THE HOUTHI MOVEMENT
(ANSARALLAH – "SUPPORTERS OF GOD")

PROFILE

The Houthis are a Zaydi Shiite armed group from Yemen's Saada province. The group has its roots in a Zaydi revivalist movement called Believing Youth, which was founded in the 1990s. They became an armed insurgency in 2004 after the Yemeni Sunni-majority government attempted to arrest their leader, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. Since 2014, the Houthis have controlled much of northwestern Yemen, including the capital, Sanaa, establishing a parallel government opposed to the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Their main grievances include political exclusion, economic inequality, and foreign interference, particularly by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Known for their prolonged conflict with the Yemeni government and the resulting humanitarian crisis, the Houthis have recently gained attention for attacks on military targets and shipping vessels in the Red Sea, citing the Israel-Gaza conflict as motivation.

GOALS/ TARGETS

1. Maintain and expand control in Yemen; gain international recognition.

2. Eliminate foreign interference and Western and regional (Saudi, UAE) influence from Yemen.

3. Protect Zaidi Shiism and counter Saudi Wahhabism, a strict, ultra-conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam.

4. Continue to campaign against Israel following ceasefire.

Targets: The Yemeni government, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, the West (no direct attacks yet), and al-Qaeda.

OPERATIONAL DYNAMICS

Financing: Alleged support from Iran and Hezbollah; taxation in Houthi-controlled areas; illicit shipment of Iranian commodities.

Recruitment Tactics: Offer financial incentives, food, and other perks to impoverished families; recruit children through intimidation or bribery; infuse propaganda into school curricula; force locals to fight; leverage the Israel-Gaza conflict to position themselves as defenders of Palestine.

Terror Tactics/ Weaponry:
- Early Phase: Small-scale guerrilla warfare with ambushes, sniping, use of mines, and public executions.
- 2010s: Shift to heavy weaponry stolen from Yemeni government; trained by Iran/Hezbollah in advanced tactics and systems (guided missiles, IEDs, drones); expansion into maritime warfare.
- 2020s: Expanded use of advanced weaponry (anti-ship missiles, drone boats, unmanned underwater vessels); attacks on shipping vessels in the Red Sea corridor, particularly those linked to Israel.

STRUCTURE

Size: ~200,000 fighters

Leader: Abdul-Malik al-Houthi (brother of movement's founder)

Structure: Centralized control led by Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who appoints regional leaders; Supreme Political Council acts as de facto government; maintains a sophisticated military structure with specialized units and clear chains of command; has strong intelligence and internal security apparatus.

Allies: Iran (political, financial, and military support); Russia (provided satellite targeting data for the Houthis to attack commercial shipping); Hezbollah (training, weapons, and logistical assistance); al-Shabaab (reportedly to amplify the Houthis' threat to the Bab el-Mandeb global shipping chokepoint); al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (pause internal conflict to fight against common enemy: the Yemeni government).

THREAT ANALYSIS

The Houthis present a significant threat due to their growing military strength, exacerbation of Yemen's humanitarian crisis, and ability to disrupt global supply routes Their maritime activities in the Red Sea, including over 190 attacks on vessels since November 2023, have already cut commercial traffic by almost half, severely impacting regional trade. Their alliance with Iran is especially troubling, as it provides them with resources and expertise to enhance their operations. This

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partnership risks escalating regional conflicts and further destabilizing an already fragile Middle East, especially as Hamas and Hezbollah will need time to rebuild its strength following war with Israel.

DESIGNATION

The Houthis were originally designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) during President Donald Trump's first term, undesignated as an FTO by the Biden administration, which then went on to designate the group as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in January 2024. President Trump signed an executive order on January 22, 2025, initiating the process to re-designate the group as Foreign Terrorist Organization. The group is considered an "armed group" to a majority of the world.

RECENT & NOTABLE ATTACKS

» **December 2024**: Direct conflict between Israel and Houthi forces has intensified significantly, highlighting the Houthis' growing capability to bypass Israel's advanced air defenses. Key incidents have included a drone strike on a residential building in Yavneh, a nighttime missile attack on a school in Ramat Gan and a missile attack on a playground in Jaffa. Whilst no causalities have been reported, the frequency of attacks underscore the Houthis as a resilient force and the only "Axis of Resistance" group yet to be neutralized by Israel.

» **October 2024:** The Houthi forces launched an unmanned explosive-laden vessel at a Panama-flagged oil tanker, causing significant damage. In a separate assault, they fired an anti-ship missile targeting a Liberian-flagged bulk carrier in the Red Sea. These high-profile were part of a year-long campaign to destabilize international trade routes through the Red Sea, thus boosting public attention for the Houthi cause and expanding its international legitimacy. No casualties were reported.

» **September 2024:** In retaliation for Israel's military campaign in Gaza, Houthi forces fired a long-range ballistic missile at Israel, though Israeli air defenses were able to intercept the missile. This marked the longest-range missile ever fired from Yemen towards Israel. Separately, the Houthis launched a total of 23 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones at three U.S. destroyers in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, all of which were successfully intercepted.

» **August 2024:** The Houthis detonated explosives on a Greek-flagged vessel in the Red Sea carrying 1 million barrels of oil, raising concerns about an environmental disaster. Later that month, they carried out a three-pronged attack on a Liberian-flagged oil tanker in the Red Sea, which included the use of an unmanned explosive-laden vessel.

» **July 2024:** In a significant escalation, Houthi drones struck Tel Aviv, killing one civilian and injuring at least ten others. This attack, deep into Israeli territory, showcased the group's growing drone capabilities. On the same day, the Houthis also mounted multiple maritime assaults on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

» **June 2024:** Houthis forces attacked a bulk carrier with an unmanned explosive-laden vessel, sinking the ship and causing one casualty. The group also launched a double missile attack on a Palauan-flagged cargo ship, severely injuring one crew member.

» **September 2023:** The Houthis carried out a drone attack on the Saudi-Yemen border, killing four Bahrain Defense Force members and injuring others, as part of their ongoing fight against the Saudi-led coalition, which includes Bahrain, in the Yemen civil war.

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» **March 2024:** A Houthi anti-ship missile struck a Barbados-flagged commercial vessel off Yemen's coast, sparking a catastrophic fire and resulting in three fatalities, one of several attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea that month.

» **March 2022:** The Houthis launched a series of coordinated attacks using drones and ballistic missiles against key Saudi energy infrastructure, including an Aramco fuel depot in Jeddah and oil refineries in Ras Tanura and Rabigh, disrupting global oil prices. They also targeted Saudi border cities Jizan and Najran, hitting water desalination plants and electricity stations.

**This is not a comprehensive list.