

US, British and Australian attacks on Yemen spread Middle East war

Wednesday 31 January 2024, by [BANTAS Elizabeth](#), [SALMON Alex](#) (Date first published: 24 January 2024).

Democracy Now! reported on January 18 that the United States and Britain had launched missile attacks on Yemen for the fourth time in a week.

Reuters reported on January 24 that at least eight rounds of strikes have been launched in the past month.

The White House claimed the US was acting in self defence, protecting global trade against the “Houthis”, or Ansar Allah, a Shiite organisation predominantly comprised of the Houthi tribe based in North Yemen.

The Houthis began targeting ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden heading to Israel in mid-November to pressure Israel into a ceasefire in Gaza. More than \$1 trillion worth of goods pass through the Suez Canal, via the Red Sea, every year.

US President Joe Biden relisted the Houthis as a “Specially Designated Terrorist Group” (SDTG), reversing his January 2021 decision to lift the Trump administration’s designation.

Human rights advocates are sceptical this will deter the Houthis. Given the war between the Houthis and the US-British backed Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates coalition, they are also concerned about the impact on Yemeni civilians.

Afrah Nasser from the Arab Center in Washington [told Al Jazeera](#) on January 19 that labelling the Houthis “terrorists” could “contribute to radicalizing some parts of the population and strengthen the Houthi recruitment system”.

She said she was “very concerned about the devastating consequences” for Yemenis: according to the United Nations more than half of the 18.2 million population need assistance.

Brian Finucane, a senior US program adviser at the International Crisis Group, told *Al Jazeera*: “I think it’s a form of do-something-ism” — a reflection of the US’ refusal to recognise the Houthi attacks are a response to Israel’s war on Gaza.

Houthi spokesperson Mohammed Abdulsalam said the US’s relisting would not stop its efforts to prevent Israeli-linked ships from crossing the Red Sea. He told *Reuters* on January 19 [the Houthis’ aims](#) are to blockade Israel and retaliate against the United States and Britain for air strikes.

“We do not want the escalation to expand. This is not our demand. We imposed rules of engagement in which not a single drop of blood was shed or major material losses.”

Biden has [admitted](#) that the US strikes were not stopping the Houthi attacks, but pledged that they would continue.

The Biden administration has been criticised by both Democratic and Republican lawmakers, as well as anti-war campaigners for having launched the airstrikes without seeking Congress approval, which they argue is required under Article I of the Constitution and the *War Powers Resolution* 1973.

Biden told Congress he authorised the airstrikes “to protect United States citizens both at home and abroad” and to further “national security and foreign policy interests”.

Jon Rainwater, executive director of Peace Action, disputed this, saying: “The excuse that the president can ignore Congress because it’s an ‘emergency’ under the *War Powers Resolution* has worn thin. The US is not under attack. This isn’t a short-term crisis. Biden must go to Congress.”

Even supporters of the air strikes, such as Democratic Senator for Connecticut [Chris Murphy](#), who is also chair of the Senate foreign relations subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia and Counterterrorism, said the president is required to obtain approval.

“I expect to be briefed by the White House in the coming days on the scope of these strikes and the plan ahead.”

Trita Parsi, from the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, wrote in *The Times* on January 15 that the US strikes will only lead to “escalating tensions that strengthen the *de facto* Houthi blockade and elevate the potential for the conflict to expand into a full-fledged regional war”.

Parsi argued that the Houthi attack during November’s week-long pause in Gaza showed that a ceasefire was the best way to stop the Red Sea attacks.

“If, in the worst-case scenario, Biden’s escalation against the Houthis sparks a regional war, there should be little doubt that this is another war of choice — and one without congressional authorization. Not because Biden desired it, but because he refused to pursue the most obvious and peaceful path to prevent it.”

Yemen civil war

The US bombings of Yemen come in addition to an ongoing civil war in which more than 377,000 people died between 2014 and 2021, according to the United Nations. About 85,000 children were killed between 2015 and 2018, according to Save the Children.

The Houthis, a Zaidi sect of Shiite Islam, formed in the 1990s as a result of discrimination. By 2003, inspired by Hezbollah, the Lebanese Islamist party and resistance movement, they evolved into a political and resistance movement in opposition to the government of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was backed by the US and Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis backed the 2011 Arab Spring, which forced Saleh’s overthrow in 2012. A realignment with Saleh in 2014 meant they were able to take control of Saana, the capital. Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates forces, backed by the US, intervened in the civil war in 2015 to prevent a Houthi takeover.

The Houthis now control large parts of the north-western Yemen, allowing them to control access to the Red Sea, where more than 15% of the world’s seaborne trade passes through.

Obscuring the truth

The establishment media's reporting of the US attacks on the Houthis has obscured the truth.

As Tamara Pearson reported in *Excluded Headlines* on January 19, "The media has also been using phrasing like 'Houthi controlled site' and 'Houthi location' to detract from the fact that civilians, homes, farms, towns and cities are being bombed. Areas bombed and raided include Sanaa, Mount Hailan, Majzar, Hodeida, Sa'ada, and Dhamar."

Australia's Labor government, which continues to support Israel's genocide in Gaza, has also backed the US-British airstrikes against Yemen.

[Defence minister Richard Marles](#) said on January 23 that Australia, together with five other countries, supports the additional attacks, which he said were "proportionate and necessary strikes against eight Houthi targets in Yemen".

In a joint statement with Bahrain, Canada, the Netherlands, Britain and the US, Marles described the Houthi attacks as "an international challenge".

He said "a coalition of like-minded countries committed to upholding the rules-based order" is determined to hold the Houthis "accountable".

Although billed as a new international coalition, "Prosperity Guardian" consists largely of Western nations, half of which want to remain anonymous.

France, Italy and Spain have declined to participate, but Australia has been a willing accomplice in the attacks on the poorest Arab country in the world.

This is especially grotesque in the context of the Saudi-led coalition, backed by the US and Britain, having [destroyed Yemen](#).

While the attacks are being led by the US and Britain, Australian Defence Forces soldiers have been tasked to work with the US-British forces.

Hypocritically, Marles claims the country is acting in "self defence" and to "protect global trade", but then says Australia aims "to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea".

Greens defence spokesperson [Senator David Shoebridge](#) said on January 12 that "supporting the bombing of one of the only ports in a country that desperately needs to receive medicine, food and supplies is horrific ... it is an effective death sentence for thousands of people".

[Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John](#) criticised the government for joining in military action without consulting parliament. "This is a dangerous escalation in a conflict that our government has spent the last month saying they were trying to avoid."

The [Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition](#) on January 23 condemned the strikes as "illegal acts of war that are expanding the brutal genocidal Israeli attack on Gaza".

It said Labor "must not use AUKUS to drag Australia into another illegal war" but "uphold international law, oppose genocide" and cease weapons exports to Israel.

Labor must also "vigorously urge an immediate permanent ceasefire in Gaza and immediately recognise the State of Palestine".

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