



## **Drexel GPS: Geopolitical Update**

### **U.S. Led Coalition Responds With Massive Attacks on Houthi Sites in Yemen**

**01/12/24**

Today's geopolitical landscape opens on the heels of intense U.S. led missile strikes against Houthi rebel targets in Yemen. The attacks were carried out by a U.S.-led coalition which included the UK, Australia, and Bahrain. The strikes were a direct response to months Houthi rebels' attacks on shipping in the Red Sea.

The Houthi's have been engaged in an increasing number of drone, ballistic missile, and other methods of attacks on commercial shipping transiting the Red Sea since November. U.S. personnel stationed in the region have also been attacked by Houthi-linked groups and other Iranian proxies in the region. Prior to last night's airstrikes, many were questioning how long U.S restraint would last in the face of these accumulating attacks.

#### **Here is what we know:**

The U.S., UK, and Australian military using a combination of submarine, carrier, and other assets attacked more than a dozen Houthi rebel targets overnight. The goal was to lessen the Houthi's ability to continue to launch drone and missile strikes threatening Red Sea shipping lanes and disrupting international commerce.

The scope of the U.S. strikes indicates a more offensive strategy by the U.S. against Iranian proxies engaging in similar attacks on commercial and U.S. military assets in the region. Until now we have seen tit-for-tat defensive measures, but last night's strikes were more severe and offensive in nature.

#### **Drexel GPS Assessment:**

Proxy wars are rarely ever officially declared by both opposing sides. However, make no mistake, the U.S. is absolutely engaged in a proxy war with Iran. This latest U.S.-led airstrike in Yemen is a manifestation of that war and not the last shoe to fall. Iran will certainly continue its efforts to direct, supply, and encourage its proxies in the region against U.S. interests. However, Iran absolutely does not want to become involved in a direct confrontation with the U.S., or for that matter Israel.

It is important to note that while the strikes were extensive in scope, the public disclosure of the imminent strikes which took place ahead of steel on target served multiple purposes outside of merely destroying equipment:

- While there were Houthi fatalities resulting from the attacks, they were minimal when considering the scale of the U.S. strikes. Houthi fatalities would likely have been much higher if personnel were not given some ability to vacate the targeted areas.

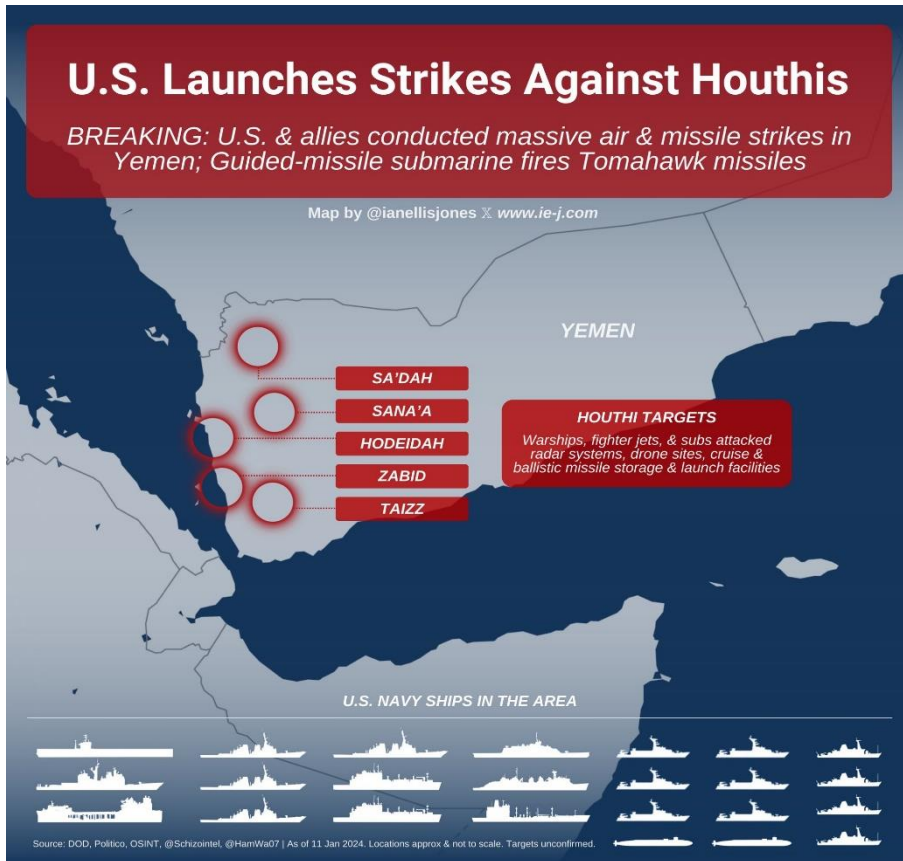
- Reducing capability instead of inflicting casualties was a predetermined and focused priority of U.S. military operational planners. The news media leak gave personnel enough time to evacuate and not enough time to move the variety of drones and other equipment targeted. It is likely that planes and missiles were already on their way to their targets when the news was leaked.
- The goal of avoiding fatalities was likely a desired policy goal communicated by the White House to the DOD's leadership tasked with planning and executing the operation.
- Why? It is no secret that the U.S. has major concerns that any of its involvement in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war could result in escalation to a broader regional conflict. U.S. election year politics also likely weighs heavily on policy decisions.
- In light of the increasing number of Houthi attacks (27 to date) in the region, the Biden administration needed to take reasonable, severe, and offensive measures. If even one U.S. sailor/servicemember fatality resulted from of any Houthi actions in the Red Sea PRIOR to a robust preemptive strike by a U.S. coalition, it would hurt the current administration's chances in the November election.

#### **Drexel GPS Assessment: Why Not Attack Iran?**

The U.S. is actively engaged in a proxy war with Iran. A direct confrontation would unequivocally start a wider regional war that neither the U.S. nor Iran desire at this time.

- Any scenario involving direct conflict between the two is always on the table, however, at this time it is unlikely.
- Aside from its rhetoric, Iran understands that it cannot win a direct one-on-one war with the U.S. and that doing so would almost surely result in regime change.
- For the U.S., engaging Iran would necessitate an unwanted expansion of its footprint in the Middle East. Along with American casualties this would result in long-term negative ramifications and complications in the region.
- This does not negate the possibility of military action between the two countries. In the lens of U.S./Iranian geopolitics, it is important to take note that retaliation can take many forms and is different from all-out war (e.g., the U.S. drone strike and killing of Iran's Qasem Soleimani in 2020).
- It is clear that tensions in the region continue to escalate given last night's strikes. What remains to be determined is the timing and scope of this escalation.

## U.S. Coalition Attacked Houthi Rebel Sites



Drexel GPS will continue to monitor this situation as it develops.

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