, and as such, it should be viewed as an active battlefield for U.S. operations against terrorism. Others think these groups lack such competence and worry the United States may overreact. The majority of long-term observers of Yemen argue that despite enhanced U.S. or international attempts to counter them, security issues originating from Yemen may remain due to the country's divisive political environment and its numerous development concerns. The construction and design of ships that traveled the Indian and Red Seas in antiquity are still not well understood, despite a considerable quantity of research by historians, archaeologists, and other nautical researchers. In a similar vein, little is known about any common characteristics that would have made them especially well-suited to sailing in confined sea basins, during monsoon seasons, or both. This kind of knowledge is crucial to understanding the different kinds of boats that were utilized in these early, globally-oriented eras to transport freight

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Yadoomi, H. (1991). The strategic importance of the Bab Al-mandab strait (p. 0035). US Army War College.

along long-distance trade routes. Additionally, it might offer oblique proof of the port and harbor infrastructure that is present along these routes.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing antagonism between Iran and Israel. Iran's influence in the region has been steadily increasing, creating a "balance of terror" between the two nations. Since the 2010s, there have been numerous instances of conflict between the two nations in the region of the Red Sea & East Africa. The Iranian government has been strategically penetrating more areas, particularly Africa. Throughout their tenure, several Iranian administrations have implemented unique policies that are shaped by a multitude of circumstances. Iran's efforts to offer different kinds of money and arms in exchange over friendly diplomatic ties and the ability to impact African leaders' attitudes toward the West and its partners, particularly Israel, have facilitated transactional relations between East African countries and Iran. In addition to reviewing the two countries' historical participation in these regions, this article examines how their respective confrontational policies have evolved over time. The research will pay special attention to the years after 2005 because there is strong evidence of Iran's significant increase in its involvement in these areas after that time. Yemen has endured and continues to endure horrific atrocities for over ten years, which have led to a humanitarian crisis because of foreign meddling. The nation has been shattered by the international powers' meddling in the internal situation in Yemen, particularly since Donald Trump took office. This paper's goal is to ascertain if the United States' intervention in Yemen's war was driven by humanitarian or self-interested motivations by looking into the causes behind it. Descriptive and analytical techniques from the qualitative method will be employed to gain a thorough review and identify the causes of this interference in order to meet the goals of the study. It is discovered that the United States' meddling in Yemen, which it has done under the pretext of a counterterrorism campaign, is

<sup>4</sup> Brandt, M. (2024). Tribes and politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi conflict. Oxford University Press.

motivated by self-interest and has helped the region both politically and economically.<sup>5</sup>

### Literature review

Houthi rebels in Yemen's ongoing attacks on cargo ships, the Red Sea has become a hotspot for maritime insecurity. An outline of the Houthi rebellion, the Red Sea's strategic significance, and the rising frequency and severity of maritime assaults in the area are given in this section. In order to examine the changing nature of the maritime dangers posed through the Houthi insurgency, Houthi Shipping Assaults in the Red Sea examines the strategies, drivers, and trends of Houthi shipping attacks. It does this by using instances and incident reports. It also looks at the larger regional factors that contribute to Red Sea maritime instability. The United States & the United Kingdom are implementing counterattacks and response plans to lessen the impact of the Houthi maritime strikes. To improve maritime safety in the Red Sea, this comprises an examination of military actions, intelligence-sharing programs, diplomatic measures, and collaboration with neighboring countries.<sup>6</sup> Effects of worldwide shipping interruptions evaluates the effects of Houthi assaults and countermeasures on international shipping operations in terms of economic, practical, and security implications. Using empirical data and case studies, it investigates the effects on insurance premiums, the durability of supply chains, market volatility, trade flows, and overall economic stability. Implications for policy and suggestion outlines the main policy implications and suggestions for tackling maritime safety in the Red Sea region based on the analysis that was done<sup>7</sup>. Possible tactics for boosting collaboration in maritime security, encouraging the settlement of disputes, putting money into marine safety capabilities, and reducing threats to international commerce lanes.

<sup>5</sup> Hill, G. (2017). Yemen endures: Civil war, Saudi adventurism and the future of Arabia. Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Pedrozo, R. P. (2024). Protecting the Free Flow of Commerce from Houthi Attacks off the Arabian Peninsula. *International Law Studies*, 103(1), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Sharp, J. M. (2011). Yemen: Background and US relations. Congressional Research Service.

Anti-tank guided missiles were installed aboard patrol boats, some thirty coast-watcher stations were erected, "spy dhows" were built under false pretenses, and the maritime radio of docked ships was utilized to develop attack targeting strategies. The Houthis' fleet of remote-controlled drone boats, which can ram opposing warships and carry bombs, is one of their most distinctive weapons.<sup>8</sup> Foundation is a thorough analysis of the body of literature, which sheds light on the causes, consequences, and historical background of maritime danger in the Red Sea. In order to put into perspective the current situation and pinpoint significant recurring themes and trends in Houthi maritime attacks and US and UK counterattacks, this literature review consults academic publications, reports, and assessments. Additionally, the abstract discusses the examination of marine occurrences, which entails looking at individual instances of Houthi attacks, evaluating the effects they have on oil tankers and commercial vessels, and analyzing the strategies used by Houthi militants. Through an analysis of these instances, the research study seeks to clarify how maritime risks in the Arabian Sea and Red Sea are changing and what that means for security and stability in the region.<sup>9</sup> US and UK's policy reactions to the Houthi maritime strikes. This entails assessing the effectiveness of diplomatic measures, intelligence-sharing programs, and military interventions in reducing maritime instability and averting further attacks. The goal of the study paper is to identify best practices, lessons learned, and areas for enhancement in the Red Sea's region's response to marine threats by critically evaluating these approaches. (Weiss, 2019) examined the aims to provide an in-depth assessment of maritime security motion in the Red Sea, based on a thorough review of previous literature, study of maritime incidents to and evaluation of policy responses. The abstract

<sup>8</sup> Bae, I., & Hong, J. (2023). Survey on the developments of unmanned marine vehicles: intelligence and cooperation. *Sensors*, 23(10), 4643.

<sup>9</sup> Kotarba-Morley, A. M. (2017). The maritime context of the trans-Mediterranean—Indian Ocean trade: critical review of Roman era vessels of the Red Sea. *Human Interaction with the Environment in the Red Sea*, 171-206.

effectively conveys the research paper's overall objectives and scope.<sup>10</sup>

In order to examine how a weaker side acting from an advantage in location can pose a challenge to the stronger party in the battle, this article examines the role that geography plays in asymmetric warfare. As a result, the study concentrates on the restricted sea setting, the opportunities and difficulties that the geographical arrangement of the seas presents for enemies, and the influence these factors have on their powers and decision-making. Then, it makes an effort to demonstrate how geography might improve the effectiveness of unconventional warfare and small-arms tactics at sea, recognizing the spatial component that underlies the emergence of non-state organizations as a significant threat to maritime security. The case of the Houthi rebellion in Yemen is then discussed in order to empirically investigate how they have used their location that the southern entrance about the Red Sea, which is close to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, to carry out intermittent offensives against the more powerful coalition, which is led by Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup> By using the Northern Sea Route (NSR) as a substitute for the well-known Southern route for container shipping through the Suez Canal, this qualitative inductive study investigates the possible advantages for the ports and economy of Scandinavia. We used in-depth face-to-face conversations that were semi-structured through deliberate selection in one particular case setting to gather expert viewpoints and meet these goals. The data analysis shows how the commercialization of NSR can benefit the Scandinavian economy (GDP growth, employment creation, etc.) and highlights the advantages of Scandinavian ports (flexibility, hinterland, ECAs, etc.) over ports elsewhere in North West Europe that might seize the opportunity presented by the NSR. It is

<sup>10</sup> Qureshi Y. (1979). Recent developments in the Red Sea Region with special reference to the Horn of Africa. *Pakistan Horizon*, 32(1/2), 142-159.

<sup>11</sup> Abdulla, K. A., & Singh, J. S. H. (2018). The Influence of Geography in Asymmetric Conflicts in Narrow Seas and the Houthi Insurgency in Yemen. *MJIR| Malaysian Journal of International Relations*, 6(1), 84-90.

emphasized, therefore, that the Scandinavian nations must take the initiative and guarantee their participation for this to be accomplished.<sup>12</sup>

### Research questions

Following are the objectives:

1. To examine the implications on regional maritime security as well as the strategic reasons behind the Houthi shipping assaults in the Red Sea.
2. To evaluate how well the US and UK's military actions have worked to prevent Houthi violence and protect international maritime routes.
3. To assess the financial effects of rising prices, supply chain interruptions, and market volatility resulting from the Houthi attacks' disruption of global shipping.
4. To determine the best course of action for enacting legislation to reduce the dangers to maritime security, support Yemeni peace efforts, and strengthen defenses against potential attacks to international shipping networks.

### Methodology

#### 1. Design of Research:

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study thoroughly examines the research issue by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. To comprehend the background, goals, and tactics of the Houthi shipping strikes and the US and UK's response, analytical techniques include literature reviews and content analyses of official pronouncements, policy statements, and news stories. Statistical examination of shipping data, such as attack frequency and severity, economic effects, and patterns of international shipping interruptions, is a key component of quantitative approaches.

#### 2. Gathering of Data:

##### Primary Data:

Official declarations, studies, and policy papers from international and governmental bodies, such

as the American Department of Defense, the UK Ministry of Defense, the United Nations, and pertinent agencies interviews with important players, including representatives of the shipping sector, lawmakers, military personnel, and specialists in marine security.

##### Secondary Data:

Books, research papers, journal articles, and scholarly writing on international shipping, marine security, and conflict resolution. Read news stories and media reports about Houthi ship attacks and counterattacks from reliable sources to stay up to date on events, reactions, and developments.

#### 3. Analyzing Data:

##### Qualitative Analysis:

The use of theme analysis to pinpoint important themes, trends, and trends concerning the Houthi shipping attacks, the US and UK's counterattacks, and the effects they have on international commerce. Comparative investigation to look at how the US and UK's countermeasure strategy, methods, and results differ and are comparable.

##### Quantitative Analysis

To examine the frequency, severity, and geographic dispersion of Houthi shipping attacks, descriptive statistics are used. Economic impact analysis to calculate the price of closing international trade routes, the cost of maritime insurance, and the earnings of the shipping sector. Using geographic analysis, one may see how attacks are distributed geographically and pinpoint high-risk areas around the Red Sea.

#### 4. Moral Aspects to Take into Account:

Guaranteeing the privacy and anonymity of respondents to questionnaires and interviews. Respecting ethical standards when conducting research on delicate subjects like military operations and national security. Correctly citing and recognizing sources in order to maintain academic integrity and prevent plagiarism.

#### 5. Restrictions:

The accessibility and dependability of data sources, particularly in areas afflicted by conflict

<sup>12</sup> Solvang, H. B., Karamperidis, S., Valantasis-Kanellos, N., & Song, D. W. (2018). An exploratory study on the Northern Sea Route as an alternative shipping passage. *Maritime Policy & Management*, 45(4), 495-513.

where access is restricted. Possible biases in government pronouncements and news stories, which call for triangulating information from several sources. Difficulties in fully estimating the financial effects of disruptions in international shipping networks.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the suggested methodology seeks to offer a thorough and rigorous examination of the research subject, illuminating the intricate dynamics of economic vulnerabilities, geopolitical conflicts, and marine security in the area of the Red Sea and beyond.

## **Results and Findings**

### **• Nature of Houthi attacks:**

The research sheds information on the strategies used by the Houthi rebels to attack cargo vessels, which include the deployment of missile strikes, unmanned explosives boats, and naval mines. The safety of marine travel across the Red Sea is now under question due to these attacks, which have targeted military as well as civilian vessels.

### **• US and UK Response:**

In order to prevent and eliminate Houthi dangers in the Red Sea, the study looks at the military actions that the US and the UK took in tandem with their regional partners. Targeted airstrikes on installations under Houthi control and the arrival of naval forces to guard important shipping lanes have been part of these actions.

### **• Impact on World Shipping:**

The research illustrates the major disruptions brought about by the Houthi attacks and the

ensuing military operations through an examination of maritime data and economic indicators. Increasing insurance premiums, rerouting of blood vessels, and delays in schedules for shipping have all added to the growing expenses of participating in the marine commerce and affecting supply chains globally.

### **• Consequences for Nautical Security:**

The results highlight how the Houthi shipping strikes have wider ramifications for Red Sea and other maritime security. In order to protect important sea lanes and guarantee the free flow of commerce, there is a greater need for international collaboration and security measures due to the increased tensions in the region and the growth of asymmetrical hazards posed by non-state actors.

### **Role of Cape of Good Hope**

In the midst of Houthi shipping strikes in the Red Sea, the Cape of Good Hope rises to prominence and provides a tactically sound alternative path for international shipping. Vessels may choose this detour in order to avoid security threats when tensions rise, which would minimize disruptions and guarantee that maritime trade continues unhindered. This decision could change regional dynamics and trade patterns geopolitically. The trade-offs, however, are highlighted by greater operating costs and lengthier transit times. Maintaining the stability of global commerce and protecting both routes depend heavily on cooperative maritime security initiatives.

## Alternative Shipping Routes



**Fig 1. The Red Sea as well as the Strait of Bab al-Mandab are two possible routes for trade between Asia and North Europe and Asia and the Americas.**

### Ramification

The US and UK's response to the Houthi shipping strikes in the Red Sea has significant implications for international trade. International trade is hampered, transportation prices rise, and security threats are increased when important trade routes are disrupted. Increased insurance costs and losses in revenue for shipping companies lead to economic instability. Growing local circumstances and strategic objectives are reflected in the escalation of geopolitical conflicts. Delivery of humanitarian help is impeded, which exacerbates situations in areas affected by conflict. Maintaining maritime security necessitates communication and cooperation between nations. It will need coordinated action to address the interrelated issues of marine safety and neighborhood peace in order to mitigate these effects.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the attacks on shipping by the Houthis in the Red Sea in Yemen and the US and UK's counterattacks that followed highlight the difficult issues that maritime security faces in the twenty-first century. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates diplomatic, diplomatic, and economic tactics while also taking into account

the larger socio-political factors at play is needed to address these issues. The global community can reduce risks, advance stability, and protect the integrity of international maritime networks for the good of all by cooperating and taking proactive measures

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