

The Houthis' Hypersonic Missile Is a Game-Changer in Red Sea

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The screenshot captured from a video released by Yemen's Houthi group on June 26, 2024 shows that a hypersonic missile is launched from an undisclosed desert area in Yemen.
[Xinhua](#)



Is this Iran's revenge?

Is this how Iran pays-back Israel for bombing its consulate in Damascus in late March; by providing the Houthis with hypersonic missiles to fight the "Great Satan"?

On June 26, Yemen's Houthi rebels launched an attack on a commercial ship in the Arabian Sea using a long-range, solid-fuel hypersonic ballistic missile. It was the first time the group had used the state-of-the-art missile in its military operations. The significance of the development cannot be overstated. Hypersonic missiles—which feature technological advances that are still unavailable in the West—are more accurate, harder to shoot down, and travel longer distances than earlier models. **These unique, cutting-edge weapons are a force-multiplier that give the Houthis a decided advantage in future attacks in the Red Sea and beyond.** They will allow the Houthis to tighten their grip on commercial traffic while putting US warships at greater risk. They will also significantly improve the Houthis chances of prevailing in their war with the United States and its coalition partners. This is from an article at the *Maritime Executive*:

The Houthis.... are asserting that they have launched for the first time a hypersonic missile which was used to target an MSC containership far out in the Gulf of Aden....

For the first time, the identity of the missile that targeted the... MSC Sarah V in the Arabian Sea," was being revealed according to a posting by the Houthi spokesperson Yahya Saree. "It is a locally made hypersonic missile that possesses advanced technology, is accurate in hitting, and reaches long ranges."...

Media reports in March said the Houthis had begun manufacturing their hypersonic missile... capable of reaching Mach 8. The reports said it would be used to threaten shipping further into the Indian Ocean. [Video: Houthis Claim First Launch of Hypersonic Missile Targeting MSC Ship](#), *Maritime Executive*

First of all, the Houthis do not have advanced missile production facilities, so whatever hybrid ballistic missile they are presently using in their military operations, they did not manufacture it themselves.

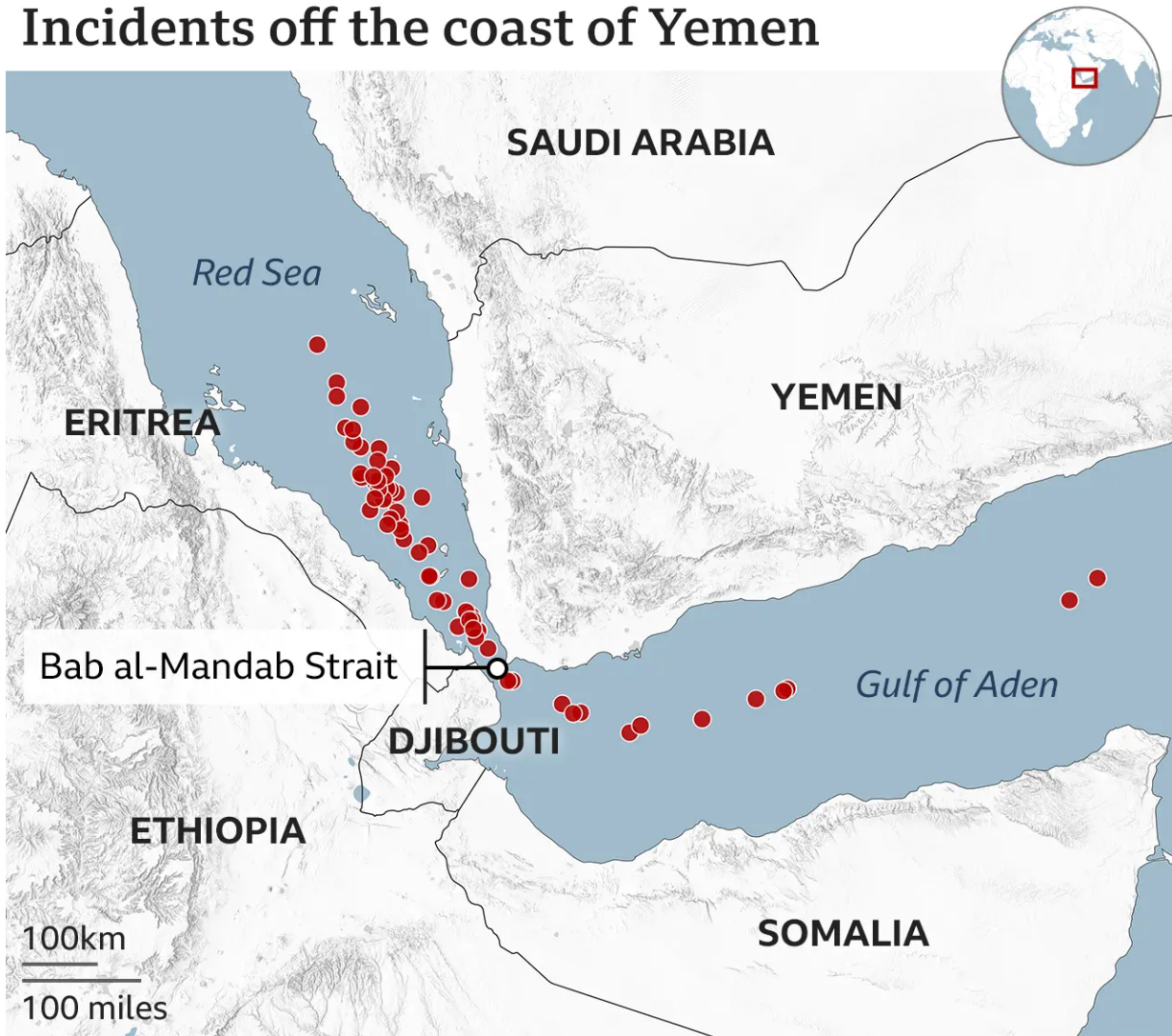
Secondly, **experts suggest that the missile that was fired in the Arabian Sea incident earlier in the week was probably a version of the Iranian-made Fattah-1,** which can travel at speeds of up to Mach 3 or three times the speed of sound. The Fattah-1 represents a significant upgrade from the missiles the Houthis have been using, but **they do not pose the same grave threat to commercial shipping as advanced, cutting edge hypersonic ballistic missiles.** State-of-the-art solid-fuel hypersonic missiles are in a class of their own. Some of them travel at speeds that exceed Mach 5 and are highly maneuverable and able to change course during flight. Here's some background:

The ability to launch highly maneuverable weapons at hypersonic speeds gives any country a considerable advantage, because such weapons can evade just about any defense system currently in use.

"It doesn't matter what the threat is. If you can't see it, you can't defend against it," General John Hyten, the former vice chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told an audience in Washington in January 2020.

As the commander of U.S. Strategic Command in 2018, Hyten said, **"We don't have any defense that could deny the deployment of such a weapon against us. ... Our defense is deterrent capability."** [What Are Hypersonic Weapons and Who Has Them?](#), VOA

Incidents off the coast of Yemen



Source: Ambrey Analytics



Bottom line: **If the Houthis had these “advanced” weapons at their disposal, the Red Sea would be littered with smoldering US warships headed for Davy Jones locker.** But that isn’t the case, so we have to assume that—who ever is supplying the Houthis—is not yet prepared to give them their top-of-the-line hypersonic missiles. Here’s more from an article at *Business Insider*:

Markus Schiller, director of ST Analytics, a Munich-based consulting firm that researches missiles and space technology, told Business Insider that **the missile was likely designed in Iran.**

“Definitely something from the Iranian Fattah family of missiles, which date back to the 1990s and were continuously advanced since then,” Schiller said. **Tehran has recently touted the latest versions of its Fattah missiles as hypersonic.**,, [Houthi rebels say they’ve fired a new ‘homemade hypersonic missile,’ posting footage of its launch at a civilian ship.](#) *Business Insider*

It’s actually better that the Houthis do NOT have the best ballistic missiles available. After all, the point of their blockade is not to obliterate US warships and kill thousands of people, but to persuade Israel to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza by applying pressure to the Israeli economy. In truth, the success of the Houthi strategy is largely attributable to the fact that it

has been mostly peaceful which is why their cause has garnered support from people around the world. If they change their MO and start blowing ships out of the water right-and-left, popular support will vanish overnight. This is from an article at *Foreign Policy*:

.....eight months on, the disruption to shipping has suddenly gotten a lot worse. In late June, Houthi attacks sank a ship—the second since they began their attacks—and damaged another. The list of attempted and successful attacks is a year-to-date litany; U.S. Central Command’s public messaging is a near-daily drumbeat of reports of U.S. vessels swatting away drones, missiles, and uncrewed surface vessels. The Houthis, who’ve used anti-ship missiles to great effect, are now increasingly resorting to those surface drones, including the so-called Houthi’s Blowfish....

The deployments, and constant interceptions, have eaten into the U.S. Navy’s own magazines. Congressional aides said the United States isn’t producing nearly enough of the standard air defense missiles used by U.S. escort ships in the Red Sea to shoot down Houthi drones and missiles. “As long as the burn rate remains as precipitously high as it’s been over there, we’re in a bit more of a precarious position,” one aide said, speaking on condition of anonymity to talk candidly about U.S. munitions shortfalls. [Why Can’t the U.S. Navy and Its Allies Stop the Houthis?](#), *Foreign Policy*

You can sense the frustration in the author’s analysis, and you can understand why. Washington does not want to get bogged-down the Red Sea fighting an insurgent group that poses no national security threat to the US. No. Nor does Biden want to commit more resources or ground troops to an effort that does not advance America’s broader geopolitical ambition of rolling-back Russia’s operation in Ukraine or containing China. In short, **the fracas in the Red Sea is generally perceived to be a nuisance that US foreign policy honchos wish would just “go away”. But instead of going away, it’s getting worse, which is forcing Biden to make choices he doesn’t want to make.** This is from an article at *gCaptain*:

A naval force deployed by the European Union to protect vessels in the Red Sea needs to more than double in size because of escalating attacks by Iran-backed Houthi rebels, the head of the operation said.

Four EU vessels have been patrolling the waters off the coast of Yemen since February. In that time, they’ve provided “close assistance” to 164 ships, shot down more than a dozen unmanned aerial vehicles and destroyed four anti-ship ballistics missiles, Rear Admiral Vasileios Gryparis said in an interview on Wednesday.

The Yemen-based Houthis ... has roiled global shipping, forcing many vessels to sail thousands of miles around southern Africa instead — despite the EU operation and US and UK bombing that began in January....

“There are daily about 40 or 50 ships going up and down the strait so it needs a significant amount of ships to be able to provide this close protection,” he said. **“There are cases where we are not able to provide this close protection** but we try and cope with the volume.”....

US and UK bombing campaigns have failed to stop the attacks and instead led to vessels associated with the two countries being targeted more often. The Houthis

have warned of an expanded operation to potentially attack ships in the Mediterranean Sea...

“We don’t believe that hitting the Houthis might solve the problem,” he said. “Some other countries tried similar actions some years ago and some other countries still do and we see that it is not contributing to the solution to the problem.” [Fending Off Houthis Requires Double the Fleet, EU Force Says](#), *gCaptain*



Think about what the author is saying: He’s saying that the current approach is not working so we should double-down on the same strategy. Isn’t that the definition of insanity?

What’s clear is that the US has just one tool in its foreign policy toolkit: military force. And when that tool proves ineffective, then more force is applied. We need to understand how this is going to impact the outcome of the current stand-off in the Red Sea where Uncle Sam is beating his head against a rock without achieving anything. Wouldn’t it be better to pressure Israel into lifting the siege of Gaza?

The question policymakers should be asking themselves is fairly obvious: Is there a military solution to this problem?

The answer is “No”. Nor is there a clearly defined strategic objective or exit strategy, both of which were ignored in the rush to war and the determination of foreign policy mandarins to implement their favorite operational theory: “Shoot first and ask questions later.” As a result, the US is bogged down in another pointless conflagration that cannot be won by conventional means. This is from *Business Insider*:

The Houthis have scored a string of successful hits in recent weeks on commercial vessels — even sinking one of them — and demonstrated their ability to effectively strike targets with drone boats, signaling that they’re getting smarter with their attacks....

Some of the incidents have also revealed dangerous new tactics. Most notably, on June 12, the **Houthis struck a commercial vessel in the Red Sea with an explosive-laden drone boat for the first time** since they began attacking merchant shipping in November....

The initial drone boat attack on the commercial bulk carrier MV Tutor caused flooding and damage to the engine room. Hours later, a Houthi missile hit the ship. The double-tap strike forced the crew to abandon the vessel, and it eventually sank...

The same week, the Houthis fired two anti-ship missiles, hitting the MV Verbena in the Gulf of Aden. Not even 24 hours later, the bulk cargo carrier was struck by another missile, marking the week's second double-tap strike. The ship's crew eventually abandoned the vessel due to the damage sustained by the attacks.

British security firm Ambrey said the attacks on the Tutor and Verbena, in addition to successful strikes on two other vessels in the days prior, **were indicative of a "significant increase in effectiveness" of Houthi operations.**

"Every single Houthi attack, the Houthis are probably learning something about what works and what doesn't," Carter said. "If you think about how a military organization operates, they're definitely taking away lessons from the different strike packages that they're using."....

It is difficult to not only prevent the rebels from obtaining their "low-tech, low-cost" means of attack and to deter them from launching attacks, **Alex Stark**, an associate policy researcher who covers Middle East security at the RAND Corporation, told BI.

These attacks are an "ongoing problem without an obvious or useful solution at hand," she added. [The Houthis are getting smarter with their Red Sea attacks, and the ships sailing these waters are paying the price](#), *Business Insider*

Ms. Stark is wrong. There is "an obvious... solution at hand". The Biden administration needs to suspend all weapons shipments to Israel until they lift their blockade of food, water and medical aid to the people in Gaza. That is the only policy that will bring an end to the crisis in the Red Sea. More importantly, it's the right thing to do.

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