

The endless war in Yemen

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In September 2026 the Iranian backed Houthis launched a lightning offensive against Saudi-backed government forces along the southwestern coastal plain. Within a week the Houthi forces gained control over the Red Sea coast of Yemen and the vital Bab al-Mandeb Strait. This marks the deadliest and most intense fighting in the country since the collapse of the 2022 UN ceasefire. The conflict has re-ignited into the most significant domestic and regional fighting in years, deeply intertwined with a broader regional proxy conflict involving Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The current escalation threatens to completely collapse the fragile calm and drag the region into a wider conflict. Yemen's envoy to the UN, Abdallah Al-Saadi, told the UN Security Council the Houthi offensive was no longer simply a domestic matter but "a growing threat to the security of the region, freedom of navigation, energy supplies and one of the most important threats to global trade." ¹

The threat to the Red Sea waterway

Bab al-Mandeb links Asia to Europe via the Red Sea and Suez Canal. About 12% of the world's goods are shipped through the strait.

Disruption to the waterway could mean trouble for all shipping and for the price of crude oil, which has now soared again.

Before the current offensive, the Houthis already controlled the major port city of Hodeidah on the Red Sea and with their drones and missiles, the Houthis have been able to disrupt traffic in the Red Sea, but they did not hold any areas directly overlooking Bab al-Mandeb. Shipping through the Bab al-Mandeb had fallen by about 60% since the Houthis began attacking some ships there in late 2023 while expressing solidarity with Hamas in Gaza.

Saudi Arabia has increasingly relied on the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb to export its crude since Iran has been targeting vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. But renewed Houthi threats have “curtailed” that activity.

The Houthi Bab al-Mandeb & Red Sea Offensive

The Houthis launched a lightning offensive along the southwestern coastal plain designed to seize control of the global shipping bottleneck of Bab al Mandeb. This moves their threat from long-range drone/missile strikes to direct, boots-on-the-ground territorial dominance.

Yemen’s internationally recognized government said on September 11, 2026, that its air force had begun strikes against Houthi positions within a previously declared military zone, or “kill zone,” in western Taiz, spanning areas around the Red Sea port of Mokha and extending eastward along the Taiz-Mokha road.² But the airstrikes failed to halt the Houthi offensive and Houthi forces successfully overran and seized the strategic port city of Mokha from Saudi-backed government forces. Mokha was one of the last significant government positions on the coast before Bab al-Mandeb, and its capture brought the Houthis closer to the strategic strait and strengthened their position along Yemen's western coastline.³

Following a withdrawal by government forces, armed Houthi fighters on September 11, 2026, seized the Mayyun Island (referring to an island also known as Perim). The island sits inside Bab El-Mandeb and divides the strait into two channels. It has little population or economic activity,

but its location gives it military importance. Control of Mayyun gives the Houthis a position from which they can monitor shipping entering and leaving the Red Sea and potentially support attacks on vessels.⁴

Houthi forces also pushed government troops south to Dhubab, a small coastal town, but its location gives it outsized strategic importance. It sits on the mainland opposite Mayyun Island, directly beside Bab al-Mandeb. The position gives the Houthis a mainland foothold overlooking the approach to the strait. Combined with Mayyun, it puts them on both sides of the waterway's southern entrance.⁵

The Houthis also reached the Hanish Islands further north of Bab al Mandeb. Their significance is primarily military. Together with Mayyun, they extend the Houthi presence from the mainland around Bab al-Mandeb farther into the Red Sea. The gains give the group a chain of positions from which it could monitor or threaten maritime traffic rather than relying solely on positions inland.⁶

Following these captures, the Houthis declared a maritime embargo specifically banning Saudi vessels from passing through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, while asserting that normal international shipping remains safe. This has created an international crisis, as Saudi Arabia had been routing millions of barrels of oil through the Red Sea to bypass the already-closed Strait of Hormuz.

The response of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC)⁷

Presidential Leadership Council Vice President Lt. Gen. Tareq Saleh has ordered armed forces on the western coast to reorganize their ranks following the latest developments on the battlefield fronts. Military media quoted Saleh as saying that forces taking part in the fighting on the western coast, along with units from the Taiz axis in the west of the governorate, suffered casualties amid clashes with the Houthis. Saleh added that his directives included establishing an alternative command center at a location he described as secure, with the aim of regrouping the forces and organizing their operations.⁸

Yemen's National Defense Council said that any "temporary" Houthi advance on the ground would not give the group the right to impose a new reality by force. It stressed that the state and armed forces were capable of regaining the initiative and continuing what it called a "deterrence operation" across multiple fronts.⁹

The National Defense Council of Yemen acknowledged that Yemen's government is on the front line of freedom of navigation, and called for international support as the Houthis swept along the Red Sea coast toward the Bab al-Mandeb.¹⁰

Fighting Within Yemen: Additional Fronts and the Counter-Offensive

The Houthis control much of northern and western Yemen, including the country's largest population centers and the Red Sea coast. Saudi-backed government forces and other anti-Houthi groups retain much of the south and east, including: Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Shabwa, Hadramawt, and Al Mahrah, while Taiz and Marib remain divided.

Aden is the main political and military center of the internationally recognized government and remains an important southern port. Shabwa and Hadramawt contain important oil and gas infrastructure and provide access to the Arabian Sea. Al Mahrah, on the border with Oman, is farther from the current fighting but is strategically important because of its location.¹¹

In response to the Houthi push toward the Red Sea coast, the internationally recognized government (PLC) and allied tribal forces attempted to halt the advance and launched multi-front counter-offensives to stretch Houthi resources thin.

Yemen's National Defense Council said on September 10, 2026, that government forces were intensifying operations against the Houthis on several fronts, including in Taiz, Marib, Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda and Al-Dhale, following a recent redeployment of troops along Taiz's western coast. It said government forces had made gains in Marib, Al-Jawf and Al-Bayda, adding that fighting on Yemen's western coast was part of a wider battle to restore state control.¹²

The Taiz Front (South-West)

Taiz is one of Yemen's largest population centers and sits between the western coast and the interior. Its capture would give the Houthis a route farther into southern Yemen.¹³

The Houthi coastal push originated through heavy ground attacks across Taiz Governorate starting on September 3, 2026. The Iran-backed Houthi militia has intensified its attacks firing ballistic missiles toward areas in the south and west of Taiz province, triggering panic among residents and forcing people to flee.

Heavy shelling and intense urban clashes have re-ignited around Taiz city as government forces try to cut off Houthi supply lines feeding the coastal offensive.

On September 15, 2026, the Taiz military command said air force jets had struck a Houthi ballistic missile launcher inside Taiz airport.¹⁴

The Marib Front

Marib has become one of the most strategically important government-held areas in Yemen since the war escalated in 2015. It is home to more than 2 million displaced people, major army bases, oil and gas fields and a key power station. The Houthis have repeatedly attempted to seize the city, but previous offensives have failed.

Yemeni media reported in September 2026 that the Houthis had sent large numbers of fighters and military equipment to areas of Marib province under their control, raising fears of preparations for another offensive.¹⁵

The Al-Jawf Front (North)

Located in the north, Al-Jawf is considered a critical gateway toward the Houthi-controlled capital, Sanaa. Government forces, backed by a massive mobilization of local anti-Houthi tribes, secured significant field advances and territorial breakthroughs here, forcing Houthi retreats in some sectors.

The Al-Bayda Front (Central Yemen)

A part of the government's broader counter-offensive. The Yemeni national army announced a tactical breakthrough in Al-Bayda, successfully liberating the areas of Hayd al-Khazzan and al-Falhan, leaving Houthi lines in temporary disarray.

The Hodeidah Front (Western Coast)

Clashes erupted along the frontlines of Hodeidah as part of the broader Houthi push to lock down the remaining portions of the western coastal plain and secure their logistical rear.

The loss of Mokha and Houthi expansion toward Bab Al-Mandeb have raised the strategic stakes for Yemen's internationally recognized government, which has vowed to regain control of the coastline and the key maritime chokepoint.

Preparations for the government's offensive

Since September 13, 2026, Yemen's military has intensified airstrikes against Iran-backed Houthi forces around Taiz, Mokha, Khokha, Dhubab and other Red Sea areas, in what local army officials say is a preparatory phase for a ground offensive aimed at retaking territory around Bab Al-Mandeb. Military officials said much of the air campaign had focused on areas around Mokha, as government forces seek to weaken Houthi positions before launching a ground advance. Abdul Basit Al-Baher, deputy head of the Yemeni army's Moral Guidance Division in Taiz said that more than 200 Houthi fighters had been killed in strikes over recent days.¹⁶

The coming days are expected to show whether the intensified air campaign remains primarily an effort to contain Houthi gains or marks the opening phase of the government's promised ground offensive to retake Mokha, Dhubab and the approaches to Bab Al-Mandeb.

The Houthi Offensive Against Saudi Arabia and the Saudi response

The Houthis have been at war with Yemen's government since 2014, when the rebels swept from their mountainous heartland and seized

Yemen's capital forcing out the legitimate government. Saudi Arabia entered the war the following year on behalf of Yemen's legitimate government.

The Houthis fought the Saudi-led coalition from 2015 until a United Nations-brokered ceasefire in 2022. Yemen relapsed into war in July 2026 after years of relative calm punctured by sporadic violence and deepening poverty.

The current escalation stems from growing Houthi frustration over the Saudi-imposed air and sea blockade, coupled with the wider regional war in the Middle East (which features a direct confrontation between the US/Israel and Iran, effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz).

The latest hostilities kicked off in July 2026 when the Houthis let an Iranian plane land in defiance of Saudi control of Yemeni airspace. The government retaliated by striking Sanaa airport, an attack the Houthis blamed on Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis retaliated with drone and missile attacks and declared a total maritime blockade on Saudi vessels in Red Sea, while claiming movement for other countries would remain safe.

The escalation has spread beyond Yemen's battlefronts. In September 2026, the Houthis launched heavy barrages of drones and ballistic missiles targeting cities and infrastructure in southern Saudi Arabia, specifically facilities belonging to the state oil giant Saudi Aramco.

The Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis said the group fired ballistic missiles and drones at several cities in southern Saudi Arabia. According to official reports from Riyadh, at least 73 Saudi civilians were injured in the attacks, and infrastructure was damaged.

On September 9, 2026, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said that the Iran-backed Houthi militia had launched ballistic missiles and drone attacks toward three cities in Saudi Arabia: Khamis Mushait, Abha and Jizan, accusing the militia of continuing to target the Kingdom's infrastructure and national assets.¹⁷

On September 11, 2026, the Houthis targeted civilian and energy infrastructure targets in Saudi Arabia's Abha, Khamis Mushait, Jizan and Najran. The attacks caused several fires at oil facilities in the southern region that led to a temporary halt in some operations.¹⁸

Houthi spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said the Houthis fired dozens of missiles and drones at the King Khalid Air Base in Khamis Mushait, targeting hangars, radar installations and ammunition depots. The statement did not specify when the attack took place, but the Houthis often take hours or days to claim responsibility for attacks.¹⁹

On September 12, 2026, two people were injured and a mosque and several buildings were damaged after a projectile launched by Yemen's Houthis struck Saudi Arabia's southern Jizan region.²⁰

On September 15, 2026, the Houthis targeted civilian areas in Khamis Mushait, Abha and Taif with ballistic missiles and drones. Thirteen civilians in Saudi Arabia were injured and several buildings and cars were damaged. The Saudi Civil Defense issued a series of alerts for several cities in the west and south of the country, including Abha, Jeddah, Jizan, Taif and Yanbu.²¹

On September 15, 2026, **Saudi air defenses were able to destroy a drone attempting to enter the air space of the holy city of Mecca**, in a major escalation by Yemen's Houthi rebels. Mecca is Islam's holiest site and the location is key to one of Islam's major pillars — the Hajj, a pilgrimage to the city and its holy precincts.

The coalition said the attempt by the Houthis was a "red line" and will remain "a black mark in the record of violations by the terrorist Houthi militia, considered a deliberate act to inflame the feelings of millions of Muslims".²²

Maj. Gen. Turki al-Maliki, the spokesman for the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, said the coalition's Joint Forces Command would respond "responsibly" to protect Saudi Arabia's sovereignty, national assets, civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with the right to

self-defense under international law and Article 51 of the UN Charter, as well as international humanitarian law and its customary rules.²³

The Saudi-led coalition responded with massive airstrikes on Houthi positions and bases in western Yemen. In response to the Houthi advance towards Bab al Mandeb, Saudi Arabia has hit back with airstrikes, but it has failed to stop the Houthis' lightning advance.

Yayha Saree, the Houthi's military spokesman, said on September 13, 2026 that the "Saudi enemy has carried out 58 airstrikes in the past 24 hours, in a post on Telegram."²⁴

Up to now, the strikes have mainly focused on the front lines, in support of Yemeni government forces, without targeting the Houthis' heart of power, including the capital Sanaa.

In a statement released on September 11, 2026, the National Defense Council of Yemen's Saudi-backed and internationally recognized government strongly condemned the Houthis' renewed attacks on Saudi Arabia.²⁵

The Iranian involvement

The war in Yemen is no longer a localized conflict; it has evolved into a highly coordinated front driven by Iran's regional strategy. Following severe blowback to its traditional proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas, Tehran has shifted its focus. Iran is actively utilizing the Houthis and Iraqi militias as a "second front" to target American allies in the Gulf, driving up the economic costs of the ongoing US-led conflict against Iran.

US envoy to the UN describes escalation as Iranian project executed by proxy, and attacks against Saudi Arabia and international shipping reflect 'active cooperation with Tehran.'²⁶

Yemen's Interior Minister Major General Ibrahim Haidan warned that Iran is seeking to establish long-term military influence over the Bab al-Mandeb Strait and its surrounding islands and coastlines by exporting to the Red Sea the model it developed to "militarize maritime corridors" in the Strait of Hormuz. Haidan said experts from Iran's Revolutionary

Guards Corps (IRGC) were helping the Houthis strengthen their capabilities and build fortifications, operations rooms and facilities for missiles, drones and remotely guided boats.²⁷

The rebels' capture of Mokha, overlooking tanker routes out of the Red Sea, could boost Iran's strategy of driving up world oil and gas prices to pressure the United States, experts say. It also raises concerns of a new front opening after more than six months of war in the region – one in which Saudi Arabia is forced to respond. Experts say the developments in Yemen could give Tehran more leverage in any negotiations with the United States.

Iran's government called on September 11, 2026, for an end to Saudi Arabia's blockade of Yemen, throwing its support behind its ally, the Houthis. In its first statement since the rebels entered the port of Mokha, Iran's Foreign Ministry also called for a return to negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis. Later, Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi said on social media that the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia have discussed diplomatic efforts to “restore stability” to the region.²⁸

The involvement of Iraqi militias

The Houthi-Iraqi Militia Axis - Intelligence reports have revealed an unprecedented level of coordination. Houthi advisors have reportedly been embedded in a joint operations room in Iraq alongside Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and groups like Harakat al-Nujaba. Officials confirmed that the Houthis helped plan and execute swarm drone attacks launched against Saudi oil facilities directly from Iraqi territory in July 2026. In response, the US and Saudi Arabia conducted joint retaliatory airstrikes targeting these Iran-backed militias inside Iraq.

On September 11, 2026, Saudi authorities said that drones launched from Iraq led to the temporary closure of a crucial oil export route used to bypass the lockdown of the Strait of Hormuz. Saudi officials said repairing the damage could take three to five weeks, including at a major pumping facility.²⁹

Riyadh has increased its use of the 1,200-kilometre East-West pipeline, which links Abqaiq, near the Gulf, to the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea, since the start of the Middle East war to bypass the closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran.³⁰ The pipeline has a total capacity to carry up to 7 million barrels of oil a day.

The office of Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi confirmed the attack originated from Iraqi territory and said on X that the commander in charge of the southern province of Maysan had been dismissed. The Iraqi government said it condemned “the attacks targeting our brethren in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia originated from a location within the governorate.”³¹

Riyadh said that, at the Iraqi prime minister’s request, it had chosen “not to respond at this stage and to support the efforts of the Iraqi government...to prevent attacks launched from Iraq against the Kingdom and neighboring countries.”³²

The Saudi diplomatic Appeals

Faced with the worsening Houthi attacks and Houthi advance in Yemen's Red Sea coastline, Saudi Arabia actively sought external military assistance to secure its borders and interests:

The United States : Saudi Arabia requested direct US military support to repel the Houthi offensive. However ,US President Donald Trump refused the request ,signaling a preference for regional partners to handle the conflict directly.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) spoke with US President Donald Trump multiple times in recent days as Riyadh and Washington coordinate over the escalating situation in Yemen. Trump told MBS that the US would provide intelligence and targeting assistance as the Iran-backed Houthis make significant gains along Yemen’s Red Sea coastline.

US President Donald Trump has said the Houthis told his administration they did not want to fight the United States and were allowing most ships to pass, while blocking Saudi-linked vessels. The Houthis have said

the blockade is in response to what they described as Saudi Arabia's siege of Yemen.³³

US Central Command (CENTCOM) chief Adm. Brad Cooper traveled to the Kingdom met with senior Saudi military and government officials to discuss coordination. CENTCOM has previously described freedom of navigation and regional security as key priorities.³⁴

The US embassy in Yemen said on September 9, 2026, the Houthi militia and its Iranian backers had miscalculated by underestimating the resolve of Yemen's internationally recognized government, armed forces and people to end Houthi "aggression and brutality."³⁵

The embassy said the current escalation had been sparked by Houthi actions with Iran's support, citing an August 7 statement by the UN Security Council. It added that the Houthis had brought Yemen "nothing but suffering" and turned the country into a base for Iran to "undermine Arab unity and security."³⁶

Turkey and Pakistan (The Mecca Pact) :In August 2026, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan signed a NATO-style mutual defense agreement known as the "Mecca pact". A pact under which an armed attack on Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or Turkey T is considered an attack on all.

Pakistan already has a substantial military presence in Saudi Arabia. In May 2026, Islamabad deployed around 8,000 troops, a squadron of JF-17 fighter jets, drones, and an HQ-9 air-defense system to the Kingdom.

In response to the "Mecca pact", Houthi officials explicitly warned Turkey and Pakistan that any direct military intervention would carry a "heavy price".³⁷

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on September 13, 2026, denounced Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia in a call with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Sharif condemned the Houthi militia's attacks targeting Saudi Arabia, denouncing the flagrant violations of Saudi sovereignty and territorial integrity, and reiterating Pakistan's full solidarity with the Kingdom.³⁸

Following the latest Houthi attacks, Pakistan's Defense Minister stated that the pact would be activated if aggression continues and Pakistan's director general of Inter-Services Public Relations; Lt. Gen. Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry, said: "Pakistan fully stands with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, both diplomatically and physically, and I would like to underscore here the word physically ... We will go to any extent. There should be no doubt on that," he added. "We will continue to defend Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against any aggression."³⁹

Turkey has expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia; however, despite being a party to the Mecca Agreement and the Saudi-led coalition to protect freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, it appears unwilling to engage in military combat against the Houthis. At this stage, Turkey maintains that the Mecca Agreement requires parliamentary ratification—a step expected to take place in October—and notes that Saudi Arabia has not submitted a formal request for military assistance under the agreement.

Egypt: On September 15, 2026, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, arrived to Cairo for a short official visit. The leaders had closed-door meeting and later expanded talks attended by delegations from both countries, and a luncheon hosted by Al-Sisi in honor of the Saudi crown prince and his accompanying delegation.⁴⁰

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi reaffirmed Cairo's support for Saudi Arabia's security and added that the security of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states was an integral part of Egypt's national security and expressed Cairo's "complete rejection and condemnation" of any attacks or threats against the Kingdom's sovereignty, stability or territorial integrity. The president also expressed support for measures taken by Saudi Arabia to protect its security and stability and for efforts to reach a comprehensive and sustainable political solution to the crisis in Yemen.⁴¹

The talks also focused on maritime security, with al-Sisi and the Crown Prince stressing the importance of ensuring the freedom and safety of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb and the Red Sea.

Disruptions to shipping through Bab al-Mandeb are particularly significant for Egypt because the waterway serves as the southern gateway to the Suez Canal, a major source of revenue for the country. Suez Canal revenues in the 2025-2026 financial year stood at about \$4.67 billion, roughly half their level before the Iran-backed Houthi militia began attacking commercial shipping in the Red Sea in 2023.⁴²

Saudi Arabia's attempts to secure military aid from the U.S., its allies under the "Mecca Agreement" (Pakistan and Turkey), and Egypt resulted in expressions of solidarity and support for Saudi Arabia's right to self-defense; however, no country had publicly committed additional military assistance in response to the latest Saudi request at the time.

The response of the UN

The United Nations Security Council met on September 9, 2026, to discuss the conflict with its Yemen envoy, Hans Grundberg. Hans Grundberg warned that the Houthis' latest attacks across several frontlines had triggered increasingly intense clashes, threatening to further expand the conflict and undermine efforts toward a political settlement. The renewed violence threatens to unravel efforts to reach a political settlement after a fragile truce in 2022 had largely halted major fighting.⁴³ Grundberg called for "the active investment of every member of this body (United Nations Security Council) to contain what could be the precipice for a far more dangerous conflict".⁴⁴

The emergency meeting was brought together by the United Kingdom, which called on the Security Council to "send a clear and consistent message: the Houthis must de-escalate, cease their attacks, and return to a path towards peace".

Humanitarian crisis

Yemen is Arab world's poorest country. The escalating fighting threatens to end a fragile truce that had largely halted Yemen's civil war since 2022.

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The sudden explosion of violence across multiple fronts has triggered a massive humanitarian toll in a matter of days. Local agencies report that

over 500 combatants and civilians have been killed, and approximately 125,000 people have been forced to flee their homes to escape the heavy artillery and ground skirmishes. Taiz had received the largest number, with 7,782 families comprising about 54,643 people, followed by Lahj, Hodeidah and Aden.⁴⁶

The port city of Aden has functioned as a provisional capital since the Houthis seized Sanaa in 2014. Since then, Aden's population has doubled as more and more Yemenis flee zones controlled by the Houthis searching for security and work. In 2025, the city was already home to 755,000 officially registered displaced persons, out of a population of 3.5 million, according to the social affairs ministry.⁴⁷ Authorities in Aden have formed a humanitarian response cell to deal with current waves of people displaced by the fighting and coordinate assistance with aid organizations.⁴⁸

In Hodeidah province, Houthi forces raided the offices of several humanitarian organizations amid what local sources described as an escalation against civilians and aid workers.⁴⁹

The country as a whole, meanwhile, continues to suffer one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The UN warned last year that 17 million people in Yemen were struggling to eat and a further million faced extreme hunger.⁵⁰ The newest wave, sparked by the Houthi takeover of Yemen's Red Sea coast, is expected to further strain already struggling infrastructure and public services.

Summary

The dramatic escalation and resumption of fighting in Yemen in September 2026 marked the collapse of the 2022 truce. The Houthis achieved a massive strategic victory by capturing the strategic port city of Mokha and Perim Island, located at the mouth of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Control over these points gives the Houthis a direct hold on the southern entrance of the Red Sea.

Securing de facto control over the Bab al-Mandeb Strait grants the Iranian-led axis the ability to bottleneck the region's two most critical

energy and maritime trade arteries—the Strait of Hormuz on one side, and the gateway to the Red Sea on the other.

The Houthi offensive to seize control of the Bab al-Mandeb Strait is not a limited move stemming merely from the war in Yemen between the Houthis and the legitimate government; rather, it is part of a strategic Iranian move within a regional campaign. Tehran determines and coordinates the timing and actions of its proxy organizations and the Iranian axis thus operates as a centralized network capable of exerting pressure from multiple directions (Yemen, Iraq, and the maritime arena).

Saudi Arabia is effectively under strategic siege. The Strait of Hormuz is compromised to the east, the East-West Pipeline—designed to bypass it—has been damaged, and to the south, the Houthis are tightening their grip on the Bab al-Mandeb area, threatening the alternative route via the Red Sea.

The strategic blockade is also taking on the dimension of a direct threat to the Saudi home front. In recent days, authorities have been forced to repeatedly issue alerts to residents of southern cities regarding Houthi missiles and drones, following earlier attacks that caused dozens of casualties and damaged energy infrastructure. Saudi Arabia is thus required to simultaneously protect its export routes, rehabilitate damaged infrastructure, and defend its cities against further attacks.

Against the backdrop of the siege and the offensive facing Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman turned to his allies to request military assistance. Saudi Arabia asked military aid from the United States, its allies under the Mecca Agreement (Pakistan and Turkey) and Egypt, however, aside from expressions of solidarity and support for Saudi Arabia's right to self-defense, no party stepped forward to provide actual military assistance to the Saudis.

The blocking of the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandeb, the damage to the Kingdom's oil infrastructure, and the expansion of Houthi control into strategic areas of Yemen are not merely problems for Saudi Arabia and Yemen's legitimate government.

Saudi Arabia lacks the military capacity to contend with multiple fronts simultaneously on its own. A victory for Iran and its proxies in the current conflict could have catastrophic consequences for the entire region; therefore, the United States and Saudi Arabia's allies must stand by its side and thwart the coordinated offensive led by Iran.

Notes:

¹ Houthis 'bear full responsibility' for Red Sea escalation, arms flow must stop, Security Council told, Arab news, September 16, 2026.

² Yemeni forces begin airstrikes in declared 'kill zone' as fighting intensifies near Mokha, Arab news, September 11, 2026.

³ Mohamed Hatem, Explainer: Houthi gains around Bab El-Mandeb and what they mean, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.

⁴ Houthis reach Yemen's Dhubab as hundreds of families flee toward Taiz, Al Arabiya, September 11, 2026.

⁵ Mohamed Hatem, Explainer: Houthi gains around Bab El-Mandeb and what they mean, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Yemen's internationally recognized government - Presidential Leadership Council (PLC).

⁸ Yemeni forces regroup on western coast as fighting with Houthis escalates, Al Arabiya, September 10, 2026.

⁹ Houthis reach Yemen's Dhubab as hundreds of families flee toward Taiz, Al Arabiya, September 11, 2026.

¹⁰ Saudi airstrikes hit rebel-held Mokha airport in Yemen, Houthi broadcaster says, Ahram online, September 11, 2026.

¹¹ Mohamed Hatem, Explainer: Houthi gains around Bab El-Mandeb and what they mean, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.

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- ¹² Yemeni forces begin airstrikes in declared 'kill zone' as fighting intensifies near Mokha, Arab news, September 11, 2026.
- ¹³ Mohamed Hatem, Explainer: Houthi gains around Bab El-Mandeb and what they mean, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.
- ¹⁴ Yemeni army steps up strikes on Houthis near Bab Al-Mandab ahead of possible ground offensive, Arab news, September 15, 2026.
- ¹⁵ Yemen army says it is ready as Houthis mass forces around Marib, Arab news, September 13, 2026.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Saudi-led coalition says Houthis attacked three Saudi cities with missiles, drones, Al Arabiya, September 9, 2026.
- ¹⁸ Yemeni forces begin airstrikes in declared 'kill zone' as fighting intensifies near Mokha, Arab news, September 11, 2026.
- ¹⁹ Saudi oil pipeline hit in strikes will be mostly out of service for several weeks for repair, Ahram online, September 14, 2026.
- ²⁰ Houthi projectile injures two, damages mosque in Saudi Arabia's Jazan, Arab news, September 12, 2026.
- ²¹ 13 civilians in Saudi Arabia injured after Houthi attacks, alerts for several cities across Kingdom, Arab news, September 15, 2026.
- ²² Houthi drone destroyed before entering Makkah's airspace, Saudi Arabia says, Arab news, September 16, 2026.
- ²³ Saudi Civil Defense says danger has passed after Khamis Mushait alert, Al Arabiya, September 10, 2026.
- ²⁴ Houthis say Saudi Arabia launched over 50 strikes against them in 24 hours, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.
- ²⁵ Saudi airstrikes hit rebel-held Mokha airport in Yemen, Houthi broadcaster says, Ahram online, September 11, 2026.
- ²⁶ Houthis 'bear full responsibility' for Red Sea escalation, arms flow must stop, Security Council told, Arab news, September 16, 2026.

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- ²⁷ Yemen Interior Minister: Iran seeking to militarize Bab al-Mandeb through the Houthis, Asharq Al Awsat, September 17, 2026.
- ²⁸ Saudi airstrikes hit rebel-held Mokha airport in Yemen, Houthi broadcaster says, Ahram online, September 11, 2026.
- ²⁹ Saudi oil pipeline hit in strikes will be mostly out of service for several weeks for repair, Ahram online, September 14, 2026.
- ³⁰ Saudi Arabia says drones from Iraq caused injuries, oil pipeline closure, Al Arabiya, September 12, 2026.
- ³¹ Saudi Arabia condemns drone attack from Iraq after East-West Pipeline shut as precaution, Arab news, September 11, 2026.
- ³² Saudi Arabia says drones from Iraq caused injuries, oil pipeline closure, Al Arabiya, September 12, 2026.
- ³³ Mohamed Hatem, Explainer: Houthi gains around Bab El-Mandeb and what they mean, Ahram online, September 13, 2026.
- ³⁴ Trump tells MBS US will provide intel, targeting assistance amid Yemen escalation: Source, Al Arabiya. September 11, 2026.
- ³⁵ US says Houthis, Iran miscalculated by underestimating Yemen's resolve, Al Arabiya, September 9, 2026.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
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