



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Attacks in the Red Sea - Iran seeks global pressure on Israel through the disruption of international shipping



The frequent attacks on military and merchant ships in the Red Sea region represent the most severe spill over of Israel's war against Hamas since it began 2 months ago.

The escalation confirms the desire of Iran and its regional proxies to destabilise the region in zones where they could act combatively under the pretext of protecting the Palestinians in Gaza.

Tensions off the coast of Yemen, where attacks by the pro-Iranian Houthi militia on allied military and merchant ships reached their peak last week.

Last Sunday, drones and rockets were launched on 3 merchant ships. The US military ship returned fire and remained undamaged, while civilian vessels suffered only minor damages.

Since the start of the conflict between Israel and Hamas until the latest incident last Wednesday, the US Navy has opened fire on drones and rockets 6 times. This trend of escalation shows no signs of calming down, as evidenced by the preparations of the US and its allies for increased defence in the region.

The involvement of Iran

Iran is undoubtedly behind the escalation in the Red Sea zone, a vital maritime corridor for global trade. This was confirmed by American civil and military officials, leaving no doubt that Tehran is directly behind the Houthi's actions in Yemen.

“The weapons here are being supplied by Iran. Iran, we believe, is the ultimate party responsible for this”, said Jake Sullivan, US National Security Advisor.

The frequency of attacks by Yemeni pro-Iranian supporters on vessels in the Red Sea shows Tehran's intention to trigger considerable regional tensions from that zone

Since the terrorist attacks of Hamas on Israel on October 7 and the start of the Israeli intervention in Gaza, there has been an open concern that Iran will become involved as a factor in the escalation in the region, either directly or, as has always been more probable, through its proxies.

Attacks by Hezbollah, one of the pro-Iranian groups, on Israel from neighbouring Lebanon were sporadic and have not caused a significant escalation in 2 months, even though they remain a direct threat.

However, the frequency of attacks by Yemeni pro-Iranian supporters on vessels in the Red Sea shows Tehran's intention to trigger considerable regional tensions from that zone.

Red Sea - an ideal zone for crisis escalation

From Iran's point of view, armed actions in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden provide much greater scope for creating a large-scale crisis than any other area in the Middle East.

Drone and rocket attacks have been aimed at Israeli merchant ships or cargo for Israel, directly attacking Israeli interests.

This was the case with the **hijacking** of the Israeli-linked car carrier Galaxy Leader, when the attackers took the international crew hostage.

Also, the escalation in the Red Sea zone is favourable for Iran given that the US Navy is present in the region and, due to the danger of frequent attacks, will have to engage directly, possibly increasing its forces in that area.

For Iran, this would also mean stretching US resources in the region at several crisis points, expecting that this could lead to their weakening.

Tehran expects the most significant effect from provocations in the Red Sea causing disruptions to global commercial shipping,

where it would position itself as an actor that manages that crisis and expects profit from its resolution.



The attacks made the large container carriers start to avoid the Red Sea and the passage of cargo through the Suez Canal, searching for alternative surrounding routes

Iran wants to create unbearable pressure on Israel's allies to influence Israel to cease actions against Hamas if it manages to establish a permanent threat on frequent global shipping routes in the Middle East.

10% of the global maritime transport of oil (about 9 million barrels per day) and millions of tons of other goods, particularly food, pass through the Red Sea route. Another 40% of global maritime oil transport passes through the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, which Tehran previously made a risky corridor.

The latest attacks by the pro-Iranian militia in Yemen on vessels in the Red Sea raise the Iranian threat to global trade to an even higher level. These attacks made the large container carriers **start to avoid** the Red Sea and the passage of cargo through the Suez Canal, searching for alternative surrounding routes.

A smaller number of ships have already chosen to bypass the Cape of Good Hope and continue towards Europe and the Mediterranean despite the additional expenses incurred by the 20-day prolonged voyage.

Strengthening of the allied presence in the region

The growing crisis in the Red Sea region has been causing new disruption to global supply chains, and it risks hitting the European, the US, and China markets.

The US initiated forming an international task force, which would increase the safety of navigation through the risky area. Jake Sullivan announced that 7 out of 39 allied nations already participating in a joint mission in international waters around the Middle East, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, have responded to the US invitation.

To what extent the tensions in this part of the Middle East will escalate depends solely on Iran

To what extent the tensions in this part of the Middle East will escalate depends solely on Iran and the extent to which it wants to confront the US and its allies.

Reports that Saudi Arabia asked the US to be as restrained as possible in armed responses are evidence that the allied bloc is determined to oppose further Iranian actions through a proxy in Yemen

The supreme interest of Saudi Arabia is that the Israeli operation against Hamas does not spill over and destabilise the entire region. However, Iran has different interests, which creates an obligation for Saudi Arabia to try to solve the root of its fears for the region's stability with Iran, given that they normalised diplomatic relations last March.