

# The Way to the Dominance of Houthis in Yemen

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**Abstract:** *Yemen was called Arabia the Happy in ancient times. Today, Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, struggling with food shortages, civil war, famine, and epidemics. The years - long crisis is threatening the outbreak of the world's greatest famine, resulting in the destruction of homes, schools, and hospitals in an already poor country. In 2015, after the Houthis took over Saana, the Saudi - led coalition launched a war on Houthis having an object to restore the power of internationally recognized government. However, this war just pushed Yemen into even deeper chaos, and now the danger of the conflict becoming a regional war has arisen. Attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant ships triggered the intervention of coalition forces led by Western powers. British and American ships and planes have attacked Houthi positions in Yemen. But who exactly are the Houthis? What is the background of the Red Sea conflict and why have the USA and the UK attacked them? The permanent power vacuum gave an opportunity not just for the Sunni terrorists of al - Qaida and the Islamic State to expand within the country but also the appearance of radical Shia Islamist movements as well, like Ansar Allah. This paper will analyse the political background of the Iranian - backed Houthi and the way how these proxy forces became dominant in the country.*

**Keywords:** Houthis, Yemen, proxy forces, Islam revolution, terrorism, Red Sea crisis

## Emergence of Houthi movement

The emergence of Yemen's Houthis as a radical Shiite movement is linked to Iran's expansionist policies. Iran, which maintained good relations with Western countries during the time of the Shah, has now become an exporter of terrorism in the countries of the Middle East. The regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi was overthrown by large mass demonstrations in 1979, after a series of two - year demonstrations, with the return of Ayatollah Khomeini. The collapse of Reza Pahlavi's regime shocked Western countries. In 1978, the CIA estimated that, the shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, would remain on the throne for the foreseeable future.<sup>1</sup>

However, just one hundred days later the shah - - despite his massive military, fearsome security police, and superpower support was overthrown by a popular and largely peaceful revolution. The success of the so - called Islamic revolution was met with surprised the world because it was strange and unusual. Why was unusual?

Firstly, because in Iran was experiencing a relative prosperity and Reza Pahlavi Shah he built schools, increased equality for women. For example, between fiscal year 1964 and 1978, Iran's gross national product grew at an annual rate of 13.2 percent at constant prices. The oil, gas, and construction industries expanded by almost 500 percent during this period. Generally speaking, in a period between 1973 - 77, Iran registered an average growth rate of 7.4 percent and the per capita income in 1976 reached its highest level.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the traditional causes of revolutions, such as post - war crisis, massive unemployment, or inflation, were absent. The unemployment rate was registered at 2.9 percent, the lowest in the history of the country.<sup>3</sup> Although the Shah's regime had managed to leave a relatively satisfactory economic record, Reza Pahlavi had eradicated his opponents within the country by exercising a complete political suppression, especially the leftwinger opposition and minorities, to the extent that he could not even tolerate peaceful and legal criticisms of the opposition.

Thirdly, even it was massively popular, generated a large wave of emigration too. For example, on 11 December 1978, the Day of Ashura (Day of Hussein death), the Shia religious leadership was able to mobilize around 9 million people and organize anti - Shah demonstrators marched throughout Iran. From statistic point of view this number means that around 10% of the country population marched in the anti - Shah demonstrations, the highest percentage than any revolution in the modern history.<sup>4</sup> For example, against Ceausescu regime in Romania only 1% of the population was mobilized.

The outcome of the so - called "Islam revolution" (also named "Green revolution") also strange, the pro - Western secular authoritarian monarchy has been replaced by an anti - Western totalitarian Islamist theocracy characterized by the concept of Guardianship of Islamic Jurist. Of course, this person is none other than Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Khomeini saw the seizure of power in 1979 as a victory for Islam over an autocratic regime and a personal victory of Allah in Iran. In same year, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran established a religious state where the supreme leader is given

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kurzman: The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran, Harvard University Press, 2005 ISBN: 978-0674018433, p10

<sup>2</sup> Jahangir Amuzegar: The Iranian Economy before and after the Revolution Middle East Journal, Vol 46, 1992, Published By: Middle East Institute, ISSN: 00263141. pp. 413-425

<sup>3</sup> Ali Farahbakhsh: Iranian Economy in Six Snapshots, Payam-e Emruz; Economic, Social, Cultural. February 2001, No. 23. Downloaded from [https://web.archive.org/web/20070927023440/http://www.irvl.net/six\\_snapshots.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20070927023440/http://www.irvl.net/six_snapshots.htm) on 12 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> Charles Kurzman: The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran. Harvard University Press. (2005). ISBN 978-0674018433. pp 120-121

unlimited and unchecked powers. It is well known that Khomeini changed the major paradigm of Shia Islam during his exile in Iraq. He declared that Islamic jurists are the true holders of religious and political authority, who must be obeyed as "an expression of obedience to God." This religious doctrine helped him to get the absolute, unlimited power in Iran.

Khomeini was not satisfied with becoming the supreme leader of Iran. He had bigger ambitions; he wanted to rule the entire Middle East and lead the Islamic world. He exported his own ideology abroad, according to which the Shiites should leave the ranks of the oppressed. This a reason way, all Shia should participate in military training, and take the leading dominant position within the whole of Islam by force, as they are the true believers, supported by Allah, and take back all the holy places, Mecca, Medina and, of course, Jerusalem, and the land of Islam must be freed from foreign invaders and especially from the Jews. This ideology, also called "Khomeinism". This was a direct call for rebellion, uprising and became very popular in the poor Shiite villages of the Middle East from Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has built a network of proxies across the Middle East. However, this exporting the new Iranian ideology to Iraq was taken as a major danger by Saddam Hussein and he launched war against Iran in 1980.

As the front lines were stabilized and the defense apparatus was reorganized, Khomeini had more resources to export her ideology abroad, support financially and organize armed groups for the first time in Lebanon, where the upheaval and power vacuum caused by the civil war gave her the opportunity to do so. Hence, Hezbollah was founded in the early 1980s as part of Iranian efforts to unite militant Lebanese Shiite groups into a single organization. Hezbollah was founded by Muslim imams and financed by Iran primarily to terrorize Israel. Unfortunately, Hezbollah became a success story. American and French peacekeepers left Lebanon after deadly Beirut barracks bombing in 1983, the new terrorist organization won the guerilla war against Amal and Christian militias.

Furthermore, on 24 May 2000, per the decision of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak unilaterally the Israeli Defence Forces has been withdrawn completely withdrawal from the so - called security zone in South Lebanon into the internationally recognized border. The South Lebanon Army shortly collapsed, so, Hezbollah became a dominant military and political force in Lebanon. So, Hezbollah, the Party of Allah, gained enormous prestige and became an example to follow. Following the example of Hezbollah, and of course motivated by the money of the Iranians, Hussein al - Houthi founds his own movement in Yemen.

Hussein Badr al - Din al - Houthi was a member of Houthi clan and the clan member of Zaidi community. Zaidi is considered as a branch of Shia Islam. It is means that all Houthis are Zaydis, not all Zaydis are Houthis. Hussein al - Houthi who was already active in Yemeni political life, he was a member of parliament and of the Zaydi political party Al - Haqq (The Truth) as well, but he criticized the government of Yemen because of corruption and being close to Westerners. So, he became persona non grata in Yemen and fled, allegedly

to Syria and then to Iran. After he spent some years in the Iranian holy Shiite city of Qom, he started to follow Khomeini's ideas of "liberation of Muslim Land from the occupation of Americans and Jews".

So, he returned to Yemen in mid - 1990s, and he believed the party Al - Haqq was not radical enough in challenging the government. Consequently, he moved on to created new a political and paramilitary group called the Believing Youth in 1997. Hussein al - Houthi announced a religious renewal movement among the followers of the Zaidi branch of the Shia sect of Islam, which existed within it, in the northern part of Yemen they inhabited, actually uniting the local tribes. Moreover, in order to have a more aggressive form of Zaydi activism, the Ansar Allah, (Partisans of God) a secret political party also has been established by Hussein al - Houthi.

Al - Houthi's father, Badreddin al - Houthi was a Zaidi Cleric, having a lot of children, 14 boys, and 7 daughters. This fact became an important, because Hussein was killed in a police operation in 2004 and his father took over the ideological control of the movement, while his brother, Abdul Marik, took over the operational control. The movement takes the name Houthi and gains great popularity due to Hussein's martyrdom. In other words, the movement led by a party like Lebanese Hezbollah, consisting of strongly anti - Western, anti - Jewish fanatics, was born, which is now known as the Houthis. Currently, after death of Badreddin al - Houthi, the 'ideological /religious wing' led by Abdulkarim al - Houthi, the current Minister of Interior, who is uncle of Abdulmalik al - Houth. However, there is a difference compared to Hezbollah. The party Ansar Allah' ideology feeds on the same religious roots as Hezbollah, so there is no difference. Another similarity is that the party Ansar Allah also conducts activities related to social welfare such education, healthcare, etc.

In addition to this, the party Ansar Allah as a matter of course, is functioning as a political party. Moreover, the party Ansar Allah, like Hezbollah, also has an administrative function, of course only in the areas it controls. However, it does not exercise its administrative functions in the same way as Hezbollah. Because what happened was that Hezbollah built its own apparatus in Lebanon, in contrast, Ansar Allah kept the previous apparatus. At the same time, in order to realize his own power and influence, he appointed so - called "advisors/supervisors" alongside the leaders of the regional and local administrative apparatus. Hence, in Houthi - controlled territories, formal state authorities are systematically paralleled by the party Ansar Allah's supervisory system. This 'shadow state' guarantees the control of the central regime over its peripheries, and the grip of the Houthi inner - circle over local elites of Houthi supporters This system is very similar to the political commissar system of the Bolsheviks.

Regarding the military profile, in addition to the fact that they have tens of thousands of armed militiamen, they used the military formations and their commanders loyal to them. Of course, this military hierarchy was also supported by the advisors of the Ansar Allah party, who placed the military structure under close party supervision. Consequently, de facto the military wing of Ansar Allah consists of tens of

thousands of armed militiamen controlled by local tribal leaders on the one hand, and also has traditional military power on the other hand. In this way, the Houthis gained the upper hand in the military, till to control the 60 - 70% of the pre - war military arsenal, including missiles.

The tribal system in the Arab world is an extremely strong and important social structure, it is especially true in Yemen. Yemeni society stands out as the most tribal nation in the Arab world due to the significant influence wielded by tribal leaders and their deep integration into the various facets of the state.<sup>5</sup> This is a reason way; the party Ansar Allah created a "popular committee" (same times also called "revolutionary committee") dealing with the tribal issue. So, the 'tribal wing': composed by loyalists of non - Hashemite origin, those commonly known in northern Yemen as qaba'il, or tribesmen. It was led by Salih al - Samad, the former president of the Houthi Supreme Presidential Council who died in April 2018, he was killed by a Saudi airstrike.<sup>6</sup> His successor is Mahadi al - Mashat. This popular Houthi movement became one of the major elements of Yemeni political life and even do one of strongest military fractions within Yemen.

### Houthis as a major political component of Yemeni political structure

The US unjustified invasion of Iraq in 2003 deeply radicalized not just several Arab fundamentalist movements like the Houthi movement but many other ordinary Arabs in the Middle East. Under Teheran, Hezbollah and Second Intifada influence they formulated the slogan saying that "Allah is the Greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, A Curse Upon the Jews, Victory to Islam". De facto, this slogan was originally not tied to the Houthi movement, however, already in 2003, the slogan already was used by protestors in Saana and became a sign of public demonstrations against the dictatorship of Yemeni President Abdullah Saleh.<sup>7</sup>

The Houthi movement eventually leads a rebellion against the Yemeni government in 2004. The period between 2005 - 2009 was characterized by sporadic clashes between the government and the Houthis and longer or shorter cease - fires. In August 2009, the Yemeni government army launched a major operation, named Operation Scorched Earth, to eliminate the Houthi rebellion in North Yemen.

This large - scale operation also ended by a ceasefire in 2010, when the Saleh's government agrees to a ceasefire with Abdul - Malik al - Houthi and the rebels. The next turning point is the series of Arab Spring demonstrations, which also reach

Yemen in 2011. The power of the autocratically ruling Saleh has been greatly weakened for 2011, and the Houthis are receiving more and more support from Iran. According to the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, Iran provided not just missiles, UAVs, and other weapons but also around 30 million USD as financial support to Houthis.<sup>8</sup> The always fragile Yemeni state descends into a civil war again, which leads to Houthi rebels occupying Sada, the traditional capital. Moreover, in March 2015, the Houthis began to occupy Aden, the former capital of South Yemen, and which almost came under their control, but the Saudi intervention prevented them from doing so. The Houthis after a fierce and bloody fight gave up their intention of capturing the city in June 2015.

Anyway, this Houthis operation already demonstrated so that the Houthis already one of the dominant actors in the decade - long civil war in Yemen militarily, politically as well. The dominance of the ancient enemy, the Shiites, in Yemen was not acceptable to the newly appointed Crown Prince Mohammed. Consequently, the Saudi - led coalition chose to go to war to support Hadi and prevent the Houthi - Saleh rebellion from consolidating control of the country. However, the coalition forces (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain) could not win, and even lost the war against the rebels, who practically had no air force, in both military and political terms.

Despite the billions of dollars spent, over 25, 000 airstrikes, naval blockades, and initial US intelligence support, they were unable to defeat the Houthis. During this phase of war, estimated the Saudi - led military coalition was spending \$200 million a day on military operations in Yemen.<sup>9</sup> The cost of the war to Yemenis is staggering. According to the UN, between 2015 and 2021 almost 400, 000 people died, mainly caused by issues associated with conflict like lack of access to food, water, and healthcare.<sup>10</sup> The Houthis have won the war in Yemen, defeating their opponents in the civil war, the Saudi - led coalition forces who intervened in 2015 against them. It is a remarkable accomplishment for the Houthis having just couple helicopters and no navy at all.

It is extremely like Hezbollah's success in Lebanon. Another similarity is the equipment with drones and missiles with different ranges. The Houthis are known to be in possession of the Scud - B and - C missiles, the North Korean Hwasong variants, the Tochka missile, the Qaher - 1 missile, the Zelzal - 3 ballistic missile and the C - 802 anti - ship cruise missile. These missiles enable the Houthis to attack several Saudi, Emirati, and Israeli targets, including the locations of

<sup>5</sup> Marieke Brandt: Tribes and Politics in Yemen: History of Houthi conflict, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0197783252. pp 145-146

<sup>6</sup> Rawan Saif, Jack Watling: How the UAE's Chinese-Made Drone Is Changing the War in Yemen, Foreign Policy, 27 April 2018. Downloaded from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/27/drone-wars-how-the-uaes-chinese-made-drone-is-changing-the-war-in-yemen/> on 20 February 2024

<sup>7</sup> Lucas Winter: Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances Middle East Policy, Vol. XV.No.1, Spring, 2011. pp 112-115

<sup>8</sup> David Adesnik: Iran Spends \$16 Billion Annually to Support Terrorists and Rogue Regimes, FDD. Policy Brief 2010. Downloaded from <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/01/10/iran-spends-16-billion-annually-to-support-terrorists-and-rogue-regimes/> on 17 February 2024

<sup>9</sup> Glen Carey: The Saudi Town on the Frontline of Yemen's War. 2015. Downloaded from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-21/in-one-saudi-town-gunfire-all-day-brings-yemen-war-near-home?embedded-checkout=true> on 21 February 2024

<sup>10</sup> Taylor Hanna, David K. Bohl, Jonathan B. Moyer: Assessing Impact of War in Yemen: Pathways of Recovery. United Nations Development Programme, e Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, 2021. p. 12. Downloaded from <https://www.undp.org/publications/assessing-impact-war-yemen-pathways-recovery> on 20 February 2024.

International airports, oil refineries, oil tanker terminals and LNG liquefaction plants and export terminals. With these skills, their fanaticism, willingness to martyrdom, the experience of long - term guerrilla warfare and, not least, the help of experts from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iranian weapons and financial support, the Houthis have now developed into a significant asymmetric force. Thanks to Tehran's geopolitical plans and efforts, the so - called Axis of Resistance in which many terrorist organizations and militias participate.

As of 2024, Iran had allies among more than a dozen major militias, some with their own political parties, like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Ansar Allah, that challenged local and neighbouring governments. These organizations are able to take advantage of the power vacuum existing in the given country and area and are integrated into governmental organizations. Relying on their social network, military power, and financial resources, they operate in a practically state - within - a - state manner. It is worth mentioning, that the wrong Middle East policy of the United States, the invasion of Iraq, and the destruction of Saddam Hussein's army, which was the only local force against Iranian expansion, played a major role in Iran's rise to prominence. Then the military withdrawal from Iraq, which offered Iraq on a platter to the leadership in Tehran. Iran very calculatedly took advantage of the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and the fact that the Iraqi army, which had been trained for billions of dollars, collapsed in seconds under ISIS attacks. A prime example of this collapse was when some hundreds of ISIS forces drove two Iraqi divisions out of Mosul. Moreover, the restrained policy towards the Assad regime also suggested that the USA is no longer a reliable partner in the region. This is the reason why the opening of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia was no longer managed by the United States, but by China. China has taken advantage of the shift in US policy attention and made several arms deals with Iran, as well as building a seaport in Djibouti capable of serving an aircraft carrier and a nuclear submarine. The establishment of this Chinese naval base has raised some questions regarding the ambitions of the PRC's both in Africa as well as globally. With this step, China seems to be more and more decisive in realizing its foreign policy ambitions and its strategy of achieving global great power goals. It has become quite apparent that Communist China intends to occupy a more meaningful position on the international stage, and the establishment of military bases, similarly to what the United States, the current global military hegemon, has been doing, can be regarded as one of the first steps in accomplishing this aspiration. Iran Islamic regime supports 12 different terrorist groups in Middle East. These groups are hostile to Saudis, Israelis, Kurds and Emiratis. As it demonstrated in the picture Nr3, Iran through the Iran's Revolutionary Guards provided arms, training and financial support to militias and political movements in at least five countries in the Middle East:

Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain. Moreover, Iranians supported the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Gaza.

Until the brutal attack by Hamas on October 7, the United States tried to distance itself from a direct confrontation with Iranian proxy forces. Through six presidencies since 1984, the United States has used sanctions against Iran's extensive network of Middle Eastern militia proxies rather than military confrontation to curb Tehran's regional influence. Between 2017 and 2021, under Donald Trump presidency, the US increased the scale and nature of restrictive economic measures. Unfortunately, this regime of different sanctions has never fully succeeded. For example, in 2020, according to the State Department's estimation, despite all sanctions in place, Iran was able to provide to Hezbollah around \$700 million.<sup>11</sup> This American policy of sanctioning already started in 1995 when the Clinton administration sanctioned the Hezbollah, the Hamas and the Palestine Islamic Jihad. Between 1995 and 2022, US administrations sanctioned an additional 11 Iranian - backed militias in five Arab countries without any substantial positive outcome.

### Houthis' attacks on the Red Sea

Since the Israel - Hamas war broke out on October 7, the Iran - backed Houthis have carried out several attacks. In the beginning, they targeted Israeli cities, but they were unable to cause any damage to the Jewish State. The Western world did not understand why forces apparently distant from the Gaza problem were attacking Israeli and later Western targets. There are several reasons for carrying out the attacks: the availability of military capabilities, their successes in the civil war and the fight against the Saudi coalition, ideological convictions imbued with deep religious fanaticism. The de facto military victory against the Saudi coalition gave confidence to carry out the attacks. On the other hand, as was shown earlier, their military capabilities, primarily their long - range missiles and drones, were theoretically capable of this. The slogan was "support of Palestinians fighting against Jews in Gaza". So, on 19 October 2023, "in response to the war in the Gaza Strip", the Houthis started firing drones and missiles towards Israel. Most have been intercepted by American warship (USS Carney), or Saudi air defence.<sup>12</sup> On 19 November, the Houthis hijacked a commercial ship in the Red Sea and have since attacked more than two dozen others with drones, missiles, and speed boats. The attacks of the Houthi terrorists in the Red Sea are a manifestation of their ideology rooted in Islamic fundamentalism.

Ansar Allah, which fully serves Iran's geopolitical goals, such as making the creation of the India - Middle East - Europe Economic Corridor impossible and the further development and eventual extension of the Abraham Accords to Saudi Arabia, can sometimes appear not fully under Iranian control.<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Houthis' resilience and unexpected capabilities allowed the Iranians to indirectly put

<sup>11</sup> Ashley Lane: Iran's Islamist Proxies in the Middle East. Wilson Center. 12 September 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.iranwatch.org/library/private-viewpoints/iran-islamist-proxies-middle-east> on 21 February 2024

<sup>12</sup> Oren Lieberman: Incident involving US warship intercepting missiles near Yemen lasted 9 hours. CNN politics 20 October. Downloaded from <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/20/politics/us-warship-intercept-missiles-near-yemen/index.html> on 02 February 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Nadwa al Dawsari: The ideological underpinnings of the Houthis' Red Sea attacks. Middle East Institute, 22 January 2024. Downloaded from <https://www.mei.edu/publications/ideological-underpinnings-houthis-red-sea-attacks> on 02 February 2024

Saudi Arabia under pressure, and along its border, with a limited material investment. Moreover, Iran has also gained an indirect access to the Red Sea due to the Houthis' presence in Hodeida. The Islam Revolutionary Guard Corps is primarily interested in maintaining transit points for weapons and smuggling through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. At the same time, as one of the main forces of the so-called "axis of resistance", it articulates the same political goal as Iran, that is, to oust the United States from the Middle East, to destroy Israel, and to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate, the capital of which would naturally be Jerusalem. The organization was preparing for a clash with the Americans and Israelis, since after the October 7th attack, about 45,000 militiamen were given military training, preparing them for the war before the recapture of Jerusalem before Judgment Day.<sup>14</sup> The Houthi terrorists continued their attacks against Israeli targets until the middle of November, but they were practically unable to cause any damage to Israel, at which point they changed their tactics. On November 19, the Japanese-operated transport ship "Galaxy Leader" with a crew of 25 was hijacked by Houthi militia men. The Houthis began systematically attacking merchant ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Up to now, 40 commercial ships have been attacked by the Houthi terrorists. Those attacks targeted absolutely civilians, unarmed personnel, and civilian objects, which, carried out deliberately or recklessly, are a war crime. Moreover, taking hostages is prohibited under international humanitarian law, including under Common Article 3 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, is a war crime as well.

The Houthis are fully aware of the fact that the Red Sea is a crucial shipping route, through which 20% of the world's shipping flows. As such it is extremely important to keep this route open and as such an international coalition has been assembled to provide protection for ships transversing this area. For them, it is extremely important that, if they cannot harm the Israelis in any other way, they should at least make the traffic to Eilat, this port is Israel's only cargo terminal on the Red Sea more difficult and thus cause financial damage to Israel.

According to the Chief Executive of the Port, by the middle of December, Israel's Eilat Port had seen an 85% drop in activity since Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen stepped up attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. Eilat primarily

handles car imports and potash exports coming from the Dead Sea, pales in size compared to Israel's Mediterranean ports in Haifa and Ashdod which handle most of the country's trade.<sup>15</sup> Egypt also affected by the Red Sea crisis. In 2023, Egypt's revenue was around 10 milliard USD. In January 2024, dollar revenues from Egypt's Suez Canal are down 40% from the beginning of the year compared to 2023.<sup>16</sup> As it is represented on the next picture, the nautical road to Europe from Asia, via the Cape Good Hope is longer by 3500 nautical miles and 8-10 days, consequently much costly. On 18 December, the US launched Operation Prosperity Guardian. Interestingly, although the United States has announced that the coalition currently has more than 20 members, half of them is not listed as participating states. The reason behind this is that the names of ten coalition member countries are not known because they participate anonymously. On 10 January, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a resolution demanding a cessation of Houthi attacks on merchant vessels.<sup>17</sup> The day of the UNSC resolution, the fanatic Houthis launched their largest-ever barrage of 18-24 attack drones and missiles at international ships and warships in the Red Sea.<sup>18</sup> This unprecedented attack is clear evidence that the Houthis wanted to provoke an armed confrontation with the United States and countries they consider infidels. His other intention with the attack also would be that to divert attention from the extremely worrying situation affecting the population, such as epidemics, food and water shortages and the low level of health care. According to the United Nations, in Yemen 18.2 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection services and 17.6 million people are facing food and nutrition insecurity.<sup>19</sup> In response, on 12 January, the coalition launched its first airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen, to which the Houthis have pledged to retaliate. According to CENTCOM that the primary purpose of the airstrikes was to deter the Houthis.<sup>20</sup> Should be noted that only few of the Houthi attacks have been successful, causing minor or major damage to merchant ships (one ship has been sunk so far) or taking control. To date, the harm to the global economy is modest. For example, Chinese shipping lines haven't given up on the Suez Canal route. Obviously, the cost of disruption of trade flows in the Red Sea can be measured at hundreds of millions of dollars and rising. However, the shipping fees have increased, approximately three times, but they remain well below the peak of the epidemic era.<sup>21</sup> From the of war point of view, the Houthis outlaw militias are

<sup>14</sup> Alistair Taylor: Conflict, competition, and containment will shape the contours of the MENA region in 2024

<sup>15</sup> Ari Rabinovitz: Israel's Eilat Port sees 85% drop-in activity amid Red Sea Houthi attacks. Reuters 21 December 2023. Downloaded from <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israels-eilat-port-sees-85-drop-activity-amid-red-sea-houthi-attacks-2023-12-21/> on 02 February 2024

<sup>16</sup> Nabila el Gaafary: Egypt's Suez Canal revenue declines by almost half due to Red Sea tension. The New Arab, 20 February 2024. Downloaded from <https://www.newarab.com/news/egypts-suez-canal-revenue-shrinks-almost-half-on-02-february-2024>

<sup>17</sup> UNSC: Adopting Resolution 2722 (2024) by Recorded Vote, Security Council Demands Houthis Immediately Stop Attacks on Merchant, Commercial Vessels in Red Sea SC/15561 10 January 2024. Downloaded from <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15561.doc.htm> on 02 February 2024

<sup>18</sup> Eric Tegler: Destroyers Shot Down 24 Houthi Missiles And Drones: That'll Be \$17 Million. Forbes, 10 January 2024. Downloaded from

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/erictegner/2024/01/10/destroyers-shot-down-24-houthi-missiles--drones-thatll-be-17m/> on 02 February 2024.

<sup>19</sup> OCHA: Yemen: Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2024 (January 2024). Downloaded from <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-response-plan-hrp-2024-january-2024> on 02 February 2024

<sup>20</sup> CENTCOM Press Releases. Downloaded from <https://search.usa.gov/search?affiliate=centcom&page=4&query=houthis&utf8=%26%23x2713%3B> on 02 February 2024

<sup>21</sup> Spencer Freingold: Sea attacks: What trade experts are saying about the shipping disruptions. World Economic Forum 20 February 2024. Downloaded from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/02/red-sea-attacks-trade-experts-houthi-shipping-yemen/> on 02 February 2024.

conducting in typical sort of asymmetric warfare. De facto, US Navy ships use 2 million USD missiles to shoot down drones that cost 2,000 USD for Houthis or Iranians to build. Despite the barrage of strikes from the coalition forces, the Houthis have continued to launch missiles and drones at ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, so the deterrence has not worked, and the degradation of anti-ship capabilities has not worked either. The Western assumption was that the Houthis did not have large quantities of anti-ship missiles on stock, which cost between 2 million and 4 million USD. These devices are regularly used by the Houthis for attacks, along with the cheaper kamikaze drones, and they are primarily targeted and destroyed by coalition airstrikes. Consequently, the fact that they are able to continue the airstrikes assumes that Iran manages to make up for the losses through smuggling. Hence, almost certainly the next step could be the US led coalition starts to target the resupply line that has a great risk of escalation. Now, the extremely important question, how to stop Houthis? It is only possible to greatly reduce or stop the attacks of the Houthis if opponents act with greater military force, block the supply routes, and regularly check all transport ships and even fishing boats going to Yemen. For this, the coalition needs a significantly larger military force. The navy task force of the EU has already appeared in the region, but this is of more symbolic importance. It is also worth mentioning that the Western strikes may play into the group's narrative, reinforcing the claim that they are fighting oppressive foreign enemies attacking Yemen, which could potentially bolster the Houthis' image among their fanatic supporters.

## Conclusion

Yemen has never been a Westphalian state, with defined territorial boundaries and a clear monopoly of force. On the contrary, contemporary Yemen is often described as a "weak or failing state". The members of the terrorist organization Ansar Allah and the Houthi movement are strongly inspired by the ideology of the Iranian revolution and are committed to creating a political structure similar to the Tehran regime and to participating in the war envisioned by their radical religious world to recapture Jerusalem. Rather than directly attacking its adversaries, Iran operates indirectly through religious partners, Shia terrorist groups, militia forces and proxies. In the countries of the Middle East where the power of the central government has weakened, Iran has successfully expanded its power by ideologically radicalizing its Shia religious community. Militarily, it more often resorted to irregular forms of warfare, but it also used its financial resources from oil revenues to expand its influence. One of Iran's strongest allies in the region is the Houthi extremists who de facto rule Yemen. Unfortunately, as a result of the Houthis' policy dictated by their religious fanaticism, the civilian population of Yemen will again suffer and endanger millions of human lives, including the lives of numerous children. This humanitarian disaster situation is much bigger than the situation in Gaza. No policy is likely to bring peace to Yemen. After all, it's up to the Yemenis, not the Americans, and certainly not the Saudis. It is clear that Iran's policy should also change in order to avoid a disaster in Yemen and to make the region more stable. The key country is Islamic Republic of Iran: it is a radically Islamist, ruthless regime, the world's leading state sponsor of terror and anti-

Semitism, and the principal driver of instability in the Middle East. The American leadership, regardless of which party's candidate will be the president, needs to pay more attention to the Middle East than it currently does. The international community is divided regarding the crisis, so a quick political solution cannot be expected.

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