



By: TA | AP Insight

How serious is the Houthis' threat of a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia?



Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on Monday announced they are imposing a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia in retaliation for a blockade on Yemen and a recent **attack on Sanaa International Airport**, threatening another vital waterway for global shipping and raising fears of renewed conflict.

A Houthi military spokesperson, Yahya Saree, said in a video statement that the maritime ban against Saudi Arabia will be effective immediately, describing it as an "equation of 'an eye for an eye.'"

There were few details on how the embargo might work, but the deputy head of the Houthi media office, Nasruddin Amer, said on X that the Bab al-Mandeb strait will be closed to the Saudis in response to what he called the kingdom's "unjust blockade on Yemenis for over 10 years."

Bab el-Mandeb, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is the gateway to the Red Sea through which around 12% of the world's trade usually passes.

A fourth of global container trade transits through the 32-kilometer (20-mile)-wide strait to and from the Suez Canal.

The Houthis earlier demonstrated their ability to disrupt shipping there when they targeted ships for months over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, with over 100 vessels attacked.

It is unclear whether the Houthis will resume that level of attack against neighboring Saudi Arabia.

East-West Pipeline

There was no immediate response from Saudi Arabia. The kingdom already faced pressure as it uses its East-West Pipeline to the Red Sea as an alternative to the **Strait of Hormuz**, which remains in the grip that Iran imposed shortly after the U.S. and Israel attacked it on Feb. 28.

The Saudis have been sending millions of barrels of crude oil a day through the pipeline.

Saudi Arabia leads a coalition against the Houthis and imposed an air and sea blockade on Yemen in 2015

Now, about 2.5 million barrels of oil per day could be at risk, Texas-based Rystad Energy wrote Monday.

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Hundreds of supporters back the embargo

Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when the rebels seized the capital, Sanaa, and much of northern Yemen and forced the government into exile. A truce was reached in 2022.

That truce has been threatened in recent days after the Houthis said the Saudis struck the Sanaa airport in an attempt to affect a flight carrying Houthi leaders back from Iran, where they attended the funeral of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The plane landed safely at another airport.

Houthis are prepared to confront "any foolish act committed by the reckless Saudi enemy" - Yahya Saree

The Houthis then launched missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia's Abha International Airport in the most significant confrontation in years.

By allowing a direct international flight to land without the approval of the Saudi-led coalition, the Houthis sought to establish a new reality in which they could independently make decisions over Yemen's airspace, experts told the AP.

"We affirm the right of our great people to

respond to the blockade with a blockade,” Saree emphasized on Monday, adding that Houthis are prepared to confront “any foolish act committed by the reckless Saudi enemy ... with a comprehensive and decisive escalation.”

Houthi-run Al Masirah TV broadcast footage of hundreds of supporters gathering in the city of Ibb, south of Sanaa, to back the embargo against Saudi Arabia. Similar rallies were held in the governorates of Saada, Marib, Hajjah and Taiz.

The stockpile of drones is running low

The Houthis are a crucial part of Iran’s so-called “Axis of Resistance,” which also includes militant groups in Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian territories.

The rebels have had a large stockpile of drones, but several Houthi members **previously told the AP** that the stockpile is running low after its attacks during the Israel-Hamas war.



Disrupting transit through the Bab al-Mandeb forces shipping firms to route vessels around the Cape of Good Hope off South Africa, significantly increasing costs

The Iran war has further impeded the flow of weapons, said the members, who at the time spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorized to talk to the media.

The U.S. and Israel responded to the Houthis’ earlier attacks on shipping with a punishing air campaign across Houthi-held areas in Yemen

until a deal that saw the rebels stop their assaults.

Disrupting transit through the Bab al-Mandeb forces shipping firms to route vessels around the Cape of Good Hope off South Africa, significantly increasing costs.

The U.S. government in the past has said going around the cape would add about 2,700 miles (4,345 kilometers) to the journey from Saudi Arabia to the U.S.