

# Houthis pulling their weight for Gaza

## Israel, allies moving to keep lid on

By Reza Raadfar  
Political analyst

### PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

Yemen's Houthis (Ansarullah), one of the few resistance groups that actually followed up with its promise of standing up for the people of Gaza, is increasingly becoming a source of worry for Israel and its allies. Once a small group of dissatisfied youth in one of the poorest and most war-stricken countries in the world, it has now turned into such a formidable military force that it gives the most powerful armies in the world second doubts about starting a conflict with it.

By controlling the irrefutably strategic Bab al-Mandeb Strait, the Ansarullah has the ability to make entry into the Red Sea hazardous for any ship that it deems to be working against its ideological and strategic interests, and that's exactly what it has been doing over the past month or so. It's not the first ruling body in the world to use its geostrategic position to its advantage; in fact, it is following in the footsteps of all its enemies, including Israel, US, UK, and Saudi Arabia, in this regard.

The six countries bordering the Red Sea proper are not in the crosshairs of the Ansarullah. However, through the Suez Canal — the shortest maritime route to Asia from Europe — the Red Sea is connected to the Mediterranean Sea, where Israel, the Gaza Strip, Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria all have coastlines. So, on the one hand, the Ansarullah has used its strategic position over the narrow strait to attack any vessel they believe is either going to or coming from Israel through the Red Sea, and on the other hand, used Yemen's relative proximity to Israel itself to launch several ballistic missiles at military posts in southern Israel.

It is worth noting that during this latest bout of heightened tension in the Red Sea, the resistance group has been cherry-picking its targets; so much has been apparent from digging into the trajectories or ownership of the maritime vessels and their cargos. The top Houthi officials have repeatedly stated that their ire is directed toward Israel and its interests, and that's what they were targeting so far. Granted, many of their missiles and drones have either inflicted little to no casualties or been intercepted by the US warships in the region, but the Houthis have likely succeeded in what they were trying to do: cautiously expanding the war on Gaza and inciting the fear of economic loss in the hearts of state leaders that are sitting on the fence and allowing that



The Galaxy Leader cargo ship is escorted by Houthi boats in the Red Sea in this photo released on November 20, 2023.  
REUTERS

atrocities in Gaza to go on. However, since the Western world, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, are staunch allies of Israel and, at times, have common interests in the safe passage of Israeli ships, they have been hard at work to build an anti-Houthi consensus in international organizations and media. Despite being labeled as a "threat to global economy" in more than one instance, which the Houthis have downplayed to only include the economy of Israel and its trading partners, the Yemeni group has not yet been slowed in their pursuit of alleviating the Israeli pressure on Gazans. Given that the rather small Yemeni group seemed unfazed by Tel Aviv and Washington's almost daily threats over the

past two months and kept humbling its foes, at least in spirit, the US announced the formation of a naval protection task force operating in the southern Red Sea in an attempt to ward off mounting attacks from the Ansarullah on merchant shipping. Only days after being touted as including more than 20 nations, key players with major naval capabilities such as France, Italy, and Spain publicly stated that they don't want to be associated with the task force at all. Nearly half of the remaining countries have so far not come forward to acknowledge their contributions or allowed the US to do so; so those contributions can range from dispatching warships to merely sending a staff officer. Meanwhile, some hawkish po-

litical figures in Israel and the United States have been quick to seize the opportunity and demand that either Iran reins in the Ansarullah or we deem Iran responsible for the expansion of war. To begin with, while Tehran supports the Ansarullah and approves of some of their actions, it has repeatedly denied being involved in planning the group's attacks as they act independently. Moreover, that line of reasoning is a stretch. After all, the United States is an ally to many countries, particularly Israel, but it notoriously cannot and will not rein in Israeli cabinets, especially the ultra-right-wing cabinet of Benjamin Netanyahu. This is a comparison that those political figures are more than happy to overlook since they know that logically,

as the Iranian foreign minister said, Israel's war on Gaza, where it is "massacring women and children," should be a bigger concern than the stopping of Israeli ships in the Red Sea.

Yet, on Sunday 31, 2023, the British newspaper The Times reported that UK, US, and possibly other members of the aforementioned task force are planning to unleash a salvo of missiles against preplanned targets in Yemen. The Iranian foreign minister told his British counterpart that his country will definitely give a strong response to any act of aggression and adventurism by Israel, which will make the regime regret its actions. A day later, it was announced that Iran's Alborz warship has entered the Red Sea through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. It also comes after Seyyed Razi Mousavi, a senior commander in the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, was killed in an Israeli air strike outside of Damascus last week.

Yemen's Ansarullah is doing its part in helping the people of Gaza. What it has been doing may not have amounted to much in the eyes of some, but it was within its capacity. Interestingly, even that much it achieved elicited such a strong response from Israel and its Western allies that one wonders what the Arab countries and resistance groups of the region could achieve if they all stepped in simultaneously to take tangible steps for the oppressed Palestinians.

Yemen's Houthi movement displays ballistic missiles during a military parade on September 21, 2023, in Sanaa, Yemen.  
MOHAMMED HAMOUD/GETTY IMAGES

