

Are the Houthis Being Punished for ‘Doing the Right Thing’? Mike Whitney

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“Whoever does not try to stop a genocide, has lost his humanity.” Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, Houthi spokesman

Events in the Middle East are spinning out of control. In the last week, the United States has attacked Houthi positions on the Yemeni mainland 7 times while the Houthis have launched 5 attacks on commercial vessels and US warships in the Red Sea. At the same time, Iran has launched multiple attacks on sites in Syria, Iraq and Pakistan, while Israel has hit targets in both Lebanon and Damascus.

Adding more fuel to the fire, the IDF has continued its relentless assault on Palestinians living in Gaza resulting in scores of new deaths and injuries. In short, there’s been a sharp uptick in military activity across the Middle East that is steadily increasing. This suggests that the low-intensity conflict we have seen for the last few weeks is about to explode into something much more violent, far-reaching and unpredictable. Many analysts believe we are on the brink of full-blown regional war which—in view of recent developments—may be unavoidable.

This is from an article at the *Washington Post*:

‘The Biden administration is crafting plans for **a sustained military campaign** targeting the Houthis in Yemen after 10 days of strikes failed to halt the group’s attacks on maritime commerce...

Officials say they don’t expect that **the operation will stretch on for years** like previous U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria. At the same time they acknowledge they can identify **no end date** or provide an estimate for when the Yemenis’ military capability will be adequately diminished.....

While the attacks have so far taken a greater toll on Europe than the United States...the Houthi campaign is already beginning to reshape the global shipping map. Some firms have chosen to reroute ships around the Cape of Good Hope off southern Africa, while major oil companies including BP and Shell suspended shipments through the area...

“It’s impossible to forecast exactly what’s going to happen, and certainly not [to predict] future operations,” the first U.S. official said. “But the principle that **it simply can’t be tolerated for a terrorist organization ... with these advanced capabilities to essentially shut down or control shipping through a key international choke point** is one that we feel very strongly about.”...

U.S. officials also are concerned that attacking the Houthis has thrust the United States into **a conflict with little exit strategy and limited support from key allies.** Notably, America's most powerful Gulf partners have withheld their backing for the American operation. The prime minister of Qatar, a key U.S. ally in the Gulf, has warned that Western strikes would not halt the violence and could fuel regional instability.

[As Houthis vow to fight on, U.S. prepares for sustained campaign](#), Washington Post

While the *Washington Post* article provides little new information, it does help to clarify a few important points:

That the US is now embroiled in another "sustained military campaign" (War) that has not been approved by the UN Security Council, the US Congress or the American people. It's clear that our domestic politics have deteriorated to the point where the president alone decides whether the country goes to war or not. And, not surprisingly, those wars invariably advance the interests of the billionaire elites who guide policy behind the fig leaf of representative government. In truth, all the war-making powers rest with them.

Since, airstrikes alone will not "degrade" the Houthis military capability, "the operation will stretch on for years." (So, get ready for another 20-year stint like Afghanistan)

The real reason the administration has eschewed direct dialogue with the Houthis, is because "it simply can't be tolerated for a terrorist organization ...to control shipping through a key international choke point." This is a tacit admission that Washington refuses to negotiate with people it doesn't consider its equal. Thus, the only option available, is to "shoot first and ask questions later."

Interestingly, the *Post* admits that "the Houthis have thrust the United States into a conflict with little exit strategy and limited support from key allies." What the authors should have added is that everything about the current strategy violates the so-called **Powell Doctrine. There is no clearly attainable objective, nor have the risks and costs been fully analyzed, nor have all other non-violent options been exhausted, nor is there a plausible exit strategy, nor is the action supported by the American people, nor does the US have broad international support, nor is a vital national security interest threatened. All of the main precepts of the Powell Doctrine have been shrugged off by Biden's foreign policy team.** As a result, there's no planning, no endgame, and no strategic objective, which is why the plan to wage war on Yemen is, perhaps, the most impulsive and poorly-thought out operation in recent times.

There's also no guarantee that the plan will work at all. In fact, there is every reason to believe it will backfire spectacularly creating an even bigger crisis. Check out this clip from an article at *Responsible Statecraft*:

It would seem that **the real threat here is the escalation from continued U.S. airstrikes**, which are killing people. As RS has reported on these pages time and again, the Houthis are battle hardened and even emboldened by the reaction of the West to their provocations. ... **a number of realist voices are decrying the folly of once again falling into a spiral of retaliatory violence** that will likely lead to a real military crisis, even the death of U.S. service members, before it is done.

“They (strikes) won’t work. They won’t sufficiently degrade Houthi capability or will stop their attacks on shipping,” says Ben Friedman, senior fellow of Defense Priorities. “Why do something that is so evidently reckless? Restraint reminds us that no such law says we must conduct airstrikes that won’t work. We always have the option not to employ pointless violence.” [US strikes Yemen again, but Houthi attacks keep coming](#), Responsible Statecraft

The fact that 8 years of relentless airstrikes by the Saudis only served to strengthen the Houthis, has not dampened the administration’s enthusiasm for more of the same. Biden is convinced that the identical policy will produce a different result. But isn’t that the definition of “insanity”? And where do we see evidence that the prescribed method actually works: Afghanistan? Iraq? Syria? Libya? Ukraine? Are these the shining examples of ‘military triumph’ that have convinced Biden that he’s on the right track?

But even if the Biden team had a coherent military strategy, there would still be a fundamental problem with the current approach, mainly because it’s morally wrong. **The United States should work alongside those who are trying to enforce the Genocide Convention, not treat them as enemies.** The Houthis have taken a constructive and (so far) non-lethal approach to Israel’s depredations in Gaza, an approach that is consistent with Article 1 of [the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) which clearly states:

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

The Houthis blockade of Israel-linked commercial ships passing through the Red Sea also hews to the tenets of The Responsibility to Protect – known as R2P which “was unanimously adopted in 2005 at the UN World Summit, the largest gathering of Heads of State and Government in history”, a document which—by the way—was signed by representatives of the United States. Here’s a short excerpt from the text:

Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.... The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity....

Pillar 1

Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

Pillar 2

The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility.

Pillar 3

If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter. [WhatIsR2P?](#) , Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect

While it's true that the Houthis have not garnered UNSC approval for their unilateral blockade of Israeli-bound ships, that is because the US blocks all such measures just as it blocked the previous Ceasefire resolutions. But the fact that the international community is unable to enforce basic humanitarian precepts—due to the obstructionism of the US— does not absolve people or states from doing their duty. It would be vastly preferable to have the UN's authorization, but it is not absolutely necessary. The higher priority is saving the lives of innocent people. Here's how Houthi spokesman, Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti summed it up in a recent statement on Twitter:

Taking action to support the oppressed... is a true test of morality... and whoever does not take action to stop the crime of genocide... has lost his humanity.

Moral... values.. do not change with the race and religion of the person... If another group of humans were subjected to the injustice that the Palestinians are subjected to, we would take action to support them, regardless of their religion and race.

... the Yemeni people (are committed) ... to achieve a just peace that guarantees the dignity, safety and security of all countries and peoples
Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti @M_N_Albukhaiti

Is it naive of us to think that the Houthis are acting in accordance with universally-accepted principles of justice and humanity? Are we wrong in assuming that the Houthis sound like men who can be reasoned with and with who one could negotiate an agreement that would end the blockade and the onslaught in Gaza at the same time? If that is so, then they why doesn't Biden engage the group diplomatically instead of bombarding their ports and cities?

And, just for the record: The administration and their allies in the media continue to imply that the traffic in the Red Sea is at historic lows due to the "indiscriminate" attacks on commercial ships by the Houthis. But that is not the case. On Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (in a visit to the United Nations) produced documentary evidence that traffic in the Red Sea remains relatively normal excluding the fact that Israel-linked ships are prevented from sailing the waterway. In other words, the western media is deliberately misleading the American people to accelerate the rush to war. Here's the story from Press TV (Iranian state media):

The Iranian foreign minister noted that **satellite images show that approximately 230 merchant vessels and oil tankers were cruising in the Red Sea at the time that the US and UK carried out their strikes against Yemen.**

"This means that they (Americans and Britons) have well understood Yemenis' point that only ships heading towards ports operated by the occupying Israeli regime will be blocked," Amir-Abdollahian said. [Iran has sternly warned Washington against attacks on Yemen, says Iranian foreign minister](#), Press TV

The Iranian FM's remarks are underscored by an official Houthi statement that was published on X and which says the following:

The Yemeni Navy is steadfast to its commitment to ongoing operations in the Red Sea until the cessation of the blockade and the aggression against Gaza. Consequently, maritime activities and navigation in the Red Sea are securely facilitated for all vessels excluding those affiliated with Israel or bound for Israeli ports. For ships unaffiliated with Israel, it is crucial to maintain uninterrupted communication with Yemeni authorities throughout their entire journey through the following channels (radio and email) **The Yemeni Armed Forces reiterates its dedication to conducting operations in strict adherence to international legal principles aimed at preventing genocide and punishing those responsible for it. Additionally, it underscores its commitment to facilitating unimpeded traffic flow and upholding maritime security in the Red Sea and the broader region.** Yemeni Navy: "[Here's exactly what you have to do to identify your vessels so they're not targeted](#)" Houthi Spokesman

The idea that the Houthis are attacking commercial vessels willy-nilly just doesn't pass the 'smell test'. What's more likely is that the narrative has been tweaked in order to demonize a rival of Israel.

Finally, I have taken the liberty of transcribing a short video by Tim Anderson who argues that the Houthis have not only seized the moral high-ground, but that the United States and Israel are acting in a way that is reckless, hypocritical and damaging to their own best interests. I think you'll find it's worth your time:

The United States has designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization for what amounts to trying to stop Israel's genocide.... Now the stated purpose of Ansar Allah's (AKA—The Houthis) blockade, is to uphold Article 1 of the UN Genocide Convention. And given that Yemen is a member to the UN Genocide Convention, the Houthis say they have an obligation to stop the shipment of weapons and other supplies to Israel while it commits a genocide. ...**The US is saying that the "terrorists" aren't the ones perpetrating a genocide, ...but the ones who are trying to stop a genocide. ...**

Designating Ansar Allah as terrorists is also deeply ironic because the US is currently enforcing two unilateral economic blockades of Cuba and Venezuela. ...and, unlike Ansar Allah's blockade of Israel, which has yet to kill anyone, US blockades have killed thousands of people....**Ansar Allah is using their blockade to stop a genocide whereas the US blockades are intended to starve and collectively punish the countries they target** and can be considered a form of genocide. ...

Ansar Allah is not being punished because of terrorism. They are being punished because their blockade is working. Israel imports 99% of its goods by sea. ...The Israeli port of Eilat has been blocked by the Houthis and seen an 85% decrease in activity.... The shipping companies are going to pass the costs onto consumers which is going to cause prices to rise and imported goods to become scarcer. ...The war resembles an economic recession for Israel. **A survey taken in November found that one in three businesses in Israel is operating at 20% capacity or less, and more than half of Israeli businesses lost 50% of their revenue.** According to the labor ministry, 18% of the Israeli workforce have been called up to fight the war which has left a huge hole in the Israeli workforce.... **Over a million Israelis have left the**

country, tourism has collapsed, business investment has collapsed, and all in all the Israeli Treasury predicts that Israel's GDP will have fallen 15% in the forth quarter, and that the war will cost Israel a total of \$58 billion. ...

State Department records show that for decades US elites were concerned they would lose control of the Red Sea. And, in 2015, the US would go on to arm, fund and support a genocidal war waged by Saudi Arabia against Ansar Allah. The war pushed two-thirds of the population to the brink of starvation and caused the worst cholera outbreak in human history. But it still failed to defeat Ansar Allah. And, now the same Yemeni people who faced a US-backed genocide only a few years ago, are now mounting the most disruptive actions against the US-backed genocide in Gaza. This is, of course, is humiliating to the United States.

It wasn't so long ago, the US considered Nelson Mandela and his supporters "terrorists". Then they defeated South African apartheid. In that sense, this latest terrorist designation of the Houthi movement, is just a continuation of this very long trend. Terrorism is a highly politicized term. Of course, apartheid states and their supporters are going to consider attempts to end their apartheid states as terrorism. But in Palestine and the Middle East, the real terrorists are the ones that are carpet-bombing hospitals, schools and entire neighborhoods; Israel and the United States.

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