

Security Council (SC)

Topic B:

Addressing the broader implications of the attacks by Houthis on merchant and commercial vessels.



I. Introduction:

Since November 2023, the Houthi movement has conducted over 100 attacks on merchant and commercial vessels, making it their prime goal to fight against the expansion of Salafism in Yemen. These attacks carried out primarily in the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, continue to disrupt international trade routes between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Before said assaults, around 6.2 million barrels of oil passed through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait daily, whereas, in the first 8 months of 2024, it plummeted by over 50% (*gCaptain*). Other than causing social disruptions, this leads to volatility in global oil markets with continuously rising prices and increasing shipping times and freight rates. Additionally, the geopolitical implications increase tensions amongst regional powers and jeopardize local and global stability.

II. Definition of Key Terms:

Houthi movement: Zaydi Shia Islamist political and military organization, emerged in Yemen in the 1990's.

Merchant and commercial vessels: (In this context) watercraft transporting cargo

Salafism: A revival movement from the 19th century in Islam based around the idea that the most authentic Islam is found in the early generations of Muslims called the Salaf, who were closest to the Prophet Muhammad

Maritime Chokepoint: Narrow waterways through which high amounts of global trade pass.

Global Supply Chain: Worldwide system of production and distribution of goods that is dependent on secure and efficient trade routes.

International Maritime Organization (IMO): UN agency that regulates shipping and ensures maritime safety on a global scale.

Asymmetric warfare: Type of war in which weaker parties utilize unconventional tactics including maritime attacks.

Piracy: Criminal acts at sea, involving attacking and stealing from ships; different but often overlapping with insurgent activities

Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (Hadi government): Yemeni politician and military officer who was Yemen's second president from 2012 until 2022. In 2015 he was forced to resign by the Houthis who protested against his choice to raise fuel subsidies and their dissatisfaction with the 2011 revolution.

III. Background Information

Although these issues have only recently risen, they are rooted in Yemen's protracted war, in which the Houthis have been a part of since 2014, seizing control of most of northern Yemen and forcing the government out of Sanaa, the capital (*Xinhua*). With Iran's and Saudi Arabia's regional power's support gained in 2015, in fact, the Houthis generated a coalition backing Yemen's government UNHCR, generating a full-scale war. The developing conflict saw significant consequences including the death of former President Saleh in 2017 and the power shift from the Hadi government to the Presidential Leadership Council in 2022. The Houthi movement has since then evolved and gone beyond land-based warfare; they use maritime attacks to assert their power and economically damage adversaries.

After a 6 month nationwide truce announced by the UN in 2022 ended, over 100 attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait alone, were carried out (by 2023) (*Arab Center Washington DC*).

Although formally terminated, there is still an ongoing ceasefire, with however, some intense periodic clashes. In fact, the Red Sea crisis has continued to escalate in 2023, generating international military responses including Operation Prosperity Guardian, led by the United States (see countries involved for explanation), and missile strikes in Yemen.

IV. Major countries and agencies involved in the issue:

Yemen:

Yemen is the primary country involved in the conflict as the Houthis have seized control of the northern portions of the country since 2014. This war has divided the country, and destroyed its economy, infrastructure, and social aspects, leaving it in a state of absolute crisis.

Saudi Arabia:

The country leads a coalition that supports Yemen's internationally recognized government against the Houthis. It has also led various military operations such as airstrikes since 2015, in hopes of weakening Houthi control. This, though, has caused extensive economic problems for Saudi Arabia, as well as societal issues including destroyed infrastructure due to the Houthi movement's cross-border missile and drone attacks. Saudi Arabia has also engaged in peace negotiations, especially after restoring ties with Iran in 2023.

Iran

Iran supports the Houthi movement as they have and continue to provide them with financial support, armament, and training. Their involvement has been detected as a way of decreasing Saudi Arabia's influence in the area and placing itself as the dominant power. As a supporter of the Houthis, Iran also has leverage over significant maritime trade routes including the Red Sea.

United States:

The United States has imposed the so-called Operation Prosperity Guardian, a military operation by a multinational coalition formed in December 2023, which aims to protect trade in the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

Arab League:

A regional organization formed in Cairo in 1945 made of 22 Arab countries including Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. It has condemned Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels and continuously advocates for stronger international measures to protect the mentioned arab trade routes.

Saudi-led Coalition:

Union between 9 countries from West Asia and North Africa including Saudi Arabia, UAE. It originated in March 2015 when Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the main powerhouses in the coalition, began military operations in Yemen, as requested by the Yemeni President Hadi. They bolstered Yemeni resistance and weakened their military capacity, forcing Houthi-Saleh forces into the defensive.

V. Previous resolutions and decisions:

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216:

This resolution, adopted in April 2015, imposed an arms embargo which consisted of land, sea and air blockade. It further demanded that the Houthis withdraw from seized areas, relinquish weapons and end all violent acts against Yemens government.

<https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/s/res/2216-%282015%29-0>

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2451:

This 2018 resolution endorsed the Stockholm Agreement, promoting a set of confidence-building measures in hopes to de-escalate the conflict. It contained various provisions for a ceasefire in Hodeidah port, a crucial hub for commercial shipments, and sought to prevent further disruptions to maritime trade.

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/461/15/pdf/n1846115.pdf>

VI. Possible solutions:

1. Establishing a Maritime Security Corridor in prime areas such as the Red Sea, allowing for protected areas, controlled by international naval forces, to ensure safety for commercial and merchant vessels
2. Strengthening naval cooperation either on regional or global levels by advocating for increased monitorization from the main countries involved including Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.
3. Implementing sanctions on entities, governments, and supply chains linked to the Houthi movement, restricting their availability to weapons and dangerous resources that may fuel their attacks on the vessels.
4. Forming an International Task Force under the UN to document and respond to Houthi attacks, ensuring that they are properly investigated and dealt with.
5. Further developing and enhancing already existing anti-piracy agreements to address the maritime attacks and threats.

VI. Works Cited/Useful Resources

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