



The Houthis in Yemen threaten Israel with ground attacks

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Overview¹

- ▶ Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, the participation of the Houthis in the "resistance axis"² has been limited to direct UAV and missile attacks on Israeli targets, especially in the south of the country. The most significant was the Houthi drone attack on Tel Aviv on July 19, 2024, to which Israel responded with an Israeli Air Force attack on the Yemeni port in the city of al-Hudaydah the following day.
- ▶ In recent weeks, the Houthis have increased their overt threats to attack Israel, including ground attacks. They also held military exercises simulating infiltrating through tunnels, taking control of Israeli military bases and abducting soldiers. According to reports, Houthi fighters have arrived in Syria and are overseen by the pro-Iranian militias.
- ▶ In ITIC assessment, the Houthis do in fact aspire to carry out a ground attack, partially as a response to Israel's attack on al-Hudaydah. Collaboration with Iran and the other "resistance axis" partners, led by the militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, enables the Houthis to overcome the great geographical distance between Yemen and Israel and move fighters close to the Israeli border for a limited direct ground attack on Israeli territory. They may try to infiltrate an Israeli civilian community or a military base, as they did in the simulations in Yemen, or participate actively as a Hezbollah auxiliary force should there be significant escalation in the fighting in the north. They would also continue their attempts to attack targets in Israeli territory with missiles or drones, as they have done since the beginning of the war.

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

² Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

The Direct Houthi-Israel Confrontation

- ▶ One of the central tenets of the Houthi movement's ideology is opposition to the "Zionist entity" and striving for its destruction, as expressed by two of the five elements of its slogan: "Allahhu akbar, death to America, death to Israel, a curse on the Jews, victory to Islam."³
- ▶ That ideology lay behind the Houthi calls for attacks on Israel and for Houthi fighters to join Israel's enemies in combat years before the war in the Gaza Strip. On March 23, 2018, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the movement, said his fighters would join Hezbollah's forces in Lebanon if a war broke out between Israel and Lebanon or between Israel and the Palestinians. He claimed that Israel was the "real enemy" of any Arab or Muslim country and that the Houthi forces looked forward to the day when they could fight against it (al-Akhbar, March 23, 2018).
- ▶ The war in the Gaza Strip gave the Houthis the opportunity to carry out their threats and as a "support front" for the "resistance axis" in the Gaza Strip. Abd al-Malik al-Houthi said the Houthis coordinated fully with their "allies" and were prepared to send soldiers to the battlefield or attack Israel with missiles, UAVs and "other means" (al-Manar, October 10, 2023).⁴
- ▶ On October 19, 2023, the Houthis began attacking Israel from Yemen with cruise missiles and UAVs, mainly focusing the Eilat region and southern Israel in general. Later, they claimed responsibility for ballistic missile attacks and attacking targets in various areas of Israel jointly with the Islamic Resistance in Iraq. The most serious attack occurred on July 19, 2024, when a Houthi drone hit a building in Tel Aviv, killing one civilian and injuring eight others. In response, the Israeli Air Force attacked targets in the port of al-Hudaydah, located in the territory controlled by the Houthis in Yemen.⁵

³ For further information, see the March 2023 ITIC report, "[The Houthi Movement and the War in Yemen: Development and Significance.](#)"

⁴ For further information, see the December 2023 ITIC report, "[Military-Terrorist Activities of the Houthis in Yemen during Operation Iron Swords.](#)"

⁵ For further information, see the July 2024 ITIC report, "[Escalation of the Confrontation Between Israel and the Houthis Background and Significance.](#)"

The Houthi Deployment for a Ground Attack on Israel

►Despite the Houthi statement of intent to carry out a ground attack, so far the Houthi ground forces have not been involved in a direct conflict with Israel. In the assessment of Yemeni and other "sources," the Houthis have a force of between 100,000 and 200,000 fighters, including an air force, a navy and missile forces. Thus it can be estimated that the ground fighting force, most of which has experience from the civil war in Yemen and fighting the Saudi Arabian-led coalition, numbers tens of thousands of soldiers who are equipped with assault rifles, sniper rifles, mortars, armored vehicles and tanks.⁶

►Since the beginning of the war, the Houthis have held high-profile exercises in which the forces simulated ground attacks on Israeli targets:

- ◆ An exercise held on January 13, 2024, simulated attacking Israeli targets from the air and on the ground, and taking over an Israeli community and an Israeli military headquarters, including taking hostages. The exercise included the use of drones, missiles and a tank, and its commander stated the campaign was at sea, on land and in the air. During the exercise, the fighters walked on the United States flag and on a picture of the Israeli prime minister (Houthi Ansar Allah movement Telegram channel, January 13, 2024).
- ◆ An exercise called "Yemen for Palestine" was held on February 3, 2024, and simulated an attack on Israeli posts and communities, abducting soldiers and the use of explosive drones to attack Israeli targets (Houthi media information center, February 3, 2024).

⁶ For further information, see the March 2023 ITIC report, "[The Houthi Movement and the War in Yemen: Development and Significance.](#)"

◆ On March 9, 2024, a combined exercise of armored, artillery and infantry forces was held, which the Houthis claimed was intended to prepare the forces for the "war of victory and holy jihad." The forces simulated occupying Israeli positions, firing machine guns and rockets, and launching explosive drones, as well as abducting soldiers from armored vehicles and attacking vehicles with explosive devices (Houthi combat information X account, March 9, 2024; Houthi website, September 26 and March 9, 2024).



Right: Simulating the abduction of an Israeli soldier (Houthi combat information X account, March 9, 2024). Left: Simulating attacking an Israeli military post (Houthi media information center, February 3, 2024)

◆ On July 6, 2024, the Houthi forces issued pictures of a maneuver called "Destructive Flood," held in the Fourth Military District on July 1, 2024, with the participation of the air force and the armored, infantry, engineering and artillery corps, integrated with anti-tank missiles and snipers. The maneuver consisted of two phases: practicing a combined attack on Israeli and British "enemy camps," including the use of tunnels, and then exercising defensive capabilities in an "enemy attack (al-Masirah, July 6, 2024).



Right: Simulating a raid on an "Israeli" camp. Left: Infiltrating through a tunnel (Yahia Sarie's Telegram channel, July 6, 2024)

◆ On September 4, 2024, a graduation ceremony was held for the forces of the Houthis' 310th Armored Brigade who had participated in a course held in memory of the "shaheed Isma'il Haniyeh;" the ceremony was attended by senior Houthi political and military officials. The ceremony included the graduates' performing simulated attacks with the participation of infantry and armored forces using tanks, armored vehicles, artillery and sniper rifles. During the exercise, the forces attacked "Israeli forces" and practiced infiltrating an Israeli community (Houthi media information office X account, September 4, 2024).



**A Houthi exercise held in memory of the "shaheed Isma'il Haniyeh," simulating an infantry and armored force attack on Israeli targets
(Houthi combat information Telegram channel , September 4, 2024)**

►The great geographical distance between Yemen and Israel is a significant challenge the Houthis have to overcome to carry out a ground attack on Israel. In addition, between Israel and Yemen lie Saudi Arabia and Jordan, both affiliated with the United States-led coalition. The Houthis are working to overcome the geographical obstacle by strengthening cooperation with other "resistance axis," forces, especially the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq which operate on the Syrian border.⁷ On September 2, 2022, Saudi Arabian "sources" claimed that groups of Houthi fighters had arrived in Damascus from Oman on a Syrian airline in order to participate in a 45-day military course whose instructors belonged to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and Hezbollah, after which they would return to Yemen (Nida Post, September 2, 2022).

►In recent week, reports of the arrival of Houthi forces in Syria have also been published. On August 5, 2024, according to reports, about 50 Houthi fighters arrived in Iraq, and from there crossed the border into Syria under the supervision of the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq (Ain al-

⁷ For further information, see the August 2024 ITIC report, "[Cooperation between the Shi'ite militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen.](#)"

Furat, August 5, 2024). According to another report, approximately 50 Houthi fighters entered Syria through Iraq, this time also accompanied by pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, and arrived in southern Syria. The Houthi fighters reportedly specialized in operating missiles and UAVs (Ain al-Furat, September 10, 2024).

Statements from Houthi Leaders Regarding a Ground Attack on Israel

► In recent weeks, the Houthis announced their intention to retaliate against Israel for the attack on the port of al-Hudaydah. They also announced they were prepared to participate in the "resistance axis" responses to the killing of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, in Tehran on July 31, 2024, and of Fuad Shukur, Hezbollah's military commander, in Beirut the day before. The threats referred to the possibility of Houthi ground activity against Israel:

- ◆ On September 5, 2024, in his weekly speech, Abd al-Malik al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis, stated that they continued to prepare for a response to Israel, after which they would continue with their "support" of the Palestinians. He said, "our enemies will be surprised on land as they were surprised at sea by new, unprecedented technological means of punishment" (al-Masirah, September 6, 2024).
- ◆ Hazan al-Assad, a member of the Houthis' political council, issued a message in Hebrew, the voice over of the video of a simulated attack on Israeli targets. He said, "Yemen: scenes from the "destructive flood" maneuver, carried out by units of sergeants from the forces of the Fourth Military Region, which simulate infiltration and control of Israeli sites. That is why we are coming to uproot you and help our brothers in Gaza" (Hazan al-Assad's X account, July 7, 2024).

► Senior Houthi figures have also begun to emphasize the capabilities of the weapons possessed by their infantry forces, so far having focused on glorifying the capabilities of their ballistic missiles, UAVs, and aerial and naval weapons. Hussein al-Ezzi, a member of the Houthi's political council, claimed that "the accuracy and efficacy of the Yemeni Kornet⁸ are many times higher than those of the same weapon imported from other countries." He posted a video which allegedly showed attacks using the Yemeni Kornet missile (Hussein al-Ezzi's X

⁸ A second generation anti-tank missile that was originally developed in the USSR with a range of up to 5.5 km. The missile is laser-guided, carries a warhead weighing 4.6 kg and is designed to hit the side of tanks and armored vehicles and penetrate the layers of protection.

account, September 4, 2024). The Yemeni missile can be fired from a range of no more than ten kilometers from the target, which hints the Houthis might want to attack targets not located in the immediate area of the sea adjacent to Yemen, but much closer to the launcher.



A Houthi fighter with a Kornet launcher (Hussein al-Azi's X account, September 4, 2024)