

The Role and Implications of Houthis Action in Israel-Hamas War 2023-2024

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Abstract

The Israel-Hamas war has lingered for years been part of the larger Israel-Palestinian conflict. The claim to land and sovereignty has been at the core of this altercation between Israel and Hamas. As earlier said the crisis has been long in origin but that of October 7th, 2023 assumed a dangerous and wider dimension of global proportion. This particular crisis has drawn the attention of many state and non-state actors of which the Houthis in Yemen is one of them. The actions of these state and non-state actors have complicated, exacerbated, and escalated this war. This is why this work focus on the role and implications of Houthis in this Israel-Hamas imbroglio. In line with this some pertinent questions were raised. Who are the Houthis? What made the Houthis to engage in this precarious war? What is their role in the war? What are the implications of their role? In order to find answers to these questions documentary evidence was used to gather data for the work from books, journals, magazines, Newspapers and internet materials. The ideological theory was used as an analytical tool. From these gatherings and analysis, the work discovered that the Houthis are a group of people from Yemen fighting to end political and economic marginalization within their country and with hatred against the Saudis, UAE, US and Israel as depicted by their slogan.

Keywords: Houthis, Israel, Hamas, Implications, Role.

Introduction

The Israeli-Hamas war officially started in 1948 (Abayomi, 2023) with formation of the State of Israel though under the name of Palestinian/Arab war. The crisis started as far as 1896 (Abayomi, 2023) when the Zionist movement was formed or in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration. All these crises have drawn the world's attention but none has been so dramatic and terrible like that of October 7th, 2023 (Basil, 2023). In this well-planned attack by the Hamas, Israel was taken by surprise about 1,200 Israelis were killed while more than 250 were taken into Gaza as captives (Okoli, 2024). This war has drawn state actors like the US, Egypt, Qatar, Iran, Turkiye, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Britain, and international bodies like the EU and the UN etc. Non-state actors like Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthis, the Syrian jihadists are also involved. The Houthis from Yemen has been waging unrelenting sea war by firing at ships passing through their channels to Israel, thereby disrupting world commerce.

The Houthis attacked Israel on July 19th, 2024 (Abdullahi, 2024) with a long-range drone. They meticulously planned the drone's flight path and direction to make it fly at a moderately low height tracking Eritrean, Sudanese, Somali and Egyptian coast line to reduce being seen by western ship-based radars and air defence equipment in the Red Sea. Apart from their ideological inclination, the Houthis based their attacks on Israel on the Israeli bombardment of Gaza and the global community's silence to put an end to it. The Houthis focus on attacking vessels related to Israel and her allies in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.

The Houthis aggression to Israel, plus their antisemitism are immemorial. The Houthis has gathered followers through their slogan “God is great, death to America, death to Israel, a curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam” (Abdullahi, 2024) Their leader Hussein al-Houthi, the originator of the movement, agreed that the US and Israel want to occupy both Mecca and Medina, Islam’s most venerable cities. Their current leader Malik al-Houthi believed that Israel supported the Yemeni government, Saudis, and UAE in their civil war. In 2021 the Houthis expelled the last Jews under their sovereignty (Daniel, 2023).

There is a conspiracy theory among the Houthis that the US and Israel poison their economic trees. By attacking Israeli-owned ships, the Houthis want to prove that their rhetoric against Israel is equally supported by action and also endeared themselves to the so-called “Axis of Resistance” headed by Iran, made up of Hamas, Hezbollah and pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria (Daniel, 2023) The Houthis want to show Iran that they like Hezbollah can attack Israel and US in the middle east thereby proving themselves a dependable staunch ally. The Houthis equally wanted to capture the resource rich part of Yemen called Marib. The Houthis by waging into the war between the Israelis and Hamas wants to cash in as a supporter of the Palestinian cause which is very popular amongst the Arab nations thereby getting a positive public opinion.

Literature Review

Abdulmalik (2024) saw Houthi engagement in the Israel-Hamas war as a geopolitical phenomenon. He claimed that the location of Yemen in the strategic elbow of Bal al-Mandeb of the red sea and Indian ocean gave the Houthis the apparent advantage of interfering with ease in the Israel-Hamas war. This work agrees with this view to an extent. Their location no doubt helps them to attack Israeli owned or Israeli linked ships and also to launch missiles and drones to Israel. This work maintain that Yemen (Houthi) are not the only country or group with this enviable location advantage; countries or groups like Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Egypt also share in this vantage position. Some of the countries like Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are closer and more advantageous geopolitically to Israel than Houthi in Yemen. In line with this, the work argues that there is more to Houthi engagement in the Israel-Hamas war than mere geopolitical advantage.

Ibrahim (2023-2024) opined that the urge for international recognition is the main push for Houthi action in the Israeli-Hamas war. Ibrahim believed that the Houthis in order to get global acknowledgement especially among the Arabs and other Islamic nations quickly involve themselves in the Israel-Hamas imbroglio so as to be seen as defenders of both the Hamas (Palestinian) and the Arab cause. To them, according to Ibrahim, this will give them broader acceptance and recognition in the Arab and Islamic world. This work perceived this view as been peripheral because the quest for mere recognition cannot propel the Houthis to embark on so perilous venture as wading into Israel-Hamas fracas. This research agreed that there is more than recognition that pushed Houthi into Israel-Hamas war.

Musa (2024) asserted firmly that the Houthi engagement in the Israel-Hamas war was to front the Iranian strategy of surrounding Israel with ferocious enemies. Be that as it may, every group or country’s action is first underpinned by their interest so just asserting that they are being piloted by fronting the Iranian strategy is to somehow push their interest aside. This belief makes the Houthis look as if they are merely working for the Iranians. This is a two-way thing; Iran is using the Houthis to achieve their aim while the Houthis are equally using the Iranians to get their objective. Based on this, the work sees this claim as being partially correct.

Moreover, Joseph (2024) claimed that what pushed the Houthis into Israel-Hamas altercation is the issue of Houthis trying to exploit the Hamas (Palestinian) cause popularity amongst the Arabs. To him, the Houthis assume that if the Arabs see them as being sympathetic to Hamas (Palestine) they will welcome them and this will help them achieve their objective-i.e. rulling the whole Yemen. This work opined that this alone cannot be the reason why the Houthis enter into the Israel- Hamas war. So, a more comprehensive reason has to be found.

Richard (2024) said that two reasons catapulted the Houthis into the Israel-Hamas war. According to him, they are the urge to redefined themselves from non-state actor to state actor and the idea of distracting the Israelis from devastating Gaza. He claimed that the more the Houthis attack the Israelis the more the Arabs see them as the rightful government of Yemen and the more Israel lessen their attack on Hamas. This assertion did not yet give us the comprehensive reason that pushed Houthis into the Israel-Hamas war.

This research believe that all the works reviewed has peripherally touched the reasons why the Houthis delved into the Israeli-Hamas war but none has a comprehensive cause for Houthis action. It is this gap between the peripheral reasons given by the above reviewed works and the wholistic push that led the Houthis into the Israel-Hamas war that this work wants to fill.

Methodology

This is a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative study. The data for the work was obtained through secondary sources like books, journals, theses, magazines', newspapers, and internet materials. The data collected was analyzed through documentary evidence and; the ideological theory was used as a tool of analysis. The data collection process follows specific criteria for relevance, reliability, and credibility.

Theoretical Framework

This work employed the ideological theory in order to explain this research. The ideological theory is defined as a strong deep-seated propelling force of beliefs that catapults and galvanizes people into taking an action or embarking on a mission. The propounders of this theory are Richard Spikes, Andrew Forest, and Paul light (Mustafa 2020). They argue that the ideological belief of the Germans (Aryan Race) that they were the best and the highest race God ever created made them to fight with audacity and tenacity during the Second World War. They also added that the defunct cold war was able to persist for long because of the ideological divide between the west and the east. They claimed that the propelling force of ideology upon a group or nation is incalculable and unfathomable.

They believe that good ideological force drives a group to a glorious height while a bad one does the opposite. They said that you can identify groups ideology from their motto, slogan, song or statements. This assertion aligns with the Houthis slogan of "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, a curse upon the Jews, victory to Islam" In this slogan you can clearly see and perceive one of the Houthis ideologies which is "Death to Israel" and deducing from this one can clearly see why the Houthis are hell bent in attacking Israel. Simply put, the propelling force energizing the Houthis to attack Israel can be located in their ideology.

Furthermore, they opined that the force of ideology is more than that of proxy because according to them in ideology lies a groups or nations' interest while in proxy is the furtherance of another

groups or nation's interest although that of their supporters are peripherally advanced too. The above analysis and assertions made this theory unequivocally suitable for this work.

Historical Background of the Houthis

The Houthis, practically called Ansar Allah (supporters of God) are a Yemen group and militia movement that came up in 1990s. The first grouping of the Houthis was called "the Believing Youth" (BY) and was established in 1992 in Saada Governorate of Yemen. This group founded schools, clubs and summer camps and by 1994/95 15,000-20,000 students had attended BY summer orientation (Hassan, 2022). Their lecturers were Mohammed Hussein Fadhlallah (a Lebanese shia scholar) and Hassan Nasrallah (then Secretary General of Hezbollah). The movement's motto reads "God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse on the Jews, Victory to Islam" (Hassan, 2022) This slogan is partly copied from the slogan of revolutionary Iran which says "Death to US and death to Israel" (Abdul, 2023). The Houthis are supported by Iran, North Korea and Russia.

The Houthis became majorly militant because of the way they view the political and economic exploitation against them by the Yemen government. The movement became prominent in view of the demise of its founder, Hussein Bedridden al-Houthi, in 2004 which skyrocketed into armed struggle with the Yemeni government. By 2014 exploiting the instability engendered by the Arab spring, the Houthis took control of the capital Sana'a and parts of northern Yemen. Their emergence to power was characterised by series of disruptive controversies with both the Yemen administration and a Saudi sponsored alliance in 2015 wanting to reinstitute the Hadi government. The crisis has changed into a hydra headed issue which has embraced regional powers and consequently ushered in catastrophic humanitarian imbroglio with expansive hunger and dislocation of millions. Their collaboration with Iran has further escalated the geopolitical topography of the Middle East crisis, putting them as major role players in the wider regional conflict for power. This alliance with Iran has made people to see them as Iranian proxy. In 2021 the Houthis expelled the last Jews under their sovereignty.

The Houthis fought against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, including the Yemen legitimate government which retreated to the south, later a cease-fire negotiated by the UN came into effect in April, 2022. The Houthi Zaydi shia are not completely like main shia of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. Most shia are "Twelvers" (Abdallah, 2020) i.e. they believe in 12 omniscient, God-inspired imams while the Zaydis are "Fivers" i.e. they believe that there are only five such imams. The first four are revered by all Shia, but Zaydis acknowledge a fifth imam, Zaydi ibn Ali hence their name "zaydiyya" (Abdallah, 2020).

Roles of the Houthis in the Israel-Hamas war

It is not a hidden fact that the Houthis piloted by their ideology of hatred against the Jews has been playing some roles in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The Houthis role can be compacted into economic, political, and social roles. The Houthis has been playing the role of economic disruption along the Indian-Red Sea trade routes by their bombing and sometimes sinking ships belonging to or related to Israel. In fact, Houthi confrontations have step down shipping to Israel. Merchant shipping to Eliat has significantly reduced. Trading vessels coming from Asia to Israel, likewise merchant ships have begun to detour around Africa, making the journey three weeks longer and incurring more expenses (Majid, 2023).

By 21st December, 2023 over 100 trading ships has been detoured around Africa adding 6,000 nautical miles to their trip distance and more expenses. Insurance fee for merchant vessels that go through the Red Sea have skyrocketed. Some Israeli vessels insurance cost now amount to 250%, while others could not be insured (Malik, 2024). The impact on the Egyptian economy is more costly because shipping via the Suez Canal add about 9.4 billion dollars to the economy of Egypt yearly, now this has dwindled drastically because of the Houthis role in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas whereby the Houthis attack Israeli related ships going through the Red Sea. In March 2024, Eliat port threaten to sack half of its workers because of the Houthis attack on ships bound for Eliat which has reduced her income (Malik, 2024).

Many shipping companies has suspended their activities through the Red Sea like Maersk, CMA, LGM, Cosco, Hapag-Lloyd and Evergreen Maine corporation. By May, 2024 Maersk approximated a loss of 15-20% throughout the industry because of the Red Sea crisis by the Houthis. Their attacks on shipping vessels have made 18 shipping companies to detour their vessels through South Africa thereby incurring more debt (Hamid, 2024). With their control of this important trading waterway, Iran by proxy now has power over the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The Suez Canal passes 50-60 vessels each day, i.e. 19,000 each year, 30% of international container traffic and 10% of world oil flows but this has drastically reduced because of Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea and Indian ocean junction of Bal al-Mandab (Hamid, 2024).

In the political sphere, the Houthis role has regionalized and globalized the war. Regionally, they have linked the war to the Yemen civil war and the Iran-Saudi power tussle. Globally, the ships and their goods which they attack belongs to many countries of the world plus the crews of these vessels which are nationalities of many countries. They use the Israeli-Hamas war as avenue to garner support for their cause. They use the event to show solidarity for Palestinian people thereby making itself more relevant in the eyes of the Arab world. They also played the role of getting support. They are sponsored by the Iranian government both militarily and financially, but that is not the only reason, behind that is Houthis aim to score an important political strategy. Houthis actions from the inception of the war have not only consolidated their power domestically, but also vital in Strengthening their authority as Yemen's rulling sovereign in the view of the global community, most importantly in the lethargic stand of the Arab governments.

The Houthis by their role in the Israel-Hamas war aim to control all of Yemen and rally external groups to hate US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. This Houthi belief made the conflict in Yemen and by extension in Israel to be generally seen as a part of Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy war. The Houthis by involving themselves in the war, are targeting to show themselves as a force to reckon with outside their domestic geopolitical sphere, making themselves more relevant in the "Axis of Resistance" which is headed by Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah and pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria (Adamu, 2023).

Socially, Houthis role in Israel-Hamas war of attacking ships has affected shipping of humanitarian needs to crisis-ridden Sudan (Adamu, 2023). This Houthi role has affected the shipping of goods and services for human consumption in all the countries along the Red Sea coast like Kenya, Tanzania, Eritrea, Sudan, Suadi Arabia, Egypt and by extension all the inland countries that also depend on these littoral countries. The Yemen's civil war engendered by the Houthis has displaced many people in the country, made Yemen poorer and the Houthis role in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war has worsen the situation. The Houthis asked for ceasefire in Israel-Hamas war and demanded an end to Israel blockade of Gaza. The Houthis desire to see to the

end of the Israel-Hamas war is good but the way of confrontation which they chose will rather escalate the war and increase the sufferings on the people. The Houthis should rather choose the diplomatic way of Egypt and Qatar.

The Houthis role in the war has resulted in difficult humanitarian crisis like famine, unemployment, diseases and dislocation of people. Houthis started attacking vessels bound for Israel on 19th November, 2023 and by February, 2024 40 ships had been attacked (Kabir, 2024). The people that were employed by these ships will now lose their jobs and that is if they are still alive and we are not calculating the effect on their dependants. Between November and December, 2023 there had been 13% decrease in world trade due to Houthis attacks. By March 2024 over 2,000 vessels had detoured away from the Red Sea (Kabir, 2024). The Houthis see themselves as anti-imperialist and champions of the Palestinian cause. To them, the US and Israeli policies in the region are inhuman.

Implications

One of the implications of Houthis role in the Israel-Hamas war is that it gave the conflict a regional and a globalized colouration. Their role regionalized the crisis by linking it to the war in Yemen and impliedly connecting it to the Iran-Saudi Arabia power contestation in the middle east region. The Houthis are one of the parties in the Yemeni civil war and by involving in the Israel-Hamas imbroglio and with their allegation that Israel is supporting their opponents (UAE & Saudi Arabia) made their action look like extension of the war in Yemen. The Houthis link with Iran in terms of having similar ideology, and receiving arms, training, and finance also gave the Israel-Hamas crisis a regional dimension. Their role also made the crisis a world-wide issue due to their attacks on ships both in Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Some of the ships attacked did not relate to Israel or the goods they are carrying. An example is the ship carrying cars from India to Turkiye that was attacked. Some of the ships that are not Israeli owned or carrying goods not meant for Israel has to make a dangerous and expensive detour which is detrimental to the populace waiting for the merchandize.

Houthis involvement in the Israel-Hamas war ironically promotes Iran regional strategy of using proxy parties to challenge Israel and Saudi Arabia. With Houthis help Israel is being attacked with weapons made in Iran which Iran has denied in the world debates no matter how clear the matter is. Iran is achieving their objective without been involved directly. Ironically, using weapons made in Iran to attack Israel mean that Iran has come of age as far as weapon manufacturing is concerned.

Houthis involvement in the Israel-Hamas war has equally complicates international diplomatic efforts to resolve the war. The Houthis involvement has connected the crises in middle east to the extent that diplomatic settlement is difficult and complicated. For instance, the Iran-Saudi power struggle in the middle east is now connected to the Yemeni civil war and this civil war is now linked to the on-going Israel-Hamas war by extension this crisis is joined to Syrian and Lebanon debacle. This multifarious linkages of issues in the web of conflicts in the region complicates diplomatic efforts to reach a sustainable settlement. The engagement of multiple state and non-state actors like Houthis in Yemen, Islamic jihadists in Syria, and the Hezbollah in Lebanon require a comprehensive approach to conflict settlement.

Finally, the Houthis engagement in the Israel-Hamas war has affected tourism in Israel and Egypt. The famous Egyptian resorts of Sham el sheik and Taba totally depend on the Red Sea

traffic likewise that of Israel's Eliat sea port. Tourist ships because of the Houthis bombing of ships on the Red Sea, now avoid the sea lane. This means reduce revenue both to Israel and Egypt.

Conclusion

The Houthis waded into the Israel-Hamas war being piloted by their ideology which is akin to that of Iran and this has given the Houthis action the colouration of being Iran's proxy. This is further buttressed by the fact that Iran trains, finances, and arms Houthis. Be that as it may, Houthis has played political, economic and social roles in the Israel-Hamas crisis and these roles has ushered in some implications like expanding the horizons of the crisis regionally and globally, expansion of Iran's regional strategy, complicating of diplomatic efforts to settle the conflict, and reduction in tourism revenue that accrue both to Israel and Egypt. This work is of the opinion that the Houthis embrace the diplomatic lane of the Egyptians and the Qataris so as to help end the Israel-Hamas war because war is worthless and peace is priceless.

Recommendations

-The Houthis should stop bombing ships in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea because these are international sea lanes. Not all the ships in these waters belong to Israel or are related to them. Sometimes in Houthis quest to attack Israel, they have made mistakes by attacking other ships that have no connection with Israel. This makes other countries hate the Houthis. Their attacks have made some ships to detour thereby extending the time of the journey and increasing the cost of the goods. This act of the Houthis to a great extent disrupts international trade.

- i. -Iran should stop training, financing, and arming the Houthis as this gives them the capacity to attack both the ships on the Red Sea and Israel thereby escalating the crisis.
- ii. -Israel should stop the massacre in Gaza and West Bank as this is the main reason for Houthis reaction. Israel should embrace the two-state solution so as to bring sustainable peace to the middle east.
- iii. -The UN should strongly back their middle east resolutions with action in order to bring Israel to conformity.
- iv. -The US government should be a non-partisan arbiter or negotiator in the Israel-Hamas war.

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