

U.S. and Britain launch new wave of strikes on Yemen amid Gaza war

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A Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4 takes off from a base in Cyprus to carry out air strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen on Monday, January 22, 2024. [AS1 Leah Jones/Ministry of Defence via AP Photo]

Sanaa, February 4 (RHC)-- The United States and the United Kingdom have carried out strikes on Houthi-controlled positions in Yemen in a new wave of attacks against the Iran-aligned Yemeni group, which has been targeting US and Israeli interests in solidarity with Palestinians.

In addition to Saturday's strikes, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) also hit a Houthi antiship missile that was "prepared to launch against ships in the Red Sea" early on Sunday. Houthi attacks on Israel-linked ships in the narrow strait of Bab al-Mandeb in the Red Sea have disrupted global trade, drawing in the U.S. and the UK response.

Since mid-November, the Houthis have launched dozens of missile, drone and boat attacks on commercial ships linked with Israel, in addition to US and UK military warships, with the stated goal of stopping Israel's devastating war on Gaza. Houthis have also demanded that Israel allow delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, where nearly the entire population of 2.3 million faces hunger.

The wave of new strikes followed a US air assault in Iraq and Syria on Friday that targeted armed groups linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in retaliation for the killing of three US soldiers in Jordan last week. The US has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-linked armed groups. Tehran has tried to distance itself from the drone strike.

The CENTCOM said it launched "proportionate" attacks with "support" from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. Thirty-six targets were hit "across 13 locations around midnight Saturday", the US, the UK and supporting countries said in a joint statement.

"These strikes are intended to degrade Houthi capabilities used to continue their reckless and unlawful attacks on US and UK ships as well as international commercial shipping in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden," it said.

Reporting from Washington, DC, Al Jazeera's Kimberly Halkett said the strikes were aimed at deterring Houthi attacks on U.S. interests in the region. "What we understand is that weapons facilities were targeted, along with missile systems and launchers, as well air defence systems and radar. We know these strikes were launched from ships as well as fighter jets," she said.

The U.S.-UK statement did not identify the specific places that were hit, but Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said the capital, Sanaa, and other rebel-held areas were targeted. Saree said overall there were 48 attacks on multiple governorates, including 13 on Sanaa and surrounding areas, 11 on Taiz, nine on Hodeidah, seven on al-Bayda, seven on Hajjah, and one on Sa'dah.

"These attacks will not go unanswered and will be punished," he reiterated, adding that the group remains undeterred in "supporting the steadfast Palestinian people."

Reporting from Sanaa, Al Jazeera's Mohammed al-Attab said some of the air raids were on mountainous areas that the Houthis said had been targeted before. "So, we are talking about increasing air strikes by the US and the UK in order to limit what they say is Houthis' ability to hurt US and UK maritime forces and attacks on Israeli ships, and the Houthis say this is pressure on Israel to end its aggression on people in Gaza and to end its blockade there," he said.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Nasser Kanaani condemned the attacks on Yemen in a statement on Sunday, saying they undermine international peace and security and go against Washington and London's claims that they do not wish for wider war in the region.

"The U.S. and the UK, in continuing their all-out support for the war crimes of the Zionist regime with their military actions across the region, are spreading chaos, disorder, insecurity and instability with the goal of providing breathing room for the criminal regime that is accused of genocide of Palestinians," he said, referring to the ongoing genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

In a statement, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin promised that more strikes would be forthcoming if the Houthis continue their campaign. Saturday's attack was the third joint UK-US campaign on the Houthis.

At least 16 people were killed in the US strikes in Iraq, which Washington said was only the first step in its response to the Jordan drone attack that killed US soldiers.

U.S. and allied troops in the region have been attacked more than 165 times since mid-October, mostly in Iraq and Syria, but the Jordan deaths were the first from hostile fire during that period.

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