

STATEMENT BY  
DANIEL B. SHAPIRO  
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST  
OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to speak with you today about the Houthis' piratical threats in the Red Sea and the Department's work to protect civilians and restore safe and free navigation for all legitimate maritime traffic in one of the world's most critical waterways.

Before I begin, I wanted to briefly introduce myself. I am Dan Shapiro and I am the new Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East. I look forward to working with you in this capacity.

Now, I'd like to summarize the Houthi threat and our guiding principles for addressing this critical issue.

### **Regional and Global Effects of Houthi Attacks**

As you are all aware, since November 19, the Houthis have conducted at least 48 attacks against commercial shipping and naval vessels in and around the Red Sea through which 15% of ALL global trade flows using anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), unmanned aerial systems (UAS), uncrewed surface vessels, and—in one instance—a helicopter-borne seizure.

Despite the Houthis' claims, these attacks are almost entirely unrelated to Israel and Israeli-affiliated shipping. And to be clear, any such attacks would be entirely illegitimate anyway. These are indiscriminate acts that are as much an affront to maritime commerce as piracy, having affected the interests of more than 55 nations and threatened the free flow of commerce through the Red Sea—a bedrock of the global economy.

These attacks have prompted more than a dozen major shipping operators to suspend transits of the Red Sea, caused a spike in insurance rates for vessels in the region, and, most importantly, put the lives of innocent mariners and our servicemembers at risk.

The Houthis' attacks are also driving up prices and causing delivery delays in critical humanitarian items, such as food and medicine in places where they're needed most. This is adversely affecting those in need of assistance around the world, including in Sudan, Ethiopia, and in Yemen itself. To cite one regional country suffering significantly from Houthi terrorism, Egypt has seen Suez Canal transit fees decline by some \$100 million per month, depriving it of a critical source of foreign currency.

Most recently, the Houthis launched a series of ASBMs and UAS attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea, including ones that impacted the M/V ISLANDER on February 22 and the M/V RUBYMAR on February 18. The Houthi attack on the ISLANDER injured a crewmember while the attack on the RUBYMAR severely damaged the vessel, put it at risk of sinking, forced the crew to abandon ship, and caused an 18-mile oil slick. The Houthis also launched weapons toward our warships, including an ASCM that the USS Laboon intercepted.

The Houthis have also fired missiles against Israel that have threatened or caused damage to Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

## **Whole-of-Government Approach to the Houthis**

It is clear that these Houthi attacks represent an international problem that affects all nations committed to the exercise of navigational freedoms and the free flow of commerce. These attacks, which affect the entire region and nations across the globe, cannot go unchallenged. And this problem demands a broad-based and collective response.

So, our guiding principles are to internationalize the response to the Houthis' attacks in coordination with our allies and partners and to nest military, diplomatic, and economic actions within a whole-of-government approach to impose costs on Houthi leadership and deter Houthi attacks on commercial shipping.

The United States has coordinated multiple multilateral statements condemning Houthi attacks, imposed new sanctions on the group and designated it a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) group, drafted a successful UN Security Council resolution affirming the right of States to defend their vessels from Houthi attacks, established a defensive coalition of more than 20 countries to patrol the Red Sea and safeguard commercial shipping, and now conducted three rounds of combined strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen.

While I will defer to Special Envoy Lenderking to discuss the State Department's intensive partner-based diplomacy and the SDGT designation, I would like to expand upon the Department of Defense's efforts in the Red Sea.

## **Operation Prosperity Guardian**

Our main defensive effort in the Red Sea is called Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN. Since Secretary Austin announced this coalition in December, more than 20 countries have joined on to increase maritime patrols in the Red Sea and safeguard commercial shipping.

This coalition is led by Task Force 153, which is charged with providing leadership and command and control of international maritime security activities in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Gulf of Aden. Operation PROSPERITY GUARDIAN is designed to reassure the maritime shipping industry, deter illegal activity, and promote safe navigation while protecting the free flow of international commerce.

## **Deliberate and Self-Defensive Strikes**

Meanwhile, the Department has been engaged in efforts to destroy and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to conduct maritime attacks, such as ASBMs, ASCMs, UAS, and facilities known to house such weapons. On January 11, January 22, February 3, and February 24 at the President's direction, we executed deliberate, carefully planned multinational strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen alongside the United Kingdom and with a support from a growing number of partners that now includes Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand.

In our most recent deliberate strike on Saturday, we struck 18 targets across eight locations in Houthi-controlled Yemen, including Houthi underground weapons storage facilities, missile storage facilities, one-way attack unmanned aerial systems, air defense systems, radars, and a helicopter.

Beyond coalition strikes, U.S. forces have also struck Houthi targets, including missiles and UAS on launchers, nearly three dozen times in self-defense over the last few weeks.

In total, we have struck over 230 targets in Houthi-controlled Yemen through both deliberate and self-defense strikes, likely destroying hundreds of Houthi weapons. This is not including the dozens of Houthi missiles and UAS that U.S. and partner naval vessels have intercepted and shot down over the Red Sea. In December, U.S. forces also disrupted the Houthis' attempts to board and seize the M/V MAERSK HANGZHOU, sinking three Houthi fast boats in the process after they fired on U.S. helicopters. The Houthis have not attempted another seizure attempt since this incident. However, the Houthis appear committed to sustaining standoff maritime attacks with their remaining inventory of weapons.

### **Disrupting and Exposing Iran's Support**

Complementary to our efforts to degrade and destroy Houthi capabilities, I'd like to mention the Department's efforts to stem the flow of Iranian-origin lethal aid to Yemen that enables these attacks and publicly expose Iran's support to the Houthis. On January 11 and January 28, U.S. forces interdicted dhows carrying Iranian-origin lethal aid to the Houthis in Yemen in clear violation of international law.

In the latest interdictions, U.S. forces discovered over 200 packages that contained unmanned underwater/surface vehicle (UUV/USV) components; propulsion, guidance, and warheads for Houthi medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) and anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs); air defense associated components; military-grade communication and network equipment; anti-tank guided missile launcher assemblies; explosives; and other military components. These same weapons have been employed by the Houthis to threaten and attack not just U.S. Navy vessels, but also innocent mariners on international merchant ships transiting the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb, and Gulf of Aden.

In support of our efforts to publicly expose Iran's support to the Houthis, the Defense Intelligence Agency published an unclassified report providing clear and compelling evidence that the Houthis have employed Iranian-origin missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles in attacks.

Iran does not control the Houthis in the way that it does Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria, but it certainly has the choice to provide or withhold support to the Houthis, without which the Houthis would struggle to effectively track and strike vessels navigating shipping lanes through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

We have made it clear to Iran that we hold it accountable for attacks by its partners and proxies, and believe Iranian leaders are aware of the consequences should these attacks result in U.S. casualties. Our actions in Iraq and Syria have demonstrated the Administration's willingness to

directly hold Iran responsible for militia attacks. To underscore, in response to a continuing pattern of Iranian and Iran-backed attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities and the continuing threat of future such attacks, the United States has taken, and as necessary, will continue to take military action against the IRGC and its affiliates.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, while the Department of Defense supports the overall aim of deescalating tensions and restoring stability in the Red Sea, we will not hesitate to defend civilians and protect the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways.