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## **The United States and its Allies' Ability to Achieve Security in the Red Sea Under Houthi Attacks**

### ***Introduction:***

*The aftermath of the Israeli war in Gaza extended to the Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb strait, which have witnessed intensified American and international military presence in response to Houthi attacks against Israeli ships or those affiliated with them. This led to a state of unprecedented tension in the Middle East, with the Houthis launching missile attacks and drone strikes on ships in the Red Sea, along with their continuous threats coinciding with escalating tensions between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. This prompted the United States and its allies to take certain measures to deter the Houthis, in anticipation of the conflict spreading in the Red Sea, as it is a crucial maritime passage connecting Europe to Asia and East Africa, and one of the busiest shipping lanes globally. This directly impacts the economies of major world powers and threatens international peace and security at present*

The threat to navigation in the Red Sea is seen as an opportunity for the United States to return to the region to settle scores and regain control of important issues, allowing for the simultaneous pursuit of multiple objectives. This would help economically exhaust China by hindering its exports and raising costs directed towards the Arab region and Europe, thus potentially redirecting trade towards the new Indian route. It also enables the Gulf states to return to their fold, frustrates the agreement with Iran sponsored by China, and maintains the threat of total war, which has been excluded from American calculations.

### ***Research Problem***

Securing freedom of navigation in the Red Sea is not merely a matter of power balance or defense expenditures sought by the United States

and its allies, but an American strategic issue in dealing with conflicts in the region and the world. Experience has shown that Washington's choices involve managing and developing conflicts, not resolving or ending them. Therefore, this study aims to assess the extent of the United States and its allies' ability to achieve security in the Red Sea amid current Houthi attacks.

### ***Research Objectives***

***The study's objectives include but are not limited to:***

- 1- Shedding light on the geostrategic importance of the Red Sea.
- 2- Studying and tracking the impact of Houthi attacks on global trade.
- 3- Steps taken by the United States and its allies against the Houthis.



- 4- Analyzing the reasons for the failure of the United States and its allies to control Houthi attacks.
- 5- Anticipating the repercussions of militarizing the Red Sea on the region.

### **Research Questions**

The study aims to address the following primary question: To what extent can the United States achieve security in the Red Sea amid current Houthi attacks? To clarify the study's framework and reach conclusions, answering several sub-questions is necessary, including:

- 1- What is the geostrategic importance of the Red Sea?
- 2- What are the steps taken by the United States and its allies against the Houthis?
- 3- Why did the United States and its allies fail to control Houthi attacks?
- 4- What are the repercussions of militarizing the Red Sea on the region?

### **Study Methodology**

The study relies on the “descriptive-analytical methodology”, through which the dimensions and characteristics of the current situation in the Red Sea amidst the current Houthi attacks have been identified, described objectively by collecting data and facts using scientific research tools and techniques. This methodology has been employed to describe and analyze the sources of knowledge related to the study problem in order to describe and analyze its dimensions scientifically objectively, in light of the objectives that the study seeks to achieve, with the aim of analyzing the ability of the United States and its allies to achieve security in the Red Sea amidst Houthi attacks.

### **Study Contents**

- 1- The conceptual framework of the study.
- 2- The geostrategic importance of the Red Sea.
- 3- Houthi attacks and global trade movement.
- 4- The role of the United States and its allies in countering Houthi attacks.
- 5- Steps of escalation by the United States and its allies against the Houthis.
- 6- The failure of the United States and its allies to control Houthi attacks.
- 7- Study results.
- 8- Future scenarios.

### **First: Conceptual Framework of the Study** **1- Who are the Houthis?**

The main actor in international relations is the “state”, while other non-governmental actors still derive their importance from the state and cannot act on the international stage except through it. In recent times, there have been many criticisms of this theory due to the significant role of non-state actors on the international stage, as evidenced by the recent attacks carried out by the Houthi group on the Red Sea and the subsequent repercussions that threatened maritime security, not only for regional countries but also for Western powers.

The Houthi group is a branch of the Zaidi Imamate revival movement, which emerged in the early 1990s. The original leader of the Houthis, Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, rebelled against the government in 2004 and was killed in the same year. After his death, his brother, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, assumed his position. Their father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, was a prominent Zaidi scholar and influential figure. The three belong to the Jarudiyya, a stricter sect within Zaidi Islam. The disagreement between the Jarudis led by Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Hussein and other Zaidi scholars regarding the imamate led to a split within the Zaidi revival movement in the mid-1990s. In the late 1990s, Hussein al-Houthi took control of the movement, making it extremist and militant, and his violent inclinations caused some of its key founders to distance themselves from him. Recently, a large number of Zaidi scholars who criticize the Houthis have been sent to secret prisons<sup>(1)</sup>.

Their power increased during the war in Yemen that broke out in late 2014 when they seized Sanaa. Concerned about Iran's growing influence near the borders of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom intervened at the head of a Western-backed alliance in 2015 to support the Yemeni government. The Houthis controlled a large part of the north and other major urban centers, while the internationally recognized government made Aden its headquarters<sup>(2)</sup>.

Following the outbreak of the war between Hamas and Israel in October 2023, the Houthis targeted shipping routes in the Red Sea in an attempt to show support for the Palestinians and Hamas in the war against Israel. In response,

the United States and Britain struck Houthi sites in Yemen from the air and sea in response to Houthi attacks.

## ***2- Concept of Comprehensive Power***

The concept of comprehensive power refers to the material and moral capabilities provided by technological advancement to a state. These capabilities are employed within the framework of a comprehensive strategy to achieve various objectives. Comprehensive power is defined as the state's ability to utilize all its tangible and intangible resources in a way that influences the behavior of other states. The comprehensive power of a state includes political, military, economic, technological, and informational power<sup>(3)</sup>.

## ***3- Concept of National Security***

Trigeorgis and Nenner define national security as “that part of government policy that aims to create favorable conditions to protect vital values”<sup>(4)</sup> Henry Kissinger defines it as “any actions through which a society seeks to preserve its right to survival”<sup>(5)</sup>.

***Barry Buzan mentions a certain theoretical lag in understanding the concept of national security and provides several reasons for this lag, including<sup>(6)</sup>:***

- A- The intertwining of national security with the concept of power, especially with the emergence of the realist school that introduced the idea of competition for power in international relations. Security is seen as derived from power and as a tool for maximizing it.
- B- The rise of idealists who reject the realist school and propose an alternative goal to national security, which is peace.
- C- The predominance of strategic studies in the field of national security, focusing on the military aspects of security, and dedicating them to serving defense requirements and maintaining the status quo. This has contributed to limiting the analytical scope and theoretical dimension of the concept.
- D- The role of politicians in complicating the concept to provide a greater opportunity for maneuvering, whether for internal consumption purposes or external conflict.

## ***4- Concept of Regional Security***

Regional security is a strategic concept aimed at studying the future of countries in a scientific manner. It is a relative reality where countries aim to achieve security to the minimum extent for stability. Regional security is characterized by being variable, relying on multiple complex factors: historical, economic, political, and military. It is also undefined, as it can be misused by countries due to the lack of a framework defining the concept. National security constants include geographic constants related to the country's geographical location, historical constants contributed by the country to human civilization, and cultural constants represented by religion, language, nationality, and heritage<sup>(7)</sup>.

### ***Definition of Regional Security by Barry Buzan***

Barry Buzan defines regional security as “a group of states whose primary security concerns and perceptions are interconnected to the extent that their national security problems cannot be solved separately from each other”<sup>(8)</sup>. Buzan's theory focuses on studying regional areas rather than the international system as a whole in terms of security relations, considering them as sub-security systems. Most security interactions have internal roots occurring within a region in the form of a state threatening or allying with another state.

### ***Second: Significance of the Red Sea in Geostrategy***

The Red Sea has become a crucial link between the East and the West, especially with the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. This has placed it at the center of geopolitical competition between the United States and China over the past decade. Investments in infrastructure have expanded from Djibouti to the Mediterranean, alongside the increasing Western, Chinese, and other active military presence<sup>(9)</sup>.

### ***Third: Houthi Attacks and Global Trade***

Recent tensions in the Red Sea region, primarily resulting from Houthi attacks on commercial ships and subsequent strikes by the U.S.-led coalition, have impacted global trade by:

- 1- Rising Oil Prices: Oil markets are experiencing anxiety due to ongoing tensions in the Red Sea, threatening global supply lines. This is expected to



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lead to a significant increase in oil prices in the near future. Oil prices have already risen by about 7% since the beginning of the current year 2024 due to escalating concerns about supplies from the Middle East and pressures on global energy markets<sup>(10)</sup>.

A report published by the specialized energy news website "Oil Price" mentioned that disruptions in shipping in the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal are leading to an increase in prices of African and American commodities, in addition to raising diesel prices in Europe. This is particularly significant as Europe, which imposed a ban on energy imports from Russia at the beginning of the past year, now finds itself searching for supplies from closer sources. Increasing quantities of petroleum products are passing through the Suez Canal, and these quantities are being affected by tensions in the Red Sea, leading them to take the longer route through the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. This delay in planned deliveries is raising shipping costs<sup>(11)</sup>.

2- Increased shipping costs for consumers: Military tensions in the Red Sea are impacting the rise in shipping costs for consumers around the world. Despite longer routes providing better profit margins for shipping companies, consumers are negatively affected by the increased cost of goods and products due to higher shipping and insurance costs, as well as a slowdown in product supply due to the increased cost of alternative transport routes<sup>(12)</sup>.

3- Threats to perishable goods: The transportation of perishable goods with short shelf lives is affected when shifted to longer alternative transport routes that ships must take in case of changing traffic through the Suez Canal. This includes products like meat and dairy, which may not withstand the longer routes, potentially resulting in a decrease in export volumes of these goods globally.

4- Impact on African food security: The 57 million people in East Africa facing severe food insecurity, including over 10 million refugees and internally displaced persons, are also in the line of fire. All food supplies to the Horn of Africa and East Africa flow through the Red Sea from Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and the Western Hemisphere. The 6.6 million internally displaced persons in Sudan, in particular, heavily rely on food aid delivered

through the Red Sea. Therefore, African citizens are the ones bearing the cost of delays, rising consumer goods prices, disruption of local economic entities, and pollution of waterways due to the lack of maritime security in the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean<sup>(13)</sup>.

### ***Fourth: The role of the United States and its allies in thwarting Houthi attacks.***

The American policy in the region, characterized by inconsistency and ambiguity, has been behind the escalation of regional threats, particularly those related to maritime security in sea lanes. These threats have been linked to American conflicts with Iran, leading to increased maritime threats in the Arabian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. There are several motivations behind the movements of the United States and its allies in the Red Sea that can be highlighted as follows:

#### ***First Motive: European re-mobilization to support Israel.***

The United States seeks to work on re-mobilizing its allies to support Israel, especially since Washington faces division among its European allies regarding the war in Gaza. In addition to the popular protests in Arab countries allied with the United States, Arab countries, especially Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states, feel great dissatisfaction with the United States' unconditional support for the brutal Israeli actions in Gaza. The reality is that the Israeli war will not only create refugee crises in neighboring Arab countries but may also lead to social unrest as a result of the majority of Arab public opinion acknowledging the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause<sup>(14)</sup>.

#### ***Second Motive: Enhancing Washington's Control over Maritime Passages***

The United States desires to strengthen its control over maritime chokepoints, which is a clear priority in American policy towards the Middle East. The U.S. National Security Strategy document, published in October 2022, states that "the United States will not allow foreign or regional powers to endanger the freedom of navigation through maritime passages in the Middle East, including the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb,<sup>(15)</sup>" indicating American maritime dominance in the region.



### ***Third Motive: Halting Support Provided to the Houthis***

The United States seeks to prolong tensions in the Red Sea as part of its policy to compel China to engage with Iran and request a halt to its support for the Houthis, as their attacks have had economic repercussions on U.S. interests.

### ***Fifth: Escalatory Steps by the United States and Its Allies against the Houthis***

The United States has begun taking some escalatory measures against the Houthis with two main objectives: firstly, to seize the opportunity and establish a permanent American presence in the Red Sea region, especially given Russia's military presence in the Red Sea area, particularly regarding Sudan. The second objective is to reduce the damage caused by Houthi attacks on maritime navigation in the Red Sea region, prevent the impact of these attacks on international trade. The military operations undertaken by the United States and its allies against the Houthis can be outlined as follows:

#### ***1- Reactivation of Existing Military Assets***

The United States has been leading the largest maritime alliance in the world for about two decades, known as the "Combined Maritime Force," established in 2002 under the U.S. Fifth Fleet based in Bahrain. This force includes around 38 countries, in addition to the United States, covering vast areas extending from the Indian Ocean coast to the Red Sea. With the escalation of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the United States has formed several maritime task forces operating under the U.S. Fifth Fleet and the Combined Maritime Force, including:

**A- Task Force 150:** Operating outside the Gulf waters in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea near the east coast of Africa<sup>(16)</sup>.

**B- Task Force 151:** Focusing on combating piracy and preventing the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab from smuggling charcoal abroad, a primary source of funding for the group in Somalia and Africa<sup>(17)</sup>.

**C- Task Force 152:** Concerned with maintaining security in the international waters of the Arabian Gulf, playing a significant role in preventing Iranian naval boats from seizing many ships passing near the Strait of Hormuz<sup>(18)</sup>.

**D- Task Force 153:** Established by the United States to enhance maritime security in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden. Announced in April 2022, it includes 39 countries and aims to improve maritime security in the southern Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden. Initially focused on small boats, countering pirates and smugglers, this force was not ready to confront Houthi drones or deal with ballistic and cruise missiles, leading to the consideration of establishing the "Guardian of Prosperity" force<sup>(19)</sup>.

#### ***2. The Guardians of Prosperity Force***

In December 2023, the United States announced the formation of the "Guardians of Prosperity" force. According to a Washington statement, the force includes twenty countries, notably the United States, Britain, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Seychelles, with the goal of securing the Red Sea, ensuring freedom of navigation, and preventing attacks on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, this force is a new and important multinational security initiative, established under the umbrella of the Combined Maritime Forces and its Combined Task Force 153, which focuses on securing the Red Sea<sup>(20)</sup>.

The United States, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain announced on January 20, 2024, that "the goal remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea." Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte affirmed that the U.S.-British action is based on the right of self-defense, aims to protect freedom of navigation, and focuses on stopping escalation. Britain considered the strikes on the Houthi group to be legitimate and self-defense to achieve its political and diplomatic goals.

This military effort has not succeeded in deterring Houthi attacks, as their attacks have continued and even escalated significantly recently. Naturally, a different result could not have been expected given the narrow operational mandate, as the coalition's operations were conducted within the framework of "limited engagement," without targeting important operational infrastructure or command and control centers, and were limited to countering Houthi projectiles and drones, shooting



them down, and conducting limited preemptive operations. The United States reiterated the limited nature of these operations, emphasizing that it does not want to enter into a war or a broader military confrontation with the Houthis. The Europeans, for their part, set a much lower operational ceiling, announcing that the goal of their mission was limited to escorting ships without conducting any offensive operations. It is unlikely that the military track will succeed in addressing the Red Sea crisis while this limited mandate remains<sup>(21)</sup>.

### ***3. Classifying the Houthis as a Terrorist Organization***

The United States took another important step in the field of political and economic pressure on the Houthi group. On January 17, 2024, the Houthis were re-designated as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)” organization, which allows for the freezing of assets of individuals and entities that provide support to the group and any of its affiliates, branches, fronts, or associates. This comes as the Biden administration believes in the limited reliance on the military option alone, after the United States removed the Houthis from the list of terrorist organizations in 2021 to ensure the facilitation of the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen<sup>(22)</sup>.

### ***4. Calculated Operations***

Since January 12, 2024, the United States and the United Kingdom have adopted a new escalation strategy against the Houthis, namely “calculated operations.” These are military actions targeting the Houthis’ infrastructure and combat capabilities. However, these calculated operations have failed to significantly impact the Houthis’ fighting capacity. On March 14, 2024, the group’s leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, stated that his group had targeted a total of 73 ships and warships. He asserted that the group’s operations would continue until the war waged by Israel on the Gaza Strip ceased. He indicated that his group had received 344 air and naval strikes since the beginning of the attacks and had launched 403 missiles and drones in 96 attacks against both cargo and military vessels. He also announced the mobilization and training of 282,000 fighters since the start of the Israeli war on Gaza<sup>(23)</sup>.

### ***5. The European Aspis Plan***

The European Union’s operation in the Red Sea, “Aspis,” was launched on February 19, 2024. The Aspis plan has a budget of approximately 8 million euros, provided by the European Union’s treasury. The Aspis mission is defensive and has the authority to open fire in self-defense or to protect commercial vessels but cannot strike ground targets of the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

On April 8, 2024, Josep Borrell, the EU’s foreign policy chief, announced that the EU mission in the Red Sea had escorted 68 commercial vessels and repelled 11 attacks by Houthi rebels. He added that nine drones, one unmanned surface vehicle, and four ballistic missiles had been intercepted<sup>(24)</sup>.

### ***Sixthly: The Failure of the United States and Its Allies to Control Houthi Attacks***

There are several challenges related to Washington and its allies’ dealings with the Houthis that have led to the inability to control Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. These can be attributed to several reasons:

- A. Undefined Targeting Areas: The Houthis constitute a minority of Yemeni society, but most of them are concentrated in the city of Saada. Therefore, attacks should focus on the city of Saada, where most of their members are located. However, attacks have been concentrated on other cities such as Hodeidah and Ta’iz, and consequently, American attacks have not effectively targeted the Houthis. As a result, the strikes have not targeted the Houthis’ political leadership but rather their weapons. If the United States wanted to strike the Houthis, it might find it difficult to find targets to inflict significant damage on them<sup>(25)</sup>.
- B. The Houthis’ Ability to Procure Weapons: The Houthis rely primarily on weapons smuggled from Iran. Sabrina Singh, deputy spokesperson for the US Department of Defense, said in a press conference, “We know that the Houthis maintain a large arsenal and have sophisticated weapons because they continue to acquire them from Iran”<sup>(26)</sup> They also rely primarily on local taxes and levies imposed in areas under their control as a source of funding to purchase weapons, along with

their extensive relations with various armed groups and militias. Additionally, they possess the financial and technical capabilities to acquire locally manufactured weapons<sup>(27)</sup>. The Houthis now manufacture some components of weapons and related technologies instead of obtaining complete armaments from Iran, which represents a qualitative development in their ability to conceal these components within electronic devices<sup>(28)</sup>.

C. **Disjointed Security Agendas:** The failure to confront Houthi attacks is largely due to the lack of international commitment to maritime security. This is evident in the absence of a unified international response to freedom of navigation in waterways, in accordance with the principles enshrined in the law of the sea and relevant international legislation. This reality indicates a disconnect between the security agendas of different countries and the broader framework of collective security. It also reflects the relativity of the concept of security and the tendency to align it with the competitive positions of states, particularly the major ones.

D. **Escalation with Iran:** It will be difficult for Washington to maintain a defensive policy for a long time, as any mistake could lead to an escalation of the conflict. This is what happened on April 14, 2024, when Iran initiated the first direct military confrontation against Israel using drones and missiles, after decades of proxy wars waged by both sides in the air, land, sea, and cyber domains. This came after Iran threatened retaliation for the bloody attack on its consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus. There are global concerns that the tensions in the region and the war between Israel and Hamas could escalate into broader and unpredictable regional confrontations. In this context, there are possibilities of an Israeli response that could put the Middle East on the brink of disaster, amid fears of targeting nuclear facilities in Iran.

E. **Increased Popularity of the Houthis in the Region:** Western attacks may bolster the popularity of the Houthis both inside Yemen and in the Middle East. This is especially because

the Houthis focus their attacks on what they consider to be Israeli-linked ships to enhance their local and regional influence, presenting themselves as a major and influential player in the region. They exploit in doing so the sympathy supporting Palestinians in the region. This was evident in the massive demonstrations in Yemen following the Western strikes against the Houthis, where tens of thousands of people marched in the country's main cities in protest against the strikes. At the same time, the majority of Yemenis support the Houthis' actions in support of Palestine, even if they are dissatisfied with Houthi rule<sup>(29)</sup>.

F. **Declining public opinion of Biden in the US:** Public approval of Biden's performance has declined, according to polls conducted in late 2023. The number of supporters within the Democratic Party has dropped from nearly 100% to around 25%, affecting all age groups within the party. Regarding the handling of the Gaza war, polls showed a higher level of dissatisfaction with President Biden's performance among the 18-45 age group compared to older age groups<sup>(30)</sup>.

### ***Study Results***

The increased US military presence in the Red Sea, and plans to further intensify it in the future, could lead to the militarization of the Red Sea, resulting in a range of consequences for the region and the world. These implications can be identified as follows:

1- The intensified Western military presence in the Red Sea reflects the US-China competition, as Beijing views conflicts as a means of strengthening US influence at the expense of China's soft power, which relies on stability and economic aspects. Additionally, China is concerned that the US is seeking to escalate tensions in the Red Sea to contain its Belt and Road Initiative, which uses the Red Sea as a convergence point between the land and maritime Silk Road, and to limit its only overseas military base in Djibouti.

2- The surrounding environment in the Red Sea faces several disturbances. In addition to the threats emanating from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, the Horn of Africa region faces long-standing challenges and conflicts, the most recent being the





conflict in Sudan, which has reached the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, whose ports enjoy a regional and international competitive advantage, especially with Russia and Turkey attempting to develop them and build their naval bases there. With the failure of Saudi-American attempts to resolve the crisis in Sudan, the Sudanese shores on the Red Sea will remain weak flanks threatening the security of the Red Sea<sup>(31)</sup>.

3- The approach adopted by the United States may serve the interests of the Houthis and, consequently, Iran. Therefore, there is a better alternative, which consists of developing a multi-dimensional and long-term security strategy that links maritime security to the Yemeni peace process. This approach requires doubling support for the Yemeni government so that its forces can expel the Houthis from Hodeidah and push them back into the mountains.

4- Escalation of the conflict in the Red Sea could lead to a wider regional war with devastating economic consequences and potential impacts on poor and marginalized populations. Attacks on commercial ships and increased tensions could hinder humanitarian aid efforts and exacerbate the suffering of affected communities.

5- Houthi attacks pose unique security and military challenges with the launch of ballistic missiles and drones at Eilat, as Eilat is only 16 kilometers from Aqaba, while it is about 7 kilometers from the Egyptian city of Taba. This means that Houthi attacks pose several risks, such as Arab lands being affected by interception operations, or the fall of missiles due to inaccurate targeting. Israeli jamming devices deprive Houthi missiles of their ability to guide and reach their target, threatening their fall in Arab lands. One such missile previously fell in unpopulated areas in Jordanian territory<sup>(32)</sup>.

6- The tumultuous situation in the Red Sea is having a detrimental impact on Yemen's future, particularly on the political process aimed at resolving the Yemeni crisis. The Houthis are striving to establish domestic legitimacy and popularity that would grant them bargaining power or facilitate the expansion of their military control. This is especially evident in their attempts to incite public anger against the internationally recognized Yemeni

government's perceived weakness regarding the Gaza war. Furthermore, the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist group is hindering Saudi Arabia's efforts to engage in dialogue with them and reach a settlement to resolve the Yemeni crisis, as negotiating with a designated terrorist group is considered extremely risky<sup>(33)</sup>.

7- The Houthi group is attempting to exploit the Arab position. At a time when Arab peoples perceive these groups as engaging in escalatory and military actions, this poses an embarrassment to official Arab regimes that rely on political solutions. Additionally, these groups have demonstrated the extent of the threats looming over Arab countries at various political, economic, security, and military levels, both on land, sea, and air. This poses a threat to all countries in the region. Given that they have implemented these threats within a low-threshold conflict with the United States and against one of its closest allies, Israel, it is likely that they will employ them against other countries in the future<sup>(34)</sup>.

8- Houthi attacks have put European trade at risk, as 40% of European trade, especially European-Asian trade, passes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a key region for European oil supplies. With the escalating tensions in the Red Sea, inflation rates in Europe are likely to rise, leading to economic crises across Europe, which is already facing negative economic repercussions from the Ukraine war.

9- The US proposal to launch a naval force to secure the Red Sea remains somewhat vague, but its implications reveal a degree of US urgency that clearly indicates concrete fears of the current conflict expanding in an uncontrollable manner. While the idea is not new and is linked to navigation in the Red Sea, its organic connection to the US desire to preserve Israel's security, and Washington's continued rejection of all calls for a ceasefire, may make some invited Arab countries hesitant to respond to this proposal.

10- The significant increase in maritime incidents in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean is creating an environment for increased piracy and illicit trafficking. Moreover, diverting shipping routes around the rest of Africa creates more targets for piracy in other areas, especially as more



ships are forced to sail closer to the coast. It can be said that engaging in the militarization of the Red Sea could lead to negative consequences for the international shipping lane, whose importance to the global economy has been demonstrated by these events. This calls for a reconsideration of reviving some regional initiatives to address current and future threats, whether these challenges are expected or unexpected.

***Future Scenarios:***

***First Scenario: Expansion of the Conflict in the Region***

This scenario envisions an escalation of the conflict in the Red Sea, with the US and its allies becoming more involved in securing navigation in the region and conducting more precise military operations against Houthi targets. The aim is to deplete the Houthis' military capabilities. This could potentially draw in new parties. The US-led coalition could launch a major military offensive to end Houthi control over the port of Hodeidah, a strategic port on the Red Sea, and could also carry out heavy strikes on the Houthis' internal missile launch sites. This threatens to ignite a wide-ranging regional war, as the increased military presence in the Red Sea could fuel active hostilities, exacerbating concerns about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spreading to other parts of the region, especially after Iran launched a drone attack targeting Israel on April 13, 2024. The study suggests that this scenario is likely due to several reasons:

A- Houthi retaliation: The Houthis may expand their retaliatory operations if they cannot respond to US strikes by redirecting their attacks to US allies (the UAE and Saudi Arabia), which could necessitate a unified effort between the Prosperity Guard coalition and the Arab coalition, negatively impacting the peace process in Yemen.

B- Houthi-African alliances: The Houthi group may reach understandings with factions on the African coast, sharing a common goal against the US. The group's operations could gradually entice groups on the Somali coast that share a desire to threaten maritime navigation, which would severely impact the global supply of energy products, giving Iran the strategic influence it has long sought.

C-The position of the legitimate Yemeni government: The legitimate Yemeni government has adopted positions opposing the Houthis' behavior and has held them responsible for what is happening. It has supported the US decision to redesignate the Houthis as a "global terrorist group" and has supported US-British strikes on the Houthis, justifying this by arguing that the group is targeting the security and safety of international navigation in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

***Second Scenario: Supporting Prospects for a Political Solution in Yemen and Ending the War in Gaza***

There is a possibility that the Houthis will stop their attacks if their future status in Yemen is legalized; that is, if political talks proceed to achieve political recognition for them within Yemen, especially since the Houthis already control all of northern Yemen and govern most of Yemen. This scenario could also include an increase in foreign aid or humanitarian aid led by non-governmental organizations for civilians in Yemen.

The military confrontation between the Houthis and the United States may also decline, and military attacks may decrease, through a US-Iranian agreement or a US-Houthi understanding, with or without a formal agreement or through an unwritten consensus.



### **Conclusion:**

*Main Criticism of the US: The US response to Houthi attacks is insufficient to deter the militia, and the US approach has encouraged further Houthi escalation.*

*Regional Tensions: The escalating situation in the Red Sea and the renewed Israeli-Hamas conflict necessitates increased efforts from major powers, the UN Security Council, and international organizations to contain the situation and mitigate its security and economic consequences.*

*US Focus: The US is expected to prioritize security in the Red Sea, similar to its focus on the Indian Ocean and South Asia to counter China. This includes controlling international trade, combating terrorism, piracy, arms smuggling, and illegal immigration. The US views China's efforts to become central to global trade networks as a challenge to the current US-led international order.*

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## The United States and its Allies' Ability to Achieve Security in the Red Sea Under Houthi Attacks

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### Abstract:

The repercussions of the Israeli war in the Gaza Strip have extended to affect the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, which are witnessing an intense American and international military presence in response to Houthi attacks against Israeli ships or those affiliated with them. Consequently, the Middle East region has entered an unprecedented state of tension. With the Houthi launching missile attacks and drone attacks on ships in the Red Sea, and their ongoing threats coinciding with the escalating situation between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the United States and its allies have taken some measures in an attempt to deter the Houthis, anticipating the expansion of the conflict in the Red Sea. This is because it is the most important maritime passage connecting Europe to Asia and East Africa, and it hosts the world's busiest shipping lanes. This directly affects the economies of major world powers and threatens international peace and security at the present time.

The issue of securing freedom of navigation in the Red Sea is not merely a matter of power balance or defense expenditures sought by the United States and its allies. It is rather an American strategic approach in dealing with conflicts in the region and the world. Experience has shown that Washington's choices involve managing and developing conflicts, rather than resolving or ending them. Therefore, the study aims to assess the United States' and its allies' ability to protect the security of the Red Sea in light of the current Houthi attacks.

**Keywords:** Red Sea, United States, war on Gaza Strip, Houthis, Yemen.

## قدرة الولايات المتحدة وحلفائها على حماية أمن البحر الأحمر في ظل هجمات الحوثيين

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### المستخلص:

امتدت تداعيات الحرب الإسرائيلية في قطاع غزة لتطول البحر الأحمر ومضيق باب المندب، الذي يشهد حضوراً عسكرياً أمريكياً ودولياً مكثفاً؛ بدافع الاستجابة للهجمات الحوثية ضد السفن الإسرائيلية أو المرتبطة بها. ومن ثم دخلت منطقة الشرق الأوسط حالة من التوتر غير المسبوق، ومع شن الحوثيين هجمات صاروخية وهجمات بطائرات بدون طيار على السفن في البحر الأحمر، وتهديداتهم المستمرة تزامناً مع تصاعد الموقف بين إسرائيل وحركة حماس في قطاع غزة؛ الأمر الذي دفع الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وحلفاءها لاتخاذ بعض التدابير، كمحاولة لردع الحوثيين، تحسباً لاتساع رقعة الصراع في البحر الأحمر، كونه أهم ممر مائي يربط أوروبا وآسيا وشرق إفريقيا، وأكثر قنوات الشحن كثافة عالمياً؛ ما يؤثر بشكل مباشر على اقتصادات كبريات دول العالم، ويهدد الأمن والسلم الدوليين في التوقيت الراهن.

إن مسألة تأمين حرية الملاحة في البحر الأحمر ليست مسألة ميزان قوى، أو نفقات دفاعية تسعى الولايات المتحدة وحلفاؤها لتأمينها، إنما هي مسألة استراتيجية أمريكية في التعامل مع الصراعات في المنطقة والعالم، وقد أثبتت التجربة أن خيارات واشنطن هي إدارة الصراعات وتطويرها والاستثمار فيها، وليس حلها أو إنهاؤها؛ وبالتالي تحاول الدراسة تناول مدى قدرة الولايات المتحدة وحلفائها على حماية أمن البحر الأحمر في ظل هجمات الحوثيين الراهنة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** البحر الأحمر، الولايات المتحدة، الحرب على قطاع غزة، الحوثيين، اليمن.