

Protection of Yemen's coasts and restoration of state control over territory, ports and waters is a joint Yemeni and international interest.

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Spotlight

ANALYSIS

The battle for Bab Al-Mandab

Houthi arrival at key transit route threatens maritime trade and energy supplies, Yemeni military spokesman says

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The Houthi militia's arrival at Bab Al-Mandab constitutes a threat to freedom of maritime navigation, international trade and the flow of energy supplies, the official spokesperson for the Yemeni Armed Forces said on Thursday.

The warning came after Houthi forces advanced toward the west coast, giving the Iran-backed group a new foothold on the Red Sea coast close to one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints.

The spokesperson said regional and international powers would not allow the Houthis to take control of Bab Al-Mandab and repeat what happened in the Strait of Hormuz.

The statement has placed renewed focus on the Red Sea port of Mokha and what the advance could mean for commercial shipping and maritime security.

The city had served as the main base of the National Resistance Forces commanded by Presidential Leadership Council member Tareq Saleh, whose forces developed military bases, naval units and other infrastructure there after splitting from the Houthis following the killing of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2017.

Those forces operated across the Red Sea and around islands controlled by the government. Following the capture, Saleh ordered his forces along the western coast to regroup.

The withdrawal leaves the Houthis with a stronger presence on a coastline directly connected to Bab Al-Mandab — and potentially a new means of exerting pressure on vessels passing through the Red Sea.

The Yemeni military spokesperson said supporting Yemen's legitimate government was the only way to eliminate the Houthi threat and ensure international efforts to combat terrorism and piracy succeed.

It warned that failure to deter the Houthis would constitute a victory for what it described as the Iranian project in the region and encourage other terrorist organizations to adopt a similar approach. Bab Al-Mandab

connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, making stability around it essential to ships moving between the wider Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal. Disruption along Yemen's western coast can therefore have consequences far beyond the country itself.

Mokha's strategic importance comes partly from its geography. The historic port sits on a promontory extending into the Red Sea, allowing vessels using the international shipping route to be seen directly from shore.

Col. Abdul Basit Al-Baher, a Yemeni military official in Taiz, told Arab News that Houthi control of such a position could change the threat facing shipping.

"They can now target the international shipping route with light or medium weapons, rather than missiles," he said.

"The port is situated on a peninsula extending toward the international shipping lane, allowing ships to be clearly seen with the naked eye." A threat to shipping does not require control of the entire Bab Al-Mandab Strait. A hostile presence close enough to monitor vessels can increase uncertainty around the artery.

The Houthi capture of Mokha followed an offensive launched west of Taiz earlier this month, using missiles, drones and mortar fire before a ground advance.

Yemeni military commanders and analysts warned that the objective appeared to be the road linking Taiz with Mokha, whose capture would isolate Taiz from the Red Sea.

For the Houthis, Mokha provides a military gain and greater access to the Red Sea. For the government, its loss removes an important position from which it sought to limit Houthi activity.

The consequences extend beyond the possibility of attacks on commercial vessels.

Government coast guard units and naval forces affiliated with the National Resistance had used Mokha as a base for intercepting shipments carrying weapons to the Houthis. They also sought to combat human trafficking, drug smuggling and other illicit activity in the Red Sea.

Al-Baher said those forces had now withdrawn south to Dhuhab, near Bab Al-Mandab. He warned that their departure could create new opportunities for



YEMEN'S INTENSIFYING CONFLICT
Fighting rages amid competing claims by government-aligned forces and Houthis



- FIVE FRONTS**
- 1 Jowf:** Government claims eastern Al-Hazm gains and Houthi supply-route cuts.
 - 2 Taiz:** Government forces claim advances but captured positions unspecified.
 - 3 Abyan and Al-Rayda:** Government forces prepare for possible offensive along 70km front.
 - 4 Marib:** Renewed violence, no major change in control established as of Thursday.
 - 5 Red Sea coast:** Reports claim fierce fighting around Mokha; fate of nearby Dhuhab is uncertain.

Sources: Arab News, agencies

ARAB NEWS

smuggling networks. "All forms of smuggling — involving illicit goods, narcotics, weapons and contraband — will return, as will the targeting of ships and international shipping," he said.

National Resistance naval forces had also maintained a presence around the Hanish Archipelago and Zuqar Island.

Their withdrawal could give the Houthis an opportunity to expand their influence offshore, further strengthening their position around maritime traffic.

The immediate consequences will depend on what the Houthis do next. They could consolidate their hold on Mokha, expand south toward Bab Al-Mandab or attempt to extend their influence over strategically located Red Sea islands.

The Yemeni military spokesperson said the redeployment of

troops along the western coast was part of the wider battle against the Houthis and argued that their movement into open areas could create opportunities for Yemeni forces to target them.

"Drawing the Houthi militia into open areas would make it easier for the Yemeni Armed Forces to target and eliminate its members," the spokesperson said.

For Yemen, any loss at this time would be a military setback. For the wider region, however, the stakes are higher. The security of Bab Al-Mandab affects not only Yemen but also the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and international maritime traffic. A safe and secure Bab Al-Mandab ultimately depends on stability around it — and the Houthi capture of Mokha has made that stability considerably more uncertain.