

Houthi Attacks on Red Sea Shipping: From Campaign to Coastline

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RELATED BILLS [S. 3451](#) (Houthi Human Rights Accountability Act); [H.R. 10354](#) (To impose targeted sanctions on the Houthi terrorists and their supporters, and to support the internationally recognized Government of Yemen in their fight against Houthi terrorists.)

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In brief

Core point: In September 2026 the Houthis took Mocha, Perim Island and the Hanish islands, placing them on the Bab el-Mandeb.¹

Why it matters: Nearly 15 percent of global trade transits the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.²

On the record: The State Department designated Ansarallah a Foreign Terrorist Organization by notice published March 5, 2025.³

Scale: A U.S. Maritime Administration advisory records more than 100 Houthi attacks on commercial vessels from November 2023 to October 2025.⁴

Supply chain: Documents reported by Jonathan Spyer name Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese advisers on drones, missiles and intelligence.⁵

The campaign

The Houthis began attacking shipping on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden route in November 2023 and paused with the ceasefire of January 15, 2025.⁶ U.S. strikes ran from March 15 to May 6, 2025. The pause ended on July 6 to 7, 2025, when the Houthis struck two Greek-managed bulk carriers,⁷ the *Magic Seas* and *Eternity C.*⁸ Greece controls more than 21 percent of the world's cargo-carrying capacity.⁹

After the U.S.-Israel war with Iran began on February 28, 2026, the Houthis moved launchers into the highlands above the Red Sea in Al-Hudaydah and Hajjah.¹⁰ On August 9, 2026, they attacked Mokha port with ballistic missiles, drones and an explosive boat. Two days later an attack on the Egyptian-owned cargo ship *Tihamah* near Perim Island killed four crew members and two Yemeni rescuers.¹¹

Holding the strait

By mid-September 2026 Houthi forces held Mocha, Perim Island, the Zuqar islands and the Greater and Lesser Hanish islands, about 20 km from the African coast. Their statements pointed to targeting Saudi shipping rather than a general

1. Jonathan Spyer, "Inside the Houthi Advance: How Iran's Allies Are Helping Tighten Tehran's Grip on the Red Sea," *Middle East Forum Online*, September 22, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/inside-the-houthi-advance-how-irans-allies-are-helping-tighten-tehrans-grip-on-the-red-sea>.

2. "Neutralizing the Houthi Threat: A Strategic Blueprint for the Red Sea and Beyond," *Middle East Quarterly*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/meq/neutralizing-the-houthi-threat-a-strategic-blueprint-for-the-red-sea-and-beyond>.

3. U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organization Designation of Ansarallah," *Federal Register* 90 (March 5, 2025): 11352, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/05/2025-03629/foreign-terrorist-organization-designation-of-ansarallah>.

4. Abdulmajeed Zubah, "How to Counter the Houthi Capture of Mokha and Protect Red Sea Shipping," *Middle East Forum Observer*, September 10, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/how-to-counter-the-houthi-capture-of-mokha-and-protect-red-sea-shipping>.

5. Spyer, "Inside the Houthi Advance."

6. Jonathan Spyer, "In Its Attacks on Houthis, the United States Is Missing the Russian Connection," *Middle East Forum Online*, March 21, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/in-its-attacks-on-houthis-the-united-states-is-missing-the-russian-connection>.

7. "Neutralizing the Houthi Threat."

8. Nicoletta Kouroushi, "Why the Houthis Are Targeting Greek Shipping," *Middle East Forum Observer*, July 28, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/why-the-houthis-are-targeting-greek-shipping>.

9. Kouroushi, "Why the Houthis."

10. Abdulmajeed Zubah, "The Houthis Prepare to Enter the War," *Middle East Forum Observer*, March 20, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/the-houthis-prepare-to-enter-the-war>.

11. Zubah, "How to Counter."

blockade. On September 10, an Iraqi militia drone attack struck the Saudi East-West pipeline, which lets Riyadh move oil to the Red Sea without passing the Strait of Hormuz.¹² MEF’s Abdulmajeed Zubah assesses that high ground near the water would bring shipping within range of shorter-range drones and enable mining (analysis).¹³

Who sustains the Houthis

Documents obtained from Yemeni sources and reported by MEF’s Jonathan Spyer list Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese experts advising on drones, missiles and intelligence. They also name businessmen importing Chinese drone parts and state that Chinese shipping firms, including COSCO Shipping, have paid the Houthis for safe passage since a March 2024 meeting in Muscat.¹⁴ These claims rest on the documents as reported and are not independently confirmed here. Treasury’s March 5, 2025 action against seven senior Houthis cited weapons procurement negotiated with Russia.¹⁵

In Congress, S. 3451, the Houthi Human Rights Accountability Act, was introduced on December 11, 2025, and H.R. 10354, on targeted sanctions on the Houthis, on September 14, 2026.¹⁶

Questions for oversight

- 1. How has the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation of Ansarallah affected transit payments to the Houthis, including those reported from Chinese carriers?
- 2. What is the U.S. assessment of Houthi control of Perim Island and the Hanish islands for commercial traffic?
- 3. How are interdictions of Iranian components bound for Saleef and Hodeidah tracked and reported to Congress?
- 4. What did the March to May 2025 strikes show about the cost of U.S. munitions against low-cost Houthi systems?
- 5. How does the State Department assess the Russian procurement links described in Treasury’s March 2025 designations?
- 6. What does current Maritime Administration guidance advise for U.S.-flag and U.S.-owned vessels near the Bab el-Mandeb?

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12. Spyer, “Inside the Houthi Advance.”
13. Zubah, “How to Counter.”
14. Spyer, “Inside the Houthi Advance.”
15. Spyer, “In Its Attacks.”
16. Houthi Human Rights Accountability Act, S. 3451, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/3451>; To impose targeted sanctions on the Houthi terrorists and their supporters, and to support the internationally recognized Government of Yemen in their fight against Houthi terrorists, H.R. 10354, 119th Cong. (2026), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/10354>.