Israel must be proactive when facing the Houthis and Iran

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 11.09.2024

While the significant strike on Hodeidah port was crucial, it has only led to a temporary calm. Israel must be prepared to once again take strong action against the Houthis and their operator – Iran.

The Israeli strike on Hodeidah on July 20 somewhat restored Israel's deterrence, making an impression both domestically and across the Middle East that Israel can respond decisively to its adversaries. Now, two months after this powerful response, it is imperative to assess whether it had the strength to curb Houthi aggression and to draw the appropriate conclusions accordingly.

Judging by recent developments in the Red Sea, it appears not. On Monday, September 2, two oil tankers were attacked by ballistic missiles and explosive drones launched from Yemeni territory. Less than two weeks earlier, the Greek oil tanker Sounion, carrying a million barrels of oil, was also attacked by the rebels, burning for over a week and raising fears of a massive spill that could cause an unprecedented environmental disaster.

As for the direct threat to Israel, there seems to be little reason for optimism. According to the statement made by Houthi militia leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi on September 21, the Houthis are now preparing for the "fifth" phase of their confrontation with Israel, which includes unexpected initiatives and an expanded target bank. The Houthis threaten to strike back strongly against military targets, ports and energy sites, and disrupt Israel's oil supply.

While some of the militia's declarations appear to be no more than exaggerated shows of solidarity with Hamas, others – particularly the statements from senior Houthis claiming that retaliation against Israel is certain – should be taken more seriously, especially in light of their close cooperation with Tehran and the extensive support they receive from it to execute their plans.

Therefore, one should not conclude that the Houthis are deterred. The significant strike on the port of Hodeidah, as important as it was, only brought temporary relief, and based on the high motivation they are displaying to harm Israel and the

renewed attacks in the Red Sea, it seems more likely that the Houthis took a pause to regroup.

Iranian-Houthi cooperation

SO LONG as Iranian-Houthi cooperation continues unhindered, the range of threats from Tehran and its proxy against Israel and the West is only expected to expand. The Houthis may grow stronger over the years, both in terms of the quantity and quality of their weaponry, and might even bring the threat closer, possibly through the resumption of direct flights from Sana'a to Amman.

Therefore, despite its focus on the more immediate threats posed by Gaza and Lebanon, Israel must be prepared to take harsh measures against the Houthis in the near future. These include targeting Houthi leadership, launching cyber attacks, and continuing to launch strikes against economic and military assets under Houthi control.

In parallel, similar to its struggle against other components of Iran's proxy network, Israel cannot settle for dealing with the proxy alone and will need to strike at the head of the octopus. It must disrupt Iran's lethal support for Houthi attacks by targeting the IRGC intelligence ship and hitting Iranian officials and assets in Yemen.

Moreover, Israel should work to raise awareness among policymakers in the US, Europe, and international forums about the threat posed by the Yemeni militia, including the Houthis' ambitions to develop advanced weapons that could directly threaten Europe and the US.

The Israel-Hamas war

The "Swords of Iron" war, in which Israel is being attacked for the first time from seven fronts simultaneously, is an achievement of the "Axis of Resistance" that Iran can claim credit for. More specifically, Tehran is now reaping the fruits of its long-term investment in the Red Sea arena, which began as early as 2009 with its military assistance to the Houthis.

Consequently, Israel is now required to correct, together with the US, years of neglect towards the threat that has gradually developed in this area. Seeing that

further escalation is expected down the road, Israel must develop a comprehensive strategic plan that includes proactive and decisive measures to reduce the scope of the threat.

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