

Research Briefing

1 March 2024

By Library specialists

UK and international response to Houthis in the Red Sea 2024



Summary

- 1 Who are the Houthis?
- 2 Houthi attacks since 7 October 2023
- 3 UN and international statements
- 4 UK statements and Red Sea presence
- 5 UK and US military strikes: UK and international response
- 6 Sanctions and arms embargoes against the Houthis

Cover image attribution: [Adobe Stock image 96805225 – Map of Middle East and Asia](#) – by pomogayev – [Adobe Stock](#) (stock.adobe.com). [Adobe Stock License](#). / image cropped.

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact hoclbraryonline@parliament.uk or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

1	Who are the Houthis?	7
2	Houthi attacks since 7 October 2023	9
3	UN and international statements	13
3.1	UN Security Council resolution, 2024	13
3.2	US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian	14
3.3	Other International statements	17
4	UK statements and Red Sea presence	19
4.1	UK statements on the use of force	19
4.2	Deployment of Royal Navy	20
5	UK and US military strikes: UK and international response	22
5.1	UK and US strikes in 2023/2024	22
5.2	On what legal grounds did the UK act?	23
5.3	What was the role and response of parliament?	25
5.4	What has been the response to the strikes?	29
6	Sanctions and arms embargoes against the Houthis	34
6.1	UN Security Council Resolutions	34
6.2	Other sanctions	34
6.3	Proscribing the Houthis as a terrorist group	35

Summary

From 11 January to 24 February 2024, the US and UK have conducted four joint naval and air strikes against the Houthis in response to their ongoing attacks on shipping. The US has also conducted a series of separate actions.

Beginning in November 2023, the Houthis have been launching attacks against ships it says are linked to Israel, causing shipping to be diverted away from the Red Sea, hindering world trade and freedom of navigation.

The Houthis are one of several [Iran-aligned armed groups](#) in the Middle East, which also include Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shia militias in Iraq, who have been conducting [attacks against Israel](#), Israeli-linked ships, and US forces and military bases since the Hamas assault on Israel on 7 October 2023.

The 2024 strikes follow warnings by the UK Defence Secretary that [the UK was prepared to use military force](#) to stop the Houthi attacks and a [UN Security Council Resolution in January 2024 demanding a halt to them](#).

This research briefing explains who the Houthis are, their recent attacks, the UK/US strikes and their legal basis, and the international response.

Who are the Houthis?

The Houthis are a Yemeni armed group, who in 2014 seized control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, marking the [beginning of a multi-sided conflict in Yemen](#). The Houthis are in conflict with the internationally recognised Government of Yemen, which has been backed militarily by a Saudi-led coalition since 2015. The Houthis now control much of northern Yemen and the majority of its population. A ceasefire took place in 2022 and [peace talks are continuing](#).

The Houthis are one of several armed groups that receive military, financial or other support from Iran. Analysts judge their [relationship has become closer](#) in recent years.

In response to the recent Houthi attacks, on 17 January the US announced [it will designate the Houthis as a specially designated global terrorist group](#). The Houthis are not [a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK](#).

The [United Kingdom](#), [United States](#) and [UN Security Council](#) also apply sanctions and arms embargoes against the Houthis, with new UK and US sanctions announced in [January](#) and [February](#) 2024.

Houthi attacks since October 2023

Following the Hamas assault on Israel on 7 October 2023, the Houthis said they would seek to support Hamas militarily and launched missile and drone attacks against Israel. In November, the Houthis said [they would target Israeli-linked shipping](#) in the Red Sea [in response to Israeli military operations in Gaza](#). On 24 February 2024, the US said the Houthis had [launched at least 48 attacks](#). It previously said [Houthi-targeted ships had links to 55 countries](#).

The Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a German think tank, estimates that due to ships being diverted, [container ship capacity in the Red Sea was 80% lower than expected in January 2024](#) (compared to 2017 to 2019 levels).

Launch of international maritime coalitions

In December 2023, the US announced an international maritime coalition, [Operation Prosperity Guardian](#) to support freedom of navigation. Over 20 countries, [including the UK](#), are participating, but only one from the Middle East (Bahrain). [The UK has also deployed three ships to the region](#). In February, [the European Union also launched a separate defensive mission](#).

International statements on Houthi actions

On 10 January 2024, [the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2722 \(2024\)](#) which condemned the Houthi attacks, demanded they stop, affirmed the right to freedom of navigation, and emphasised the [arms embargo](#) (PDF) in place against the Houthis. China and Russia abstained and argued the US response risked escalating the Israel-Hamas conflict, where a ceasefire should instead be pursued. [UK and US representatives supported the resolution](#).

Two statements have been issued by a series of states calling on the Houthis to halt their actions. In December 2023, 44 states, including the members of NATO and the European Union, [“condemned Houthi interference”](#) with freedom of navigation. A [further statement was issued](#) by 13 states on 3 January 2024, including the UK, United States, Bahrain, Germany and Japan. It said the countries “are determined to hold malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks” in the Red Sea.

US and UK attacks on Houthi sites in 2024

On [11 January](#), [22 January](#), [3 February](#), and [24 February](#), the UK and US conducted strikes against Houthi targets. The US has also [conducted a series](#)

[of separate strikes](#). Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand [provided non-operational support for the US/UK actions](#). These strikes [are separate from Operation Prosperity Guardian](#).

The UK Government said these the strikes are [“limited, necessary and proportionate in self-defence”](#). Speaking in the Commons, the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, [said the UK acted “in self-defence”](#), following Houthi attacks on Royal Navy ships, “consistent with the UN charter, and to uphold freedom of navigation”. On 26 February, the Defence Secretary said that the UK had “seen no evidence” that [RAF strikes had caused civilian casualties](#).

On 23 January, the Prime Minister [set out four priorities for the UK](#) in the Red Sea: 1) diplomatic effort to support de-escalation 2) enforcing the arms embargo against the Houthis 3) implementing new sanctions 4) continuing to provide aid to Yemen and support a political solution to the conflict.

The United States has said its actions were [“defensive” in nature](#) and [focused on military targets](#) and used “precision-guided munitions to minimize collateral damage”. Both countries [emphasised their aim](#) “remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea”.

What was parliament’s role and response?

The Commons was not sitting when the US/UK strikes occurred on 11 January. It was not recalled, though the [Scottish National Party](#), [Liberal Democrats](#) and [Plaid Cymru](#) argued Parliament should have been consulted. The Prime Minister [gave a statement to the Commons](#) on the first sitting day after the strikes, 15 January 2024. He also [gave a statement on 23 January](#) and the Commons debated, but did not vote, [on the Red Sea situation on 24 January](#).

Defence Minister, James Heappey, said the Government had to act on 11 January “based on the military, strategic and operational requirement” and [this informed the operation’s timing](#). Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, also said [the Government “need\[ed\] to be able to act”](#) and the parliamentary process “would potentially degrade the quality of the operation itself”.

The Labour Leader, Keir Starmer, [backed both sets of strikes](#) to “reinforce maritime security in the Red Sea”. The SNP leader in the Commons, Stephen Flynn, [called on the Government](#) to avoid “escalation that leads to further regional instability” but [backed the actions](#). Liberal Democrat leader, Sir Ed Davey, said the [party backed “limited strikes”](#) but [called for a Commons vote](#).

As described in the Commons Library research briefing, [Yemen airstrikes: Parliament’s role in approving military action](#), Parliament has no legally established role or requirement to be consulted. In 2011 the Government acknowledged the emergence of a convention that before military action took place the House of Commons would have the opportunity to debate the matter, except in an emergency. As set out in the briefing, the approach to consulting Parliament has, however, been inconsistent.

1

Who are the Houthis?

Emergence in the 1990s

The Houthis are Zaydi Shias, a minority group in Yemen and the Middle East, and known officially as Ansar Allah. They emerged in northern Yemen in the 1990s, as part of a reaction against Saudi influence over Yemen's Government and to protect Zaydi Shia Muslims.¹

Fighting took place between the Houthis and Yemen's Government and Saudi Arabia in the 2000s, centred on Houthi demands for greater autonomy.²

Yemen's multi-sided conflict, 2014 to present

The Commons Library briefing, [Yemen in 2023](#), provides more on the conflict, peace talks, human rights and the role of the UK

Despite attempts from 2012 to resolve political divisions and agree a new constitution, negotiations between the Houthis and Yemen's Government, then led by President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, collapsed in 2014. Later that year, the Houthis launched an attack on Yemen's capital, Sana'a, capturing it and much of northern Yemen, which they continue to control.³

In March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, which included Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was invited to intervene by the Hadi Government. The Saudis, like most of the Gulf states that joined the coalition, are Sunni-majority countries that sought to reduce Iranian influence and remove a source of instability in the Arabian Peninsula (see next section).

The US administration supported the coalition, providing some logistical and other support for the air operations. The UK also backed the coalition as a means to restore Hadi, though was not a party to the conflict.⁴ The UN Security Council also passed [Resolution 2216](#), which called for the Houthis to surrender their arms and said Hadi was Yemen's legitimate ruler.⁵

In recent years, the Saudi-led coalition has weakened, with the UAE supporting a separatist group in the south, the [Southern Transitional Council](#). In 2022, Hadi yielded control to the [Presidential Leadership Council](#), which is

¹ Washington Institute, [Saudi Arabia's war with the Houthis: Old borders, new lines](#), 9 April 2015

² Brookings Institute, [Who are the Houthis?](#), 2017; Wilson Center, [Who are Yemen's Houthis?](#), 2022

³ This section from Commons Library, [Yemen in 2023](#), pp8 to 9 and section 2.1

⁴ HC Deb, [19 December 2016](#). c1215

⁵ [UN Security Council Resolution 2216 \(2015\)](#)

constituted of a coalition of political figures in Yemen. The Houthis also launched drone and missile attacks against the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

High-intensity conflict has largely ended. From April to October 2022, a nationwide ceasefire was in place. Although this was not renewed, there have been talks on a negotiated settlement, primarily brokered by Oman.

Houthi alignment with Iran

The Houthis are one of several armed groups in the Middle East that receive financial, military, or political support from Iran, and which share a common hostility to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US presence in the region.⁶

In 2019, the Houthis had an estimated armed force of around 180,000 to 200,000, and in the early period of conflict benefited from the defection of large numbers of Yemen's existing police, army, and paramilitary groups.⁷

The US, UK, Saudi Arabia, and others judge the Houthis receive military support from Iran.⁸ Iran's support is judged to have increased in recent years and to include:

- Anti-tank missiles, mines, and short-range ballistic missiles.
- Together with Lebanese Hezbollah, training Houthi fighters in military tactics and weaponry.
- Cyber operations against Saudi Arabian infrastructure, including oil.⁹
- Several millions of dollars in finance.¹⁰

In 2017, the head of Iran's [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) (IRGC) said Iran provided only "advisory and spiritual support" at the request of the Houthis.¹¹

As Italian Institute for International Political Studies analysis notes, while the Houthis have a "similar worldview" and foreign policy with Iran, the Houthis are capable of acting independently: they can raise revenue locally, have specific objectives against Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Government, and a history and organisation that pre-dates Iranian military support.¹²

⁶ Commons Library research briefing, [Iran's influence in the Middle East](#), section 1

⁷ Chatham House, [A new approach to stalled state transformations in Iraq and Yemen](#), 2019, ch 3

⁸ [Iran provides Yemen's Houthis 'lethal' support](#), Reuters, 21 April 2021, PQ 106672 [[Iran: Ansar Allah](#)], 24 January 2022

⁹ Center for Strategic and International Studies, [The Iranian and Houthi war](#), 21 December 2021

¹⁰ US Treasury Department, [Treasury sanctions network financing Houthi aggression \[...\]](#), 10 June 2021

¹¹ Middle East Institute, [IRGC admits aiding Houthis against Saudi-led coalition in Yemen](#), 27

November 2017; Arab Gulf States Institute, [Evolving Iranian-Houthi relations](#), 10 February 2023

¹² Italian Institute for International Political Studies, [Iranian backed armed groups wield power in the MENA region \[...\]](#), 22 March 2023

2

Houthi attacks since 7 October 2023

Houthi attacks on Israel

Following the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October, in which [1,200 civilians were killed](#) and an [estimated 240 hostages taken](#), the Houthi leader, Abul Malik, said the group was prepared to support Hamas militarily, including by launching drone and missile strikes.¹³

From October 2023, the group has launched several missiles and drones towards Israel, including its southernmost city of Eilat. These attacks were intercepted by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and navies of countries including France and the United States.¹⁴

The Houthis have a history of launching missile and drone attacks. During the Yemen conflict, the group launched drone and missile attacks against cities and other sites in both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.¹⁵ The group claims it has missiles that have a range that extends beyond Israel.¹⁶

Unlike other Iran-aligned groups in the region, the Houthis have not launched attacks against US military bases, such as that in Djibouti, on the Red Sea, (several attacks have been reported by Iran-aligned militia groups in Syria and Iraq against US bases since October 2023).¹⁷

Houthi attacks on shipping

In November 2023, the Houthi leadership said it would continue to attack Israel and would target Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb Strait (at the Sea's southern entrance) to "support [...] the Palestinian people".¹⁸ The US reports the Houthis have attacked ships linked to 55 states.¹⁹

¹³ [Yemen Houthi rebels 'prepared to support' Palestinian factions militarily](#), BBC Monitoring, 10 October 2023

¹⁴ [US shoots down 12 Houthi attack drones, 5 missiles; Israeli jet downs Eilat-bound UAV](#), Times of Israel, 26 December 2023; [French frigate Languedoc intercepts yet another drone \[...\]](#), Naval News, 12 December 2023; [US warship intercepts missiles fired from Yemen \[...\]](#), 20 October 2023

¹⁵ ACLED, [Beyond Riyadh: Houthi cross-border aerial warfare](#), 17 January 2023

¹⁶ Middle East Institute, [The Houthis' Red Sea missile and drone attack](#), 20 October 2023

¹⁷ US Institute for Peace, [Proxy attacks: Iraq, Syria and Yemen](#), 14 December 2023

¹⁸ Washington Institute, [Houthi ship attacks are affecting Red Sea trade routes](#), 7 December 2023; [Houthis say undeterred by US-led naval coalition](#), BBC Monitoring, 19 December 2023

¹⁹ US Department of Defense (DoD), [US partners committed to defensive operations](#), 4 January 2024

On 19 November, the Houthis seized the car-carrier *Galaxy Leader*, partly owned by an Israeli-based company. The crew remain held in Yemen.²⁰

Attacks on shipping have continued into 2024: on 24 February, the US said the Houthis have launched at least 48 attacks since 19 November.²¹ Data collected by the Armed Conflict and Location Database (ACLED) suggests the attacks have widened geographically in 2024 to include the Gulf of Aden.²²

The US navy was engaged in direct combat with the Houthis before the air and naval strikes in January 2024. On 30 December 2023, US helicopters responded in self-defence to a Houthi attack while responding to a distress signal from a ship, destroying three Houthi boats.²³

On 10 January 2024, the UK and US Governments said the Houthis had conducted “their largest attack” on shipping to date, with their navies shooting down 21 drones and missiles.²⁴

Since the Houthi attacks began in November 2023, several shipping companies have diverted ships away the region and towards the longer route around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope.

These are not the first attacks the Houthis have launched against shipping: earlier attacks had been conducted from 2015 to 2021.²⁵

What role has Iran played?

The governments of both the United States and United Kingdom have said Iran has a responsibility to help end the attacks. In response to the seizure of the ship *Galaxy Leader* on 20 November, the UK Government said:

Iran has long provided military and political support to the Houthis. We have made it clear to Iran that it bears responsibility for the actions of its proxies and partners. Iran must actively restrain these groups to prevent the conflict escalating across the region.²⁶

On 31 December 2023, Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron raised the issue directly with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and told him that “Iran shares responsibility for preventing these attacks given their long-standing support to the Houthis”.²⁷

²⁰ [Crew of seized *Galaxy Leader* allowed ‘modest’ contact with families](#), Reuters, 5 December 2023

²¹ US DoD, [DoD takes steps to restore stability in Red Sea area](#), 27 February 2024

²² ACLED, [Red Sea attacks dashboard](#)

²³ [US navy helicopter destroy Houthi boats in Red Sea \[...\]](#), BBC News, 30 December 2023

²⁴ [US, UK forces shoot down 21 drones and missiles fired by Houthis](#), Al-Jazeera, 10 January 2024

²⁵ Washington Institute, [Tracking maritime attacks in the Middle East since 2019](#)

²⁶ FCDO, [Seizure of MV *Galaxy Leader* by the Houthis—UK statement](#), 21 November 2023

²⁷ Lord Cameron on X/Twitter, [Spoke to Amir-Abdollahian today \[...\]](#), 31 December 2023

The United States National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, says that the US had “every reason to believe that these attacks, while they were launched by the Houthis in Yemen, are fully enabled by Iran”.²⁸ The Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, said the UK agrees with the US assessment that Iran “has directly supplied and directly supported Houthi attacks, providing them with intelligence [...] [and] with missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles”.²⁹

The US representative to the UN Security Council, Christopher Lu, also said the “root of the problem” in the Red Sea was “Iran’s long-standing provision of financing to aid the Houthi operations”.³⁰ Both the UK, France and the United States have previously seized Iranian weaponry destined for the Houthis, most recently by the United States in January and February 2024.³¹

Iran and freedom of navigation

Iran has a history of targeting shipping in the Arabian/Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, where around 30% of the world’s seaborne crude oil passes every day.³²

Iran denies involvement in the Houthi’s actions in the Red Sea and says the group is acting “independently”.³³ In December 2023, however, the Wall Street Journal reported an Iranian ship was providing the Houthis with intelligence and weaponry.³⁴ US media reports state the US conducted a “covert” cyber-operation against the ship in February, to inhibit its ability to share intelligence on targeting with the Houthis.³⁵ In January 2024, following the launch of Operation Prosperity Guardian by the United States (see below, section 3), an Iranian warship also entered the Red Sea.³⁶

On 11 January 2024, Iran said it had seized an oil tanker, the St Nicholas, off Oman.³⁷ The US said these were “provocative and unacceptable actions” by Iran and said the ship must be released.³⁸

²⁸ [Iran says it is not involved in any actions against US \[...\]](#), Reuters, 5 December 2023; Centcom, [Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in international waters continues](#), 3 December 2023

²⁹ HC Deb, [15 January 2023](#), c858

³⁰ UN, [Alarmed by attacks on ships in Red Sea, top UN officials urge protection \[...\]](#), 3 January 2024

³¹ Centcom, [US Centcom seizes Iranian advanced conventional weaponry bound for Houthis](#), 16 January 2024; and [Intercepts Iranian shipment intended for Houthis](#), 15 February 2024; Royal Navy, [UK reveals Royal Navy seizure of smuggled Iranian missiles](#), 7 July 2022; [French forces seize shipment of weapons headed from Iran to Yemen](#), Al-Jazeera, 2 February 2023

³² International Crisis Group, [Strait of Hormuz](#), updated 11 January 2024

³³ [Iran says Yemeni rebels act ‘independently’](#), BBC Monitoring, 18 December 2023

³⁴ [Iranian spy ship helps Houthis direct attacks \[...\]](#), Wall Street Journal, 22 December 2023

³⁵ Just Security, [Key questions in US cyberattack in “Iranian spy ship”](#), 15 February 2024

³⁶ [Iranian warship Alborz enters the Red Sea—Tasnim](#), Reuters, 1 January 2024

³⁷ [Oil tanker seized near mouth of the Gulf](#), Financial Times, 11 January 2024

³⁸ White House, [Press briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre \[...\]](#), 11 January 2024

Will the Houthi attacks affect peace talks?

There are ongoing talks for a political settlement, brokered by Oman.

In December, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grunberg, said the negotiating parties had made a “significant step” in the talks to commit to a nation-wide ceasefire and to engage in an “inclusive political process”.³⁹ Further talks were taking place in early January 2024.⁴⁰

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both parties to the conflict, did not participate in US/UK strikes on 11 January or become members of Operation Prosperity Guardian. Analysis for US-based Al-Monitor argues that Saudi Arabia is seeking to “keep the door open” for negotiations with the Houthis and also to maintain relations with Iran, with which it restored diplomatic relations in March 2023 after a seven-year hiatus.⁴¹

The Yemen-based Sana’a Center argues the Houthi attacks are an attempt to isolate others in Yemen and demonstrate the group are “defiant” against Israel and the United States. It also argues the Houthi attacks pose a challenge to Saudi Arabia and the prospects for a political settlement:

Riyadh [Saudi Arabia] has now been in negotiations with the Houthis for over a year, and there is concern that if they are targeted with military action or punitive measures, it would put Saudi targets, including its vulnerable oil infrastructure, back in the crosshairs. [...]

Saudi officials may have thought they were locking the Houthis into a moderate position that would be the basis for future cooperation and nudge the group away from Tehran [Iran]. [...] If the US or Israel do launch strikes, they would likely leave the group in power, but further bolstered by claims that it went toe-to-toe with its sworn enemies [...] The hope, shared by both Saudi Arabia and the United States, that a Saudi-Houthi deal would lead to some form of normalization with the group [...] now seems premature [...].⁴²

Analysis from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) argues that the Houthi attacks may also be a means to “distract Yemen’s frustration” with Houthi administration:

[...] before the eruption of the Gaza conflict, unrest had started building up in Houthi-controlled areas demanding payment of salaries and venting public discontent at poor governance. [...] Hundreds of thousands of Yemenis took to the streets to celebrate Yemen’s 26 September 1962 ‘revolution day,’ sacred to the regime that preceded the Houthis.⁴³

³⁹ UN, [UN envoy welcomes ‘significant step’ towards ceasefire in Yemen](#), 26 December 2023; Commons Library, [Yemen in 2023](#), p20. The Houthis will currently only negotiate with Saudi Arabia.

⁴⁰ [UN envoy meets Houthi chief negotiator in Oman](#), BBC Monitoring, 9 January 2023

⁴¹ [Iran-backed Houthis emerge as threat to Israel, US amid Gaza war](#), Al-Monitor, 28 October 2023

⁴² Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, [Red Sea attacks provoke international response](#), 27 December 2023

⁴³ ACLED, [Why are Yemen’s Houthis attacking ships in the Red Sea?](#), 5 January 2024

3

UN and international statements

The economic significance of the Red Sea

The Red Sea is an important maritime corridor: around 30% of global container traffic passes through it.⁴⁴ In January 2024, the UN Conference on Trade and Development said that the number of weekly transits through the Suez Canal declined 42% in December and January. Container ship transits (including for oil and gas) were down 67% compared to a year before.⁴⁵

In December 2023 several companies, including oil company BP and the Danish shipping company Maersk, announced they were pausing shipments through the Red Sea.⁴⁶ A detour around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope can take between seven and 20 days, increasing transport costs and delaying trade.⁴⁷

In the UK, businesses and the Bank of England have warned the disruption is likely to contribute to inflation and pressure on energy and other prices.⁴⁸

3.1

UN Security Council resolution, 2024

On 10 January the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 2722 \(2024\)](#).

The Resolution demanded that the Houthis immediately release the ship *Galaxy Leader* and its crew. It also took “note” of the right of Member States “in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms”.⁴⁹

The Resolution was adopted by a vote of 11 in favour and four abstentions (including Russia and China).

⁴⁴ Atlantic Council, [What attacks in the Red Sea could mean for the \[...\] economy](#), 18 December 2023.

⁴⁵ UNCTAD, [Red Sea, Black Sea and Panama Canal: UNCTAD raises alarm](#), 26 January 2024

⁴⁶ [BP to pause Red Sea shipping transits over security concerns](#), DW, 18 December 2023

⁴⁷ Kiel Institute for World Economy, [Cargo volume in the Red Sea collapses](#), 11 January 2024

⁴⁸ [Red Sea crisis poses risk to interest rates, warns Bank of England](#), The Telegraph, 10 January 2024; [Houthi attacks on Red sea pose two big inflationary risks to Britain](#), The Telegraph, 5 January 2024

⁴⁹ [UN Security Council Resolution 2722 \(2024\)](#), 10 January 2024, para 3.

Russia proposed three unsuccessful amendments to the text (the US and UK voted against all three).⁵⁰ Russia argued amendments were necessary to avoid the Resolution being used as an open-ended endorsement of US operations by the Council. These amendments would have:

- underscored that the Resolution should not be seen to create any new precedent or norms of international law.
- replaced the language referring to rights to defend vessels with general language of Member States' rights in accordance with international law.
- added language referring to the ongoing conflict in Gaza.

Russia also argued that the Resolution “cannot create a non-existent right for States to defend their ships from attacks.”

The US rejected Russia’s proposals because they would have falsely suggested that the conflict in Gaza is the cause of the Houthi attacks.

3.2 US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian

On 18 December 2023 the US Secretary of State for Defence, Lloyd Austin, announced a 20-state coalition to protect ships under Operation Prosperity Guardian.⁵¹ This complements existing missions in the region (see box below).

More than 20 countries are participating, though not all have been publicly named. Those named include the United States, UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Seychelles, and Spain.

In February 2024, the EU launched its defensive Red Sea operation, ASPIDES. It will have four ships and one aerial asset.⁵² This will build on the [French Agenor Operation](#), which has a presence in the Gulf.⁵³ The UK Government has said that while the mission “provides a valuable defensive role”, it does not expect it to be involved in “degrading or deterring” the Houthis.⁵⁴

What was the regional response to Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)?

The Houthis have said the United States would “bear the consequences of their actions” in establishing Operation Prosperity Guardian and that the group would respond to any country that allows use of its airspace for the

⁵⁰ This section from UN, [Adopting Resolution 2722 \(2024\) \[...\]](#), 10 January 2024

⁵¹ DoD, [Secretary of Defense \[...\] on ensuring freedom of navigation](#), 18 December 2023; [More than 20 countries now part of US-led Red Sea coalition](#), Reuters, 22 December 2023

⁵² EU External Action, [EUNAVFOR Operation Aspides](#), 19 February 2024

⁵³ [EU wants to send warships to Red Sea to tackle Houthi attacks](#), Politico, 11 January 2024

⁵⁴ HL Deb, [29 February 2024](#), c1156

bombing of Yemen.⁵⁵ Iran accused the US of seeking to permanently expand its presence in support of Israel.⁵⁶

In December 2023, the Southern Transitional Council, a UAE-backed separatist movement that controls parts of southern Yemen, said it was willing to join OPG to secure international shipping lanes.⁵⁷ The internationally recognised Government of Yemen has not publicly backed the coalition. It argues that instead of the current “defensive” actions against the Houthis countries should support it regain areas controlled by the group.⁵⁸

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have been subject to drone attacks by the Houthis in recent years.⁵⁹ Of these three states, Bahrain is the only one to have publicly said it is participating in OPG.

Following the US/UK attacks on 11 January, the Saudi Foreign Minister has called for restraint and for countries to “avoid [...] escalation”.⁶⁰ The Times reports Saudi officials have been weighing up whether military action against the Houthis would complicate political negotiations in Yemen, or whether the failure to intervene would embolden the Houthis further.⁶¹

Qatar, which is not participating in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, has said the situation in the Red Sea is “unacceptable” but that a military solution is not the “correct path”. It argues ending the war in Gaza “is the best possible solution” to the Red Sea attacks.⁶²

How have China and Russia responded?

Neither Russia nor China are participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian and have instead argued countries should address the “root causes” of the Houthi actions through pursuing a ceasefire in Gaza. On 3 January 2024, Russia’s representative to the Security Council, Vassily Nebenzia, argued the maritime coalition and US actions in the region were tantamount to “fanning the flames [of conflict] with oil”.⁶³

Chatham House report that China judges any US military action as undermining of political negotiations in Yemen and antagonising of regional tensions, including between Saudi Arabia and Iran. China is seeking to

⁵⁵ [Houthis say undeterred by US-led naval coalition \[...\]](#), BBC Monitoring, 19 December 2023; [Houthi leadership figure warns Saudi Arabia, UAE \[...\]](#), BBC Monitoring, 21 December 2023

⁵⁶ [Iran, Russia: US looking for pretexts to expand regional presence](#), Press TV, 10 January 2024

⁵⁷ [Yemen separatist leader willing to join Red Sea coalition](#), BBC Monitoring, 19 December 2023

⁵⁸ [Yemen government denies participation \[...\]](#), BBC Monitoring, 12 December 2023; [Yemen’s Presidential Leadership Council asks Houthis not to start new war](#), Arab News, 4 January 2024; [Yemen Government head calls for international support against Houthis](#), BBC Monitoring, 28 January 2024

⁵⁹ See Commons Library research briefing, [Yemen in 2023](#), pp14-15

⁶⁰ Saudi Press Agency, [Saudi Arabia closely monitors \[...\] military operations](#), 12 January 2024

⁶¹ [Saudi Arabia ready to back US air strikes on Houthi rebels](#), The Times, 8 January 2023

⁶² Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stresses need to ceasefire in Gaza \[...\]](#), 7 January 2024

⁶³ UN, [Alarmed by attacks on shops in the Red Sea, UN officials urge protection \[...\]](#), 3 January 2024

advance economic ties with both states, who have typically been in conflict.⁶⁴ In January, there were reports China, though contact with Iran, was seeking to rein in Houthi attacks.⁶⁵

In contrast to the Russian and Chinese positions, the UN Assistant Secretary General, Khaled Khiari, has argued that “no cause or grievance can justify continuation of these attacks against the freedom of navigation”.⁶⁶ The US has also said linking the Houthi actions to the conflict in Gaza are “false” and such statements “embolden the Houthis and legitimise their actions”.⁶⁷

Pre-existing international maritime presence

There has long been an international maritime presence in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and surrounding area. This partly evolved after the 9/11 attacks in the US in 2001 and subsequent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in response to piracy off the coast of Somalia from 2007 onwards.

Combined Maritime Forces

Operation Prosperity Guardian will operate under the umbrella of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), specifically task force 153.⁶⁸

Led by US Central Command in Bahrain, the CMF involves nearly 40 states. A Royal Navy commodore serves as its deputy commander. There are five task groups with command rotating between contributing forces, including the UK:

- [Task Group 150](#): Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean
- [Task Group 151](#): Counter-piracy
- [Task Force 152](#): Persian (Arabian) Gulf
- [Task Force 153](#): Red Sea and Gulf of Aden
- [Task Group 154](#): Maritime security training

EU Operation Atalanta

Since 2008 the EU’s Operation Atalanta has focused on [counter-piracy and maritime security](#) in the north-west Indian Ocean.

Naval bases

France, China, Italy, Japan, and the US all have naval bases in Djibouti. [Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti](#) is the primary base of operations for US Africa

⁶⁴ Chatham House, [Houthi attacks in the Red Sea help China criticise the US](#), 9 January 2024

⁶⁵ [China presses Iran to rein in Houthi attacks](#), Reuters, 26 January 2024

⁶⁶ UN, [Alarmed by attacks on shops in the Red Sea, UN officials urge protection \[...\]](#), 3 January 2024

⁶⁷ UN, [Adopting resolution 2722 \(2024\) by recorded vote \[...\]](#), 10 January 2024

⁶⁸ US DoD, [US partners’ forces strike Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

Command in the Horn of Africa. The UAE established a military port in Eritrea in 2015 to support its operations in Yemen, but reportedly dismantled much of it in 2021.⁶⁹ Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Jordan also all have naval bases on their Red Sea coasts.

3.3

Other International statements

Joint statement of 44 states, December 2023

On 19 December 2023, a total of 44 states, including the members of NATO and the EU, “condemned Houthi interference” with freedom of navigation and said their actions were a threat to maritime security:

The Houthi-led seizure of the *Galaxy Leader* on November 19 and the detention of its 25-member international crew – who remain unjustly detained – is appalling.

Such behaviour also threatens the movement of food, fuel, humanitarian assistance, and other essential commodities to destinations and populations all over the world.

The undersigned further encourage all states to refrain from facilitation or encouragement of the Houthis. There is no justification for these attacks [...].⁷⁰

Joint statement of 13 states, January 2024

A further statement was issued by 13 states on 3 January 2024, including the UK, United States, Bahrain, Germany and Japan. This reiterated the 44-country statement of December 2023:

The Houthis will bear the responsibility of the consequences should they continue to threaten lives, the global economy, and free flow of commerce in the region’s critical waterways. We remain committed to the international rules-based order and are determined to hold malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks.⁷¹

Joint statements on 2024 strikes

In response to UK/US military strikes in January and February 2024, several states have issued collective statements alongside the UK and US defending the “precision strikes” against the Houthis as “proportionate and necessary”:

⁶⁹ [UAE dismantles Eritrea base as it pulls back after Yemen war](#), Associated Press, 18 February 2021

⁷⁰ US Department of State, [Joint statement on Houthi attacks in the Red Sea](#), 19 December 2023

⁷¹ Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), [Joint statement condemning Houthi attacks against commercial shipping](#), 3 January 2024

- Prime Minister's Office, [Joint statement on strikes](#), 12 January 2024. Signed by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, UK, and the US.
- Prime Minister's Office, [Joint statement on strikes](#), 24 January 2024. Signed by Albania, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, UK, and the US.
- Ministry of Defence, [Joint statement on strikes](#), 3 February 2024. Signed by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, UK, and the US, who all participated in the strikes.
- Ministry of Defence, [Joint statement on strikes](#), 24 February 2024. Signed by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK and US, who all participated in the strikes.

4 UK statements and Red Sea presence

From November 2023 to February 2024 HMS Diamond, a Royal Navy destroyer, was leading the UK's maritime response to Houthi attacks on shipping. On 6 February, it was [replaced by HMS Richmond](#).

On 11 January 2024, RAF aircraft bombed Houthi sites in Yemen used to launch drone attacks alongside the United States. The UK Government said it would “not hesitate to take further action” if Houthis did not cease their attacks.⁷²

4.1 UK statements on the use of force

Before the strikes of 11 January 2024

Speaking on 15 January, the Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, said the UK “could not have been clearer in its warnings” to the Houthis that they must halt their attacks in the Red Sea and that the UK was prepared to take military action.⁷³

- 19 December 2023: the Defence Secretary said the UK “will not stand idly by when the prosperity of us all is at risk” by the Houthi attacks.⁷⁴
- 1 January 2024: the Defence Secretary said the UK was prepared to take action beyond diplomatic measures:

As HMS Diamond illustrated [in December, when it [shot down a suspected drone attack](#)], we are willing to take direct action, and we won't hesitate to take further action to deter threats to freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

The Houthis should be under no misunderstanding: we are committed to holding malign actors accountable for unlawful seizures and attacks.

[...] Those terrorists who are disrupting trade in the Red Sea are drinking in the last chance saloon. Diplomatic efforts have been made to find a resolution but with limited success.⁷⁵

⁷² Ministry of Defence (MoD), [Air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

⁷³ MoD, [Defending Britain from a more dangerous world](#), 15 January 2024

⁷⁴ HCWS163 [[Maritime Update](#)], 19 December 2023

⁷⁵ Grant Shapps MP, [We must protect the Red Sea from Houthi rebels](#), The Telegraph, 1 January 2024; [UK is ready to attack Houthi rebels, says Grant Shapps](#), The Telegraph, 1 January 2024

- 3 January: The Defence Secretary stated the UK would “not hesitate to take necessary and proportionate action” against the Houthis if their actions in the Red Sea continue.⁷⁶
- 8 January: The Defence Secretary called again on the Houthis to immediately cease attacks on shipping, adding “the UK will not hesitate to take further action should the Houthis continue to ignore our warnings.”⁷⁷
- 9 January: Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, told the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee that the UK was considering what further action could be taken if attacks continued.⁷⁸

4.2

Deployment of Royal Navy

On 30 November 2023 the Defence Secretary sent HMS Diamond to the region to encourage de-escalation and to bolster the existing UK naval presence (see box on the next page).⁷⁹

HMS Diamond has since been redeployed to support Operation Prosperity Guardian (see above, section 3).⁸⁰ HMS Lancaster, a frigate permanently based in Bahrain, is also in the region to provide support.

On 8 January 2024 the Defence Secretary said HMS Richmond has also been deployed to the region to “provide resilience to the UK’s presence in the Gulf” and to swap places with HMS Diamond or HMS Lancaster if needed.⁸¹ This swap took place with HMS Diamond on 6 February 2024.⁸²

HMS Diamond is a Type 45 destroyer designed to provide air defence to shipping. Its Sea Viper air defence system can launch multiple missiles at a time with a range of up to 70 miles.⁸³

HMS Lancaster and HMS Richmond are Type 23 multi-role frigates armed with the Sea Ceptor missile system. Sea Ceptor has a shorter range than the Sea Viper system and can also engage small surface targets, such as fast attack craft, as well as incoming missiles and aircraft. Both types are also equipped with short-range gun systems.

⁷⁶ Grant Shapps MP X/Twitter, [The UK will not hesitate to take necessary \[...\]](#), 3 January 2024

⁷⁷ HCWS167 [[Red Sea](#)], 8 January 2024

⁷⁸ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: Work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), 9 January 2024, HC 325 2023-24, q669

⁷⁹ MoD, [Defence Secretary sends Royal Navy destroyer east of Suez \[...\]](#), 30 November 2023

⁸⁰ HCWS163 [[Maritime Update](#)], 19 December 2023

⁸¹ HCWS167 [[Red Sea](#)], 8 January 2024; [HC Deb 8 January 2024 c4](#)

⁸² MoD, [HMS Richmond takes over from HMS Diamond](#), 6 February 2024

⁸³ [HMS Diamond: Capabilities of the Type 45 destroyer thwarting Red Sea attacks](#), Forces News, 10 January 2024. Forces News has a [video explaining HMS Diamond’s weapons](#).

Government statements on military deployments

- [19 December 2023](#): written statement on the UK joining Operation Prosperity Guardian and HMS Diamond shooting down a drone.
- [8 January 2024](#): written statement calling on Houthis to immediately cease attacks, HMS Richmond deployed to the region.
- [8 January 2024](#): defence oral questions on HMS Richmond's role and a commitment to provide an oral statement if further action is taken to deter Houthi attacks.

The Royal Navy in the Middle East: Operation Kipion

The UK has maintained a permanent maritime presence in the Gulf region since 1980, to protect merchant shipping during the Iran-Iraq conflict.

Operation Kipion is the Royal Navy's maritime security presence based in the Persian Gulf but responsible for naval operations in the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and counter-piracy in the Indian Ocean. The Royal Navy says the [aim of the operation](#) is to "promote peace and stability in the region" and ensure the safe flow of oil and international trade.

Deployments typically includes a frigate (currently HMS Lancaster, deployed in 2022 for three years), a Royal Fleet Auxiliary support vessel (currently RFA Cardigan Bay) and a permanent mine countermeasures squadron of three mine-hunters.

They are based in Bahrain at the [Royal Navy facility at Mina Salman](#). The UK also operates a permanent Joint Logistics Support Base at Duqm port in Oman.

The following Commons Library briefings provide more information:

- [Operation Kipion](#) (CBP 8628) explains the evolution of the Royal Navy's presence.
- [UK forces in the Middle East region](#) (CBP 8794) outlines the other bases and facilities used by UK armed forces in the Middle East.
- [The Royal Navy's surface fleet](#) (CBP 9697) provides an overview of the UK's current and future naval fleet.

5 UK and US military strikes: UK and international response

5.1 UK and US strikes in 2023/2024

UK Air and naval strikes on Houthi targets

Action taken to date by UK armed forces in the Red Sea includes:

- 16 December 2023: [HMS Diamond shoots down an unmanned aerial vehicle](#) (drone). This was the first time the Type 45's Sea Viper missile has been used in action and the first surface-to-air shootdown by the Royal Navy since the First Gulf War (1990 to 1991).⁸⁴
- 9 January 2024: [HMS Diamond shoots down seven drones](#) in what Grant Shapps described as the “largest attack” from Houthis in the Red Sea to date.⁸⁵
- 11 January 2024: [RAF Typhoon aircraft attack Houthi facilities in Yemen](#). Four Typhoon aircraft, supported by a Voyager air refuelling tanker, used Paveway IV guided bombs on sites in Yemen. The Ministry of Defence said two sites used for launching drones were targeted: an airfield at Abbs and a site at Bani in north-western Yemen.⁸⁶ The Houthis state five individuals were killed in the strikes: The US, with whom the UK acted, said the strikes were on military targets and used “precision-guided munitions to minimize collateral damage”.⁸⁷
- 22 January 2024: Alongside the United States, the RAF conducted further strikes against two Houthi military sites in Sana'a to further “degrade” the group's capacity to target shipping.⁸⁸ The US said its strikes targeted missiles, unmanned aerial systems and weapons storage areas.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Royal Navy, [Diamond joins new international Red Sea mission to safeguard shipping](#), 19 December 2023; HCWS163 [[Maritime Update](#)], 19 December 2023

⁸⁵ [‘Largest Houthi attack to date’ in Red Sea repelled by HMS Diamond and US warships, Grant Shapps says](#), Sky News, 10 January 2024

⁸⁶ MoD, [Air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

⁸⁷ US DoD, [US, partners’ forces strike Houthi military targets](#), 12 January 2024; [In 73 strikes by US, UK on Yemen, 5 Houthi fighters killed](#), Anadolu Ajansi, 12 January 2024

⁸⁸ MoD, [Statement on air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 22 January 2024

⁸⁹ US DoD, [Senior military official and senior defense official hold a \[...\] briefing](#), 22 January 2024

- 3 February 2024: Alongside the US, the RAF conducted strikes against three Houthi targets, including two ground control stations.⁹⁰
- 24 February 2024: Alongside the US, the RAF targeted two Houthi sites housing long-term drones used for reconnaissance and attack missions.⁹¹

Australia, Bahrain, Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand provided non-operational support to the February strikes.⁹²

Additional US strikes in January and February 2024

In addition to the four strikes carried out alongside the UK, the United States has conducted a series of additional strikes against the Houthis. These have targeted sites including Houthi radar, a ground control station for drones, uncrewed surface vehicles, and missiles the US judged to be prepared for launch. On 27 February, the US Department of Defense said that US forces had struck over 230 targets in self-defence and pre-planned strikes, “likely destroying hundreds” of Houthi weapons.⁹³

Updates on US activity are published on the [US Central Command website](#).

5.2

On what legal grounds did the UK act?

The UK Government said the strikes on 11 January were “limited, necessary and proportionate in self-defence”.⁹⁴ The Government said the 22 January strikes were carried on the same legal grounds.⁹⁵

In [a summary of the Government’s legal position](#), the Government cited four grounds for its actions:

1. Continuing Houthi attacks, including against the Royal Navy’s HMS Diamond.
2. Identification of targets which were “proportionate” to deter further attacks.
3. Force being used in self-defence to deal with “an actual or imminent armed attack” and

⁹⁰ MoD, [Statement on air strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen](#), 3 February 2024

⁹¹ MoD, [Statement on air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 24 February 2024

⁹² See above, pages 17 to 18

⁹³ DoD, [DoD takes steps to restore stability in Red Sea area](#), 27 February 2024

⁹⁴ PMO and MoD, [Statement against Houthi targets](#), 12 January 2024

⁹⁵ PMO, [Summary of the UK Government legal position](#), 23 January 2024

4. That it would inform the UN Security Council of its [actions in self-defence](#).⁹⁶

On 23 January, the UK said it had notified the UN Security Council of its actions under Article 51 of the UN Charter.⁹⁷ The UK's letter reiterates the position set out above.⁹⁸ At the UN Security Council on 12 January, the UK's Representative, Barbara Woodward, said:

Last night, we took limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence alongside the United States, with the non-operational support of the Netherlands, Canada, Bahrain and Australia. The United Kingdom's Royal Air Force carried out targeted strikes against military facilities used by Houthi rebels in Yemen. This operation took particular care to minimise risks to civilians. [...].⁹⁹

In October 2016, when the US conducted strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen in response to attacks against US Navy war ships in the Red Sea, [the US had said that the strikes were conducted with the consent of the Government of Yemen](#) and therefore that a claim of Article 51 self-defence was unnecessary at that time:

These actions were taken with the consent of the Government of Yemen. Although the United States therefore does not believe notification pursuant to Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations is necessary in these circumstances, the United States nevertheless wishes to inform the Council that these actions were taken consistent with international law.¹⁰⁰

Self-defence under [Article 51 of the UN Charter](#) is the only right recognised by all states internationally to take unilateral military action. According to Article 51, the right is available "if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security".¹⁰¹

Russia has argued against the legality of strikes, suggesting self-defence does not apply to commercial shipping, and argued freedom of navigation at sea is governed by the UN on the Law of the Sea, which Russia suggests had several legal avenues for action rather than military action against a state.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ PMO, [Summary: The legality of UK military action to target Houthi facilities](#), 12 January 2024

⁹⁷ PMO, [Summary of the UK Government legal position](#), 23 January 2024

⁹⁸ See UN Digital Library, [Letter dated 12 January 2024 from the Permanent representative \[of the UK\]](#), 15 January 2024 and [Letter dated 12 January 2024 from the Permanent representative of the US](#), 15 January 2024

⁹⁹ FCDO, "[Houthi attacks on vessels in the Red Sea must stop: UK statement at the UN Security Council](#)", 12 January 2024.

¹⁰⁰ [Letter dated 15 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council](#), 17 October 2016, S/2016/869

¹⁰¹ C Greenwood, "[Self-Defence](#)", Mac Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law, 2001.

¹⁰² UN, [Senior UN official urges restraint following air strikes in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

5.3

What was the role and response of parliament?

Parliament's role in approving military actions

As described in the Commons Library research briefing, [Yemen airstrikes: Parliament's role in approving military action](#), deploying the armed forces is a prerogative power, exercised by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Crown.

Parliament has no legally established role or requirement to be consulted. However, since 2011 a convention has developed that the Commons should have an opportunity to debate the matter before forces are deployed, except in an emergency and [“such action would not be appropriate”](#) (PDF).

As the convention has evolved, successive governments have defended this “emergency caveat” and made clear the Government would come to the Commons retrospectively in emergency situations, where there was a need to protect a critical British national interest or to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Government's approach to consulting Parliament has, however, been inconsistent. Prior approval was sought in 2014 and 2015 before military action took place against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. However, airstrikes against the Syrian regime's chemical weapons facilities in 2018 took place without prior recourse to Parliament. The decision was also not subject to a retrospective vote. Military action in Libya in 2011, on the other hand, was subject to a retrospective vote.

In January 2024, the Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru argued Parliament should have been recalled to be consulted.¹⁰³

However, Defence Minister, James Heappey, said the Government had to act “based on the military, strategic and operational requirement” and this informed the timing of the operation and the decision not to consult parliament before it took place.¹⁰⁴ Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, also said it was a time where “you just need to be able to act” and the parliamentary process “would potentially degrade the quality of the operation itself”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ [Stephen Flynn fears ‘wider regional crisis’ after Yemen air strikes](#), BBC News, 15 January 2024; Layla Moran MP, [MPs like me have been betrayed by Rishi on Yemen—where was our vote?](#), Metro, 13 January 2024; [Some UK opposition parties call for parliament recall](#), BBC News, 12 January 2024

¹⁰⁴ [Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle ‘happy’ to help parliament recall](#), The Standard, 13 January 2024

¹⁰⁵ [Shapps warns Iran: Patience is running out with your Houthi thugs](#), Telegraph, 12 January 2024

Parliamentary proceedings on 2024 actions

Commons statements and debate following the strikes

Parliament was not recalled before the initial strikes were launched. In the Commons:

- The Prime Minister [made a statement to the House](#) on its first sitting day after the initial strikes, 15 January.
- The Prime Minister made a [further statement to the Commons](#) the day after the 22 January strikes.
- A [debate was held in the Commons on the Red Sea on 24 January](#), in which no vote was taken.
- The Secretary of State for Defence [made further statements on 5 February](#) and [26 February](#) following the third and fourth set of strikes.

Statements on strikes and UK policy

The Prime Minister has emphasised that the UK Government had sought to resolve the Houthi attacks diplomatically, including through support for the UN Security Council Resolution (see section 6.1). He has said the UK strikes are “in self-defence”, are “limited, not escalatory”, and a “necessary and proportionate response to a direct threat to UK vessels”.¹⁰⁶

On 23 January, he said the Government would “not hesitate” to act again in self-defence if the Houthi attacks continued but no decisions had been taken for a sustained campaign against the Houthis.¹⁰⁷ The Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, has also said that because the strikes are taking place in self-defence, the Government will “respond to attacks in turn [...] [and] are not looking to increase the implications of this [...] because we want to bring it [UK military action] to a close”.¹⁰⁸

Speaking on 26 February, the Defence Secretary said that the strikes had “eroded the Houthi capacity” but the group’s “intent to prosecute” attacks “remains undiminished”.¹⁰⁹

The Defence Secretary also said that the Government had “seen no evidence” that RAF strikes had caused civilian casualties and that the UN has observed “no civilian impact” of the four sets of strikes.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c577

¹⁰⁷ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c151

¹⁰⁸ HC Deb, [4 February 2024](#), c34

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb, [26 February 2024](#), c25

¹¹⁰ HC Deb, [26 February 2024](#), c24

On 23 January, the Prime Minister laid out four priorities for future UK action:

- The UK would be increasing its diplomatic engagement to support de-escalation, including with Iran.
- Enforcing the arms embargo against the Houthis.
- Implementing new sanctions against the Houthis (see section 6.2).
- To continue to provide aid to Yemen and support a diplomatic solution to the conflict.¹¹¹

The Prime Minister also said the strikes had “nothing to do with Israel and Gaza, and everything to do with our self-defence” and are also “completely unrelated” to Yemen’s civil war, in which the UK will continue to support peace negotiations.¹¹²

Position of other political parties

The Labour Leader, Keir Starmer, has backed the strikes to “reinforce maritime security in the Red Sea” and said they were a “proportionate response”.¹¹³

The SNP leader in the Commons, Stephen Flynn, called for further information on the Government strategy, arguing “we cannot have an escalation that leads to further regional instability”.¹¹⁴ He also supported the 22 January strikes, but questioned how effective strikes would be, given the history of Saudi air strikes against Yemen.¹¹⁵ The party continues to give its “tentative support”.¹¹⁶

The Liberal Democrat Leader, Ed Davey, said the party backed “limited strikes” to restore shipping lanes.¹¹⁷

Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru) questioned how strikes would “lead to de-escalation” and that there should be more protection for ships and co-ordinated diplomatic efforts to resolve the situation in the Red Sea.¹¹⁸

Questions on parliamentary consultation

On 15 January, Keir Starmer asked the Prime Minister if he:

¹¹¹ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c152

¹¹² HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), cc577, 592

¹¹³ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c580 and HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c153

¹¹⁴ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c582

¹¹⁵ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c155

¹¹⁶ HC Deb, [29 February 2024](#), c29

¹¹⁷ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c583

¹¹⁸ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c585

Stands by the parliamentary convention that, where possible, military interventions by the UK Government—particularly if they are part of a sustained campaign—should be brought before the House?¹¹⁹

The Prime Minister said he remained committed to the convention:

I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that it was necessary to strike at speed, as he acknowledged, to protect the security of the operations. That is in accordance with the convention. I remain committed to that convention, and would always look to follow appropriate processes and procedures, and act in line with precedent—he will know that there were strikes in 2015 [against Islamic State in Syria] and 2018 [against chemical weapons facilities in Syria], when a similar process was followed.¹²⁰

On 23 January, the Prime Minister said the Commons would hold a debate on UK in the Red Sea the next day. Sir Ed Davey requested the Commons be allowed to vote on the action: The Prime Minister said the Government reserved the right to take limited action and did not announce a vote.¹²¹

The issue of parliamentary consultation was also raised in the Commons [debate on the situation in the Red Sea](#) on 24 January.

On 5 February, after the third set of strikes, the Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, John Healey, questioned the stage at which the “one-off” strikes become a “sustained military operation” and parliamentary approval should be sought.¹²²

On 26 February, the Defence Secretary said the Government would “continue to gauge the view of the House” on the operations and holding a vote.¹²³

Mr Healey has also argued that the Prime Minister, rather the Secretary of State for Defence, should make a statement to the House. In reply, the Secretary of State for Defence said he had the legal authority to launch the strikes and it was “appropriate” for the Prime Minister to no longer make the statements.¹²⁴

Role of Iran

The Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Alicia Kearns, has backed the UK/US military action as a proportionate response to the Houthi attacks.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c579

¹²⁰ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), c581

¹²¹ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c157

¹²² HC Deb, [5 February 2024](#), cc23, 25

¹²³ HC Deb, [26 February 2024](#), c31

¹²⁴ HC Deb, [5 February 2024](#), cc23, 25

¹²⁵ Alicia Kearns MP, [‘Strikes against the Houthis were the right thing to do—but we must be prepared for reprisals’](#), The Mirror, 13 January 2024

She also argued that Iran is the “fundamental threat” to UK security and stability in the region.¹²⁶ Several Members, including former Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Liam Fox and Sir Iain Duncan Smith also raised Iran’s role.¹²⁷

The Prime Minister said Iran was supporting the Houthis and that the UK was taking action internationally to contain Iran:

We [the UK Government] are working closely with partners. Obviously, we are taking steps to protect ourselves here at home with the National Security Act 2023 and other measures, but internationally we want to see Iran’s influence on the region create less instability. That is why, for example, our interdiction of illegal arms shipments is so important, and we will remain actively engaged on how we can do more. [...]

We have sanctioned more than 400 Iranian individuals and entities, including the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] in its entirety.¹²⁸

In February, the Defence Secretary said that Iran “is responsible” for the Houthi’s actions, though Iran had “probably lost control of some” of the groups it funds and supports in the wider region.¹²⁹

Capacity of the Royal Navy

Several members, including the Chair of the Defence Select Committee, Sir Julian Lewis, and Nick Smith MP raised the strength of the Royal Navy on 15 January. The Prime Minister said it remains the Government’s intention to increase defence spending to 2.5% of gross domestic product “when circumstances allow” and the Government is investing in new equipment.¹³⁰

The Defence Secretary says that while several countries are participating in Operation Prosperity Guardian, and some provided assistance to the US/UK strikes, “only relatively few countries have the [...] capacity to carry out this action” and “it is the UK that is able to step up”.¹³¹

5.4

What has been the response to the strikes?

UK and US statements

The UK Government states the RAF operation represented a “blow” to the “Houthi’s ability to threaten merchant shipping” and demonstrated the UK’s commitment to protect shipping lanes.¹³² On 12 January the US Defense Department said the strikes had “degraded” the Houthi ability to launch

¹²⁶ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c156

¹²⁷ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), cc584, 589, 602

¹²⁸ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), cc584, 589, 602

¹²⁹ HC Deb, [26 February 2024](#), c29

¹³⁰ HC Deb, [15 January 2024](#), cc581, 588

¹³¹ HC Deb, [5 February 2024](#), c34

¹³² MoD, [Air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

attacks and they “would not be able to execute them [in the] same way” as before.¹³³ Speaking on 18 January, President Biden said the strikes had not yet deterred the Houthis from acting, and US strikes would continue.¹³⁴

The UK and US emphasise their aim “remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea”.¹³⁵

The Houthis have said they will continue to target Red Sea shipping, while Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon condemned the attacks.¹³⁶ They have claimed five Houthi fighters were killed in the 12 January attacks, but this has not been confirmed by the United States or UK.¹³⁷

United Nations

On 12 January, a spokesperson for UN Secretary General, António Guterres, released a statement reiterating that the Houthi attacks are unacceptable and must stop, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024). He also called on all parties to act in accordance with international law when defending their vessels and to ensure progress towards a political settlement in Yemen is not lost:

The Secretary-General calls upon all Member States defending their vessels from attacks to do so in accordance with international law, as stipulated in the Resolution.

The Secretary-General further calls upon all parties involved not to escalate even more the situation in the interest of peace and stability in the Red Sea and the wider region.

The Secretary-General stresses the need to avoid acts that could further worsen the situation in Yemen itself.¹³⁸

On 13 January, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grunberg, urged “all involved to avoid actions that would worsen the situation in Yemen, escalate the threat to maritime routes, or further fuel regional tensions”. He said “all involved [should] [...] exercise maximum restraint and to prioritise diplomatic channels”.¹³⁹

Response of Gulf states

Saudi Arabia, as a participant in the conflict against the Houthis since 2015, has called for restraint. As David Ottaway for the [Wilson Center](#) think tank notes, the Saudi Arabia has reportedly been putting pressure on the United

¹³³ US DoD, [Director of the Joint staff and Pentagon Press Secretary \[...\]](#), 12 January 2024

¹³⁴ [US-led attacks on Houthis will continue says Joe Biden](#), Times, 19 January 2024

¹³⁵ White House, [Joint statement from the Governments of Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, UK and the US](#), 11 January 2024

¹³⁶ [World reacts to US, UK attacks on Houthi targets in Yemen](#), Al-Jazeera, 12 January 2024

¹³⁷ [What we know about the strikes on Houthis](#), BBC News, 13 January 2024

¹³⁸ UN, [Statement attributable to the spokesperson for the Secretary General](#), 12 January 2024

¹³⁹ UN Special Envoy for Yemen, [Statement attributable to special envoy](#), 13 January 2023

States to not retaliate militarily, citing concerns it may lead to renewed fighting in Yemen and fresh [Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia](#).¹⁴⁰

The UAE, which has also been subject to attacks from the Houthis and supports the Southern Transitional, a separatist group in southern Yemen, also expressed “concern” at the US/UK strikes and said the Houthi actions were an “unacceptable threat to world trade”.¹⁴¹

Oman, which is facilitating political negotiations in Yemen, and the UAE, which opposes the Houthis and backs Yemen’s Southern Transitional Council, have also condemned the UK/US attacks while also calling for freedom of navigation to be protected.¹⁴²

Bahrain was the only Arab county to support the US/UK strikes. Bahrain is an important UK/US partner, hosting military bases and has accused Iran of supporting terrorist groups in the country. It has participated in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen against the Houthis and in September 2023 three Bahrain soldiers were killed by a Houthi drone strike on the Saudi-Yemen border.¹⁴³

Concerns from aid groups

On 16 January, 26 aid groups and charities, including Save the Children, Islamic Relief and Saferworld, issued a statement saying that the US/UK airstrikes had caused some of them to suspend their aid operations in Yemen over safety and security concerns. They warned further escalation could force more to halt their operations in areas of ongoing hostilities. They called on all actors to “prioritise diplomatic channels over military options”.¹⁴⁴

On 23 January, the Prime Minister said the Government had been in contact with humanitarian groups and confirmed their activities were not affected by the strikes.¹⁴⁵

Following the second set of UK/US airstrikes on 22 January, the Houthis requested all aid workers with American or British citizenship leave within 30 days.¹⁴⁶ Both the UN and internationally recognised Government of Yemen have opposed the move.¹⁴⁷

Analysis by foreign affairs groups

Analysis from the [Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington](#) by Gregory Johnsen argues that attacks will “not put the Houthi threat back in the box”,

¹⁴⁰ Wilson Center, [US weights risky response to Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping](#), 16 December 2023

¹⁴¹ Amwaj, [US airstrikes in Yemen divide ‘Axis of resistance’, GCC states](#), 16 January 2024

¹⁴² [Oman, Iraq, UAE condemns US-UK strikes on Yemen](#), BBC Monitoring, 12 January 2024

¹⁴³ [Why Bahrain supported US strikes on Yemen’s Houthis](#), Al-Monitor, 12 January 2024

¹⁴⁴ Save the Children, [Yemen: Escalation spells disaster for civilians \[...\]](#), 16 January 2024

¹⁴⁵ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c164

¹⁴⁶ [Houthis ask British and US aid workers to leave Yemen \[...\]](#), Sky News, 23 January 2024

¹⁴⁷ [Yemen government says Houthi order for departure of UN staff ‘immoral’](#), BBC Monitoring, 26 January 2024

as the group has established itself in northern Yemen, deepened its military relationship with Iran, and likely to gain domestic popularity from being targeted by the US and UK.¹⁴⁸

Elizabeth Kendall of Cambridge University notes that the Houthis “feel they have won [Yemen’s] civil war”, have a high degree of tolerance of casualties and feel secure in their political position in Yemen.¹⁴⁹

Farea Al-Muslimi, for [Chatham House](#), argues the strikes are “largely symbolic” and the Houthis are “well-equipped” and likely to judge “international support for US and UK strikes [as] thin”.¹⁵⁰

As noted Fabian Hinz for the [Institute for Strategic Studies](#), the Houthi’s anti-ship missile arsenal pre-dates the Israel-Hamas war and is a sign of a “long-term Iranian focus on strengthening Houthi anti-ship capabilities”.¹⁵¹

Despite the missile arsenal, several analysts argue targeted strikes will be effective in military terms. For example, Sam Cranny-Evans and Sidharth Kaushal of the [Royal United Services Institute](#) argue targeted strikes against command centres will be most useful, as the Houthis lack effective targeting systems.¹⁵²

Writing for the [Atlantic Council](#), Daniel Moulton, also argues the “focused” strikes will help degrade the Houthi ability to conduct additional attacks. He argued the international coalition will need to consider additional strikes and counter more widely Iran’s activity across the Middle East.¹⁵³

Nick Childs of the [International Institute for Strategic Studies](#) has raised concerns on whether the US meet the demands for an extended presence in the region.¹⁵⁴ Andrew Dorman, writing for [Chatham House](#), also argued the UK “ambition increasingly outstrips ability” and that, beyond typhoon aircraft, the UK “has few options to contribute” to the US military action.¹⁵⁵

Alexandra Stark in [Foreign Affairs](#) argues past airstrikes against the Houthis, such as those carried out by the Saudi-led coalition from 2015, did not significantly weaken the Houthi position in Yemen and instead argues the US must instead work for de-escalation across the region, including in Gaza.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [What comes after the missiles in Yemen?](#), 9 January 2024

¹⁴⁹ [The Houthi’s forgotten war goes global](#), Engelsberg Ideas, 11 January 2024

¹⁵⁰ Chatham House, [The Houthis won’t back down after US and UK strikes in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

¹⁵¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), [Houthi anti-ship missile systems](#), 8 January 2024

¹⁵² Royal United Services Institute, [Securing the Red Sea](#), 10 January 2024

¹⁵³ Atlantic Council, [What to know about the US and UK strikes on the Houthis in Yemen](#), 11 January 2024

¹⁵⁴ IISS, [Global implications of the shipping attacks](#), 19 December 2023

¹⁵⁵ Chatham House, [The UK’s diminished participation in air strikes on Yemen \[...\]](#), 12 January 2024

¹⁵⁶ [Don’t bomb the Houthis](#), Foreign Affairs, 11 January 2024

The [International Crisis Group](#) also argues that “short of an end to the Gaza war [...], tensions will continue to rise [...] in the Red Sea”.¹⁵⁷

Steven Cook, in [Foreign Policy](#), in contrast, argues that no policy is “risk free” but that Iran should be discouraged from escalating its activities in the region.¹⁵⁸

Hussam Radman, writing for the [Yemen-based Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies](#), notes that the US attacks are part of a wider US strategy of restoring “strategic deterrence” in the region, echoing US retaliatory strikes in [Syria](#) and [Iraq](#) against Iran-aligned groups that have attacked US positions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ International Crisis Group, [What next after US and UK strikes on the Houthis?](#), 13 January 2024

¹⁵⁸ [Prudence means fighting the Houthis now](#), Foreign Policy, 29 December 2023

¹⁵⁹ Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, [US and UK strike Houthi targets in Yemen](#), 12 January 2024

6 Sanctions and arms embargoes against the Houthis

6.1 UN Security Council Resolutions

In 2014 and 2015, the UN Security Council passed [resolutions 2140 \(2014\)](#) and [2216 \(2015\)](#). These designate individuals and entities, including Houthi members, as subject to asset freezes, travel bans and targeted arms embargoes. Sanctions were renewed most recently in November 2023.¹⁶⁰

[UN Security Council Resolution 2624 \(2022\)](#), adopted in February 2022, listed the Houthis as an entity under the UN arms embargo for the first time (embargoes have been in place against individual members). Among other reasons for the listing, the Council cited Houthi attacks on civilians, obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid, and Houthi attacks against shipping and terrorist attacks across borders, including the UAE.¹⁶¹

Four non-permanent members of the UN Security Council abstained on the vote, expressing concern about “the resolution’s characterization of the Houthis as a terrorist group” (these were Mexico, Norway, Ireland, and Brazil). The UK and all other Security Council members voted in favour.¹⁶²

6.2 Other sanctions

United States

The US has also applied sanctions against Houthi members.¹⁶³ In response to the current situation in the Red Sea, in from December 2023 to February 2024 the US Department of the Treasury designated 20 individuals, three entities and four companies involved in facilitating Iranian financial support.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ UN, [Unanimously adopting Resolution 2707 \(2023\) \[...\]](#), 14 November 2023

¹⁶¹ [UN Security Council Resolution 2624 \(2022\)](#)

¹⁶² UN, [Security council renews arms embargo \[...\] on those threatening peace in Yemen](#), 28 February 2022. The quote is from Mexico’s representative.

¹⁶³ US State Department, [US sanctions international network enriching Houthis in Yemen](#), 10 June 2021; US Department of the Treasury, [Treasury targets key Houthi finance network \[...\]](#), 23 February 2022

¹⁶⁴ US Department of the Treasury, [Treasury targets network financing Houthi attacks \[...\]](#), 28 December 2023; [Treasury targets network financing Houthi regional aggression](#), 7 December 2023;

United Kingdom

Before January 2024, the UK applied sanctions against 11 Houthi political and military leaders and two entities.¹⁶⁵ In concert with the United States, the UK announced sanctions against four individuals in January and February, including the Commander of the Houthi naval forces and defence minister, and two individuals and four organisations providing funding to the Houthis. UK sanctions involve asset freezes and travel bans.¹⁶⁶

European Union

The EU sanctions 12 Houthi individuals and designated the Houthis as an entity subject to sanctions.¹⁶⁷

6.3 Proscribing the Houthis as a terrorist group

United Kingdom

While the UK applies sanctions against the Houthis, it is not officially proscribed a terrorist group in the UK.¹⁶⁸

Proscribing a group would create several offenses in the UK, including being a member of the proscribed group or displaying articles in public which would arouse suspicion of membership or support for the group.¹⁶⁹

In 2022, the UK Government said it would keep proscription under review:

Any decision to proscribe a group is only ever made after careful consideration is given to whether the statutory test – whether the group is concerned in terrorism – is met, and whether the exercise of discretion to proscribe is proportionate.

The Government does not routinely comment on intelligence matters, including whether an organisation is under consideration for proscription. The Government keeps the list of proscribed organisations under review.¹⁷⁰

The Prime Minister confirmed this position on 23 January 2024.¹⁷¹

[Imposing further sanctions on Houthi financial facilitators](#), 12 January 2023; [UK and US target Houthi military officials for supporting acts of terrorism](#), 25 January 2024; [Targeting Qods force deputy commander and Houthi-affiliated supporters](#), 27 February 2024

¹⁶⁵ HM Treasury, [Financial sanctions, Yemen](#), 5 October 2022

¹⁶⁶ FCDO, [UK and US sanction key Houthi figures \[...\]](#), 25 January 2024; [The UK and US sanction Houthi enablers](#), 27 February 2024

¹⁶⁷ EUR-Lex, [EU restrictive measures in view of the situation in Yemen](#), accessed 5 January 2023

¹⁶⁸ Home Office, [Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations](#), September 2023

¹⁶⁹ Commons Library research briefing, [Proscribed terrorist organisations](#)

¹⁷⁰ PQ 154095 [[Ansar Allah](#)], 27 April 2022

¹⁷¹ HC Deb, [23 January 2024](#), c159

United States

The Trump administration designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO) in January 2021. The administration stated this was to “hold the Houthis accountable for their terrorist acts,” including attacks external to Yemen. The administration said it would take steps to ensure the designation did not disrupt the delivery of humanitarian aid.¹⁷²

Citing humanitarian concerns and a desire to support dialogue between the parties, the Biden administration reversed the designation in February 2021.¹⁷³

Following Houthi attacks against the UAE in January 2021, in April 2022 the US said it was considering re-designating the group as an FTO.¹⁷⁴ However, no announcements were made.

On 17 January 2024, the US Administration announced that it would designate the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Group (SDGT), effective from 30 days (16 February). The Administration said this delayed designation was to ensure that the designation would not adversely impact civilians and humanitarian work in Yemen.¹⁷⁵ It has also emphasised that the sanctions would not cover food, medicine, fuel and humanitarian aid to Yemen civilians.¹⁷⁶

As set out in Atlantic Council analysis, SDGT status is different from foreign terrorist organisation (as the Houthis were designated for a short period in 2021). SDGT status, for example, does not include a criminal ban on third parties providing material support for the group and allows it some access to international financial institutions.¹⁷⁷

Chatham House analysis argues the designation represents an “absence of a [US] policy” for Yemen and will “not change [...] or deter” the group. It argues the designation may also potentially complicate efforts to establish a negotiated solution to the conflict.¹⁷⁸

The Houthis have pledged to continue their attacks despite the designation.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² US State Department, [Terrorist designation of Ansarallah in Yemen](#), 10 January 2021

¹⁷³ US State Department, [Revocation of the terrorist designations of Ansarallah](#), 12 February 2021

¹⁷⁴ [Biden says administration mulling re-designating Yemen’s Houthis as a terrorist group](#), Reuters, 20 January 2022

¹⁷⁵ US State Department, [Terrorist designation of the Houthis](#), 17 January 2024

¹⁷⁶ US State Department, [Senior Administration officials on Yemen](#), 17 January 2024

¹⁷⁷ Atlantic Council, [The Houthis are again ‘specially designated global terrorists’](#), 17 January 2024

¹⁷⁸ Chatham House, [Redesignating the Houthis a terrorist group is not a bad policy: it is no policy at all](#), 19 January 2024

¹⁷⁹ [Houthi officials say attacks will continue \[...\]](#), BBC Monitoring, 17 January 2024

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)