



Flash Report: Recent Escalation in Yemen

December 28, 2024



(Picture of damage caused by the IDF airstrikes on Sanaa International Airport)



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Recent weeks have witnessed a marked escalation in Yemen's ongoing conflict. Multiple international actors—most prominently Israel, the US-UK coalition, and Saudi-led forces—have conducted air and artillery strikes across various parts of the country. Simultaneously, Houthi militants have intensified long-range missile and drone attacks on Israeli territory and Red Sea shipping lanes, highlighting the breadth of this expanding theater. Localized unrest, particularly in Taiz, has further magnified the humanitarian and security challenges facing Yemen.

Timeline of Key Security Incidents

Mid-November 2024

- **18 November:** The UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported an attack 80 nautical miles south of Aden, attributed to Houthi forces. US CENTCOM later confirmed multiple intercepted missiles and drones aimed at three U.S.-flagged merchant vessels in the Gulf of Aden.
- **19 November:** Houthis reportedly conducted a ballistic missile strike on a vessel in the Gulf of Aden, underscoring persistent threats to maritime traffic.
- **21 November:** Houthis claimed to have attacked three US vessels near Djibouti port and two US Navy destroyers in the Gulf of Aden, increasing tensions in vital shipping corridors.

Early-to-Mid December 2024

- **1 December:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intercepted multiple UAVs launched from Yemen targeting Eilat and southern Israel. Another wave of Houthis' claimed drone strikes targeted Jaffa and Ashkelon.
- **6 December:** A Houthi-launched UAV damaged an apartment block in Yavne, Israel. Although no casualties were reported, the incident evidenced the Houthis' capacity to reach deep into Israeli territory.
- **7–10 December:** Consecutive ballistic missile launches from Yemen were intercepted by the IDF. The Houthis claimed responsibility, stating they targeted strategic sites such as southern Israel and Nevatim Airbase.
- **11 December:** Houthis claimed responsibility for striking the Panama-flagged Anadolu S cargo vessel in the Red Sea. They accused it of violating a "ban on entering Israeli ports."
- **12–13 December:** Further ballistic missile launches targeted Israel's Nahal Sorek military base and Nevatim Airbase. The IDF reported successful interceptions, though the Houthis insisted that some of their "Palestine 2" missiles approached their objectives.



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Mid-to-Late December 2024

- **19 December:**

- The IDF carried out a wave of 16 airstrikes on ports, energy, and communication infrastructure in Al-Salif and Ras Isa, as well as sites in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa.
- Initial reports indicated at least seven fatalities at Al-Salif Port and multiple casualties at other key facilities.
- This spike in aerial bombardment caused widespread power outages, hampering humanitarian aid operations.

- **23 December:**

- Saudi-led artillery shelling hit Razih District.

Mid-to-Late December 2024

- **26 December:** Al Hudaydah Airport and a nearby power plant were bombed in renewed strikes.

- **27 December:**

- Multiple strikes reportedly targeted Sanaa, including the 1st Armored Division headquarters, a weapons and maintenance camp, and September 21 Park in the Mayeen District. The Houthis claimed US-UK involvement in at least one of these operations.
- An IDF strike on Ras Isa Port allegedly left one person dead and three missing.
- Houthi cross-border attacks on Tel Aviv triggered air-raid sirens and left 18 Israelis injured as they rushed to shelters.

- **28 December:**

- Up to 100 Israeli aircraft allegedly conducted extensive bombing runs on Sanaa Airport, al-Hudaydah ports, and crucial energy facilities in Aziz and Ras Qantib.
- The Houthi Health Ministry announced four fatalities and 42 injuries following IDF airstrikes on Sanaa Airport and al-Hudaydah.
- WHO Director-General Tedros confirmed that a WHO staffer injured at Sanaa Airport was evacuated to Jordan for treatment.
- UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen disputed Israeli claims that Sanaa Airport served military purposes, stressing it is a civilian site used by the UN and ICRC, and cited the lack of prior warning before the strikes.



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Localized Violence in Taiz

Throughout mid- to late December 2024, the governorate of Taiz in southwestern Yemen has experienced a discernible rise in violence, overshadowed by larger-scale aerial operations elsewhere in the country. Open-source data from 21 December to 28 December underscores the fragmented control that persists in the region and the enduring vulnerability of local populations.

One high-profile incident took place in mid-December at Souk al-Sumail in Taiz City, where a gunman opened fire on officers from the Houd al-Ashraf police station, reportedly injuring several personnel. Local sources indicated that the assailant had been previously detained for homicide but was released under contentious circumstances; upon his return, he allegedly sought retribution against the police department. Although local authorities deployed a security campaign to apprehend him, these efforts proved unsuccessful, reflecting the tenuous capacity of law enforcement in Taiz's urban centers.

Around the same period, renewed clashes erupted along the northern outskirts of Taiz. Houthi artillery strikes targeted positions near the Defense Airbase, located in the Jabal al-Zanouj area, resulting in at least one government soldier's death and multiple injuries. Military officials noted that these engagements followed other skirmishes in the city's northern and northwestern fronts, suggesting a pattern of sustained hostilities in strategically significant and densely populated zones.

From 22 to 23 December, local sources reported overnight clashes between government-aligned forces and Houthi fighters in Jabal al-Zanouj, indicating further escalation in the same northern sector. By 23–24 December, security officials confirmed continued skirmishes near the Defense Airbase. Casualty figures were not released at the time, but humanitarian actors voiced concerns over rising displacement in adjacent neighborhoods due to intermittent mortar and artillery fire.

Between 26 and 27 December, the Taiz Military Axis verified additional exchanges of fire with Houthi units in the northern outskirts, coupled with reports of intensified shelling in outlying districts. Although no formal casualty toll was provided, activists circulated unverified statements of multiple wounded on both sides.

On 28 December, military and medical sources announced that one government soldier was killed and several others injured when Houthi forces launched an artillery barrage against positions near the Defense Airbase northwest of Taiz City. The Taiz Military Axis claimed it had repelled the assault, attributing the uptick in violence to escalating Houthi offensives over the prior week.

Cross-Border Tactics and Maritime Threats

The Houthis' growing proficiency in ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as long-range UAVs, has put Israeli population centers and maritime assets at heightened risk. Over the past month, multiple missiles have been intercepted over central and southern Israel, indicating an evolution of Houthi capabilities. In maritime domains, recurring attacks near the Gulf of Aden, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and Red Sea shipping lanes (e.g., the Anadolu S vessel incident on 11 December) have raised alarm among global shipping interests, underscoring the potential for broader disruption of trade routes.



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Trend Analysis

1. **Escalating Air Campaigns:** The period from mid-December to late December shows a sustained surge in IDF and US-UK-led airstrikes against critical Yemeni infrastructure. Large-scale bombing runs (sometimes involving upward of 100 aircraft) suggest a strategic shift and higher intent aimed at crippling Houthi logistics, command-and-control nodes, and maritime capabilities.
2. **Deepening Houthi Retaliation:** Parallel to increased Israeli operations, the Houthis have maintained a consistent tempo of ballistic missile and UAV launches, targeting both Israeli urban centers and naval assets. This tit-for-tat dynamic likely propels continued hostilities, elevating risks for civilian populations on both sides.
3. **Civilian Infrastructure Under Pressure:** Many airstrikes have struck dual-use or purely civilian facilities (e.g., airports, ports, power grids). The UN and WHO have challenged Israeli claims of military usage at sites like Sanaa Airport, raising the specter of international condemnation and accusations of violations of international humanitarian law.
4. **Local Instability in Taiz:** As external actors focus on strategic objectives, local power struggles in cities like Taiz remain unresolved. Recent armed clashes and political scoresettling in Taiz City indicate the willingness of several sides in the Yemen to move into multi-front confrontation against the Houthis.

Security Outlook

The Houthi Movement's evolving arsenal and extensive operational reach suggest that Yemen's security environment will remain highly fluid and prone to sudden escalations. Based on recent airstrikes and Houthi cross-border attacks, the following trends are likely in the coming weeks and months:

1. **Immediate Term (Days to 1 Week)**
 - **Continued Air and Missile Exchanges:** The Houthis' demonstrated ability to deploy an array of ballistic missiles (including hypersonic and cruise variants) and drones will likely persist, prompting further Israeli and US-UK retaliatory airstrikes on key infrastructure in Sanaa, al-Hudaydah, and strategic energy facilities.
 - **Local Instability in Taiz and Beyond:** Recent clashes in Taiz, coupled with the Houthis' artillery and mortar shelling in contested districts, point to potential flare-ups across other frontline areas. Local pro-Yemeni government forces remain overstretched, heightening risks of sporadic violence and complicating humanitarian access.



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2. Short Term (1–4 Weeks)

- **Escalation of Maritime Threats:** The Houthis' anti-ship missiles, explosive boats, and maritime interdictions pose a growing risk to commercial and naval vessels traversing the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. With external support—primarily from Iran—there is a high likelihood of continued or intensified attacks on shipping lanes, driven by the group's focus on maritime leverage.
- **Expanded Missile Targeting:** The Houthis' arsenal of ballistic missiles and hundreds of UAVs position them to sustain or even escalate attacks on Israeli territory and naval assets. The group's advanced technical proficiency in assembling, modifying, and maintaining these weapons indicates that stockpile depletion is less likely in the near term.

3. Mid-Term (1–3 Months)

- **Increased Weapon Sophistication and Frequency of Use:** Past behavior patterns indicate that the Houthis will continue to refine their missile and drone technology, including locally modifying or assembling more advanced systems. Iranian support—through smuggled components, training, and intelligence—will remain integral. This support network underpins not only ballistic and cruise missile programs but also maritime capabilities such as anti-ship missiles and remotely piloted explosive boats.
- **International Repercussions:** With the Houthis routinely engaging in tactics that violate international humanitarian law—such as the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas and recruitment of child soldiers—international scrutiny may intensify. However, in the absence of a negotiated ceasefire or effective enforcement mechanisms, these concerns may not significantly alter the group's operational behavior.

4. Longer-Term Considerations

- **Risk of Broader Regional Spillover:** Ongoing missile launches into Israel, maritime disruptions in critical shipping corridors, and entrenched frontlines around Taiz all raise the prospect of wider regional involvement. Escalation could draw in additional external actors or prompt multilateral naval operations aimed at securing trade routes.
- **Humanitarian Crisis Deepening:** Repeated strikes on ports and airports, coupled with Houthi attacks on infrastructure, will further constrain aid deliveries. Minefields, IEDs, and explosive remnants of war compound the dangers for civilians and relief agencies. Unless there is a serious push for de-escalation, Yemen's humanitarian conditions are likely to deteriorate further.



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Overall, the Houthis' continued reliance on a broad spectrum of weapon systems—from ballistic missiles and armed drones to maritime anti-ship capabilities—points to sustained, if not heightened, conflict intensity. Their willingness to target civilian infrastructure and engage in aggressive maritime operations underscores a strategic approach geared toward maximum disruption. Meanwhile, Israeli, US-UK, and Saudi-led responses are poised to escalate further, with little evidence of an imminent diplomatic resolution.

Implications and Recommendations

Humanitarian Access: Repeated Israeli strikes on airports and ports severely restrict the flow of critical aid. Humanitarian agencies require coordination mechanisms to safely operate in heavily targeted zones like Sanaa, al-Hudaydah, and Taiz. Staying informed on the conflict dynamics remains key in identifying possible hotspots and strike locations.

Protective Measures for Shipping: The ongoing risk to vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden underscores the need for robust naval escorts and early-warning systems. Shippers should maintain heightened vigilance, coordinate with naval coalitions, and update routing protocols to minimize exposure.

De-escalation Channels: The spiral of retaliatory airstrikes and missile launches calls for immediate international mediation. Without robust dialogues, either bilateral or via recognized intermediaries, the conflict is poised to deepen, exacting a higher toll on civilian populations.

Conclusion

From mid-November to late December 2024, Yemen's conflict has transformed into a broader regional flashpoint with direct Israeli intervention, ongoing US-UK coalition attacks, and resilient Houthi retaliation both on land and at sea. Escalations in Sanaa, al-Hudaydah, and Taiz illustrate the multidimensional nature of this war, where global powers and local factions alike drive the hostilities. Absent meaningful diplomatic engagement or ceasefire agreements, the humanitarian and security challenges will likely intensify in the coming weeks, with significant ramifications for Yemeni civilians and regional stability.



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