



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

The Houthis are terrorists again



The United States has officially designated the pro-Iranian militants in Yemen, the Houthis, as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO). US President Donald Trump **announced** this step in the first days of his new term in January.

"The Houthis' activities threaten the security of American civilians and personnel in the Middle East, the safety of our closest regional partners, and the stability of global maritime trade," **said** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the beginning of the implementation of the new administration's decision.

This continued the expected bickering between the heads of the White House, so that the decision on the Houthis has now practically been pushed back to January 2021, when Trump, at the end of his first presidential term, made the same decision.

Only a few months later, President Joe Biden withdrew this decision, despite the unchanged circumstances on the ground, where the pro-Iranian Houthis have continuously carried out attacks not only on the civilian population in Yemen but also on neighbouring countries.

As in his first term, President Trump is now reversing the decisions of his Democratic predecessor on a large scale. In this sense, the decision to redesignate the Houthis as a terrorist organisation was not unexpected.

Moreover, it is in line with the strong alliance Trump has forged with Israel from the first days of his new term, as well as his firm stance on Iran.

Cessation of business operations

According to the new decision, the Houthis will be treated by the USA like any other terrorist organisation. Any contact with them, especially business activities, will be considered support for terrorism.

"The United States will not tolerate any country engaging with terrorist organisations

like the Houthis in the name of practising legitimate international business," said Secretary Rubio.

The classification of the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation not only has a domestic political motive but is also intended to have an impact on the situation in the Middle East.

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This decision comes at a time when the pro-Iranian fighting in the region has stalled, and the forces carrying it out are in complete confusion and on the defensive. This also applies to the Houthis, who have remained the most viable militant arm of Tehran's influence in the region following the decimation of Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon by Israel, and especially after the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria.

With the conclusion of a ceasefire in Gaza, the Houthis have ceased their attacks on civilian and military ships in the Red Sea; the original reason for their aggressive behaviour in the region, namely solidarity with Hamas' resistance against Israel in Gaza, has ceased.

Nevertheless, they carried out more than a hundred missile attacks on ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden between autumn 2023 and the conclusion of the ceasefire, bringing shipping on one of the busiest international sea routes to a virtual standstill during this period.

The last attack on Houthi positions was **carried out** by American forces in January of this year, so the crisis in the region appears to be calming down.

Humanitarian concerns

However, the Houthis' capabilities continue to pose a regional **threat**, which is why international maritime traffic is only very

tentatively and slowly returning to normal.

The fact that the US has put the Houthis back on the blacklist of terrorist organisations is certainly justified in view of the group's long-term aggressive actions, both in Yemen itself and against facilities and personnel of the US and its allies in the region.



Humanitarian mediators believe that declaring the Houthis a terrorist organisation will effectively block humanitarian efforts in Yemen

The biggest challenge to the US decision comes from international humanitarian mediators, who still believe that declaring the Houthis a terrorist organisation will effectively block humanitarian efforts in Yemen, where nearly 20 million people are facing an existential crisis.

"The FTO designation could lead to restrictions or delays on imports of essential commodities, as well as higher prices. In a country where 49% of the population is food insecure and 55% of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition, this could have devastating consequences," **said** Anne Garella of Action Against Hunger before Trump's decision.

After all, it was the same motives that prompted Joe Biden's administration to remove the Houthis from the list of international terrorists in the first weeks of its term in January 2021.

However, it turned out that this decision did not pacify the Houthis; on the contrary. They continued their fighting and became even more radicalised since November 2023 when

they launched attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

Further limiting the potential of the Houthis

When Biden removed the Houthis from the list of terrorist organisations, the United Arab Emirates, which had itself been the victim of several attacks by the Houthis on its territory, believed that humanitarian aid for the population would not be jeopardised if the Houthis were declared terrorists.

"According to the (US) Supreme Court, working separately but in parallel with an FTO to advance its aims—let alone to dispense humanitarian aid to a general population—does not constitute "material support" for an FTO," **considered** the UAE government, dissatisfied with the decision of then President Biden to remove the Houthis from the list of terrorist organisations.

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Trump's blacklisting of the Houthis will be an additional blow to the militants' potential to pose a threat in and around Yemen, especially on their supply channels from abroad.

"The US government is committed to holding the Houthis accountable for acquiring weapons and weapons components from suppliers in Russia, China, and Iran to threaten Red Sea security," the US State Department announced.

Despite the fact that Iran's overall influence in the Middle East has declined dramatically, the Houthis' destructive potential remains, so Washington's recent decision is an important step towards minimising this threat in the future.

Furthermore, Washington's decision reduces the Houthis' chances of influencing peace and

stabilisation negotiations, whether in Yemen
or in the region as a whole.