



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The Year of the Houthis



This was a successful year for the Houthis. While they played a part, circumstances beyond their control, such as others' reluctance to stop their destruction in the Red Sea region, further influenced this.

The pro-Iranian extremists in Yemen began terrorist attacks on civilian and military vessels exactly one year ago. They were one of the first extremist militias in the region to take military action in October last year in solidarity with the Palestinians following the Israeli intervention.

One year after the initial attacks on ships in the Red Sea zone, the Houthis, with Iran's strong support, have emerged as one of the most powerful, well-equipped, and dangerous extremist groups not only in the Middle East but also globally.

Their actions have disrupted shipping through the corridor, through which around USD 1 trillion worth of goods pass annually. According to the Egyptian authorities, traffic through the Suez Canal has **decreased** by 60–70 per cent in the past year, and the Egyptian budget alone suffers a loss of around USD 6 billion due to the reduced traffic.

The constant attacks forced the major shipping companies to avoid sailing through the Gulf of Aden, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Red Sea towards Suez, instead choosing to divert around the Cape of Good Hope.

Only a small number of merchant ships still travel through the Red Sea and Suez, albeit under the escort of allied warships.

## Disruptions will continue in 2025

Few terrorist or extremist organisations in history can "boast" such a global impact of their actions as the Houthis.

Everything indicates that the disruption caused by the Houthis will continue. "There

are no signs of de-escalation and it is not safe for our vessels or personnel to go there. Our expectation at this point is that it will last well into 2025," **said** Vincent Clerc, CEO of Maersk, the world's leading container carrier.

The Houthis are still a threat, as they have been allowed to maintain their supply of weapons and military material and, to a large extent, their fighting infrastructure in Yemen over the past year.

### The European allies are trying hard to avoid any offensive action against the Houthis, staying away from escalation

The Western allies responded to the Houthis' actions with indecision and mildness from the outset. The first offensive strike by US forces against Houthi positions in Yemen did not take place until January of this year, almost three months after the Houthis had begun their campaign. During this time, they carried out 26 attacks on merchant ships and nine on American and allied ships in the region.

However, such a long tolerance was too short for the European allies, who are trying hard to **avoid** any offensive action against the Houthis, staying away from escalation, and responding only reactively.

## Hesitation of the allies

The more offensive action of the Americans and British, albeit belated and hesitant, was the reason for the Europeans to launch their own military operation in the region and withdraw from the joint American command.

The fear was America's closeness to Israel, which the Europeans felt could lead to escalation and a general conflict with the Houthis.

During this period, as the allies hesitated and attempted to de-escalate the situation in the Red Sea zone as much as possible, the Houthis

stabilised their supply channels, established logistical points to receive equipment and weapons, and consolidated, all under the supervision and support of Iran.

### "The Houthis may see themselves as the main winners in the post-October 2023 conflict" - Michael Knights

"The Houthis may see themselves as the main winners in the post-October 2023 conflict," **said** Dr Michael Knights of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

In the actions of the Houthis, he observes "tactical evolution," decreasing weaknesses and poor technical equipment, as they had at the beginning of the operations a year ago. "Their extended maritime line of supply to Iran and related smuggling networks have not yet been effectively addressed by their adversaries," said Dr Knights.

## A test for the Trump administration

Following the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah at the end of September and the rapid loss of power of this previously strongest pro-Iranian faction in the region due to Israeli attacks, the Houthis have received political and moral support within the Axis of Resistance.



*We should not wait for U.S. casualties to take further action to impose costs on the Houthis - Marco Rubio*

The Houthis are becoming Tehran's favourite due to the decimation of Hezbollah's capacities. This could have been predicted, but the allies missed an opportunity to make it more difficult to provide supplies and other types of support to their proxy in Yemen.

The Houthis could face far more serious attacks than before when the Trump administration takes office. The attitude towards the Houthis will be a very clear sign of Trump's overall positioning towards Iran.

Future US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also hinted at a more decisive action, recently **launching** a bipartisan initiative urging Secretary Antony Blinken to "redesignate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation after the Biden-Harris Administration foolishly removed that designation" in 2021.

"Despite coalition strikes in Yemen intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities of the Houthis, the group has been able to continue committing acts of terrorism. We should not wait for U.S. casualties to take further action to impose costs on the Houthis," reads the request of the group of senators led by Marco Rubio.