

Yemen Air Strikes by UK and US Set to 'Inflame and Spread Conflict'

Former international development minister describes military action as 'knee-jerk' and 'counterproductive'

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The UK should have worked harder to ensure a peaceful solution in [Yemen](#) rather than opting for aggression against the Houthi rebels, a former UK government minister has told [The National](#).

The [US and UK military](#) launched overnight air strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen in retaliation for attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

Former UK international development minister Shahid Malik, who was responsible for aid efforts in Yemen, described the military action as "knee-jerk" and "counterproductive".

Mr Malik, the UK's first Muslim minister, said a widespread bombing operation was unlikely to deter the Houthis.

"I find it curious to be honest that we in the West have been desperate not to spread conflict throughout the region and inflame things further but the action taken overnight will effectively do exactly that despite us saying we are trying to prevent and oppose conflict," he told [The National](#).

"I do not think the military action has been fully thought through. It has been very knee-jerk and on the day [Israel is defending its actions at the ICJ](#) [International Court of Justice] just adds fuel to it.

"I think the action is counterproductive in the short term because of what is happening, even more for shipping, firms will be even more wary of going through the Red Sea now

and the straits and it will increase insurance costs.”

While the strikes were intended to weaken the Houthis’ military capacity in the short term, it will have little effect on the group on the long term, and there will be “reprisals at their time and choosing”, he added.

“These people do not have a history of being predictable or logical,” Mr Malik said.

“In the short term, cargo ships are less likely than more to travel in that area because they will fear reprisals, their insurance will have gone up 10-fold.”

Yemen was the first country Mr Malik visited in 2007 in his role as international development minister.

He witnessed the nation’s plight first-hand when he signed a \$5 billion aid deal and a 10-year development plan to help Yemen.

Despite its 20 years of conflict, he still hopes for peace and has faith Saudi Arabia can help broker it.

“The UK’s actions have not been fully thought through,” he said.

“The UK’s brand has been tarnished once more in the Middle East, I do not understand why it is going along with the US again and allowing itself to be accused of being the US’s poodle.

“Violence is a last solution; the violence seen overnight is a clear signal the UK’s diplomacy has failed. This is US action trying to safeguard their interests. This is not how you get peace.”

He added that the international community and the West could have done more.

“People do not just get radicalised – there are underlying causes of poverty and a sense of injustice and unfairness,” Mr Malik said.

“The areas where the Houthis are traditionally from are incredibly underdeveloped.

“The people of Yemen have already been suffering hardship and civil war for decades. The war has cost a lot of lives. This is a classic example where the Houthis cannot be military defeated, just like in Afghanistan. We need to sit down and have dialogue to get a sustainable peace.”

Mr Malik also expressed his hope for peace talks with Saudi Arabia.

“The Yemenis have been through an awful plight and so much of it was preventable. They were people who had so much hope for a bright future, but this has been affected by the inaction of the West,” he said.

“I still believe there is a great opportunity for peace.”

The US and the UK say the air strikes will help to protect freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, but there are fears the move could lead to further escalation in the region as the [Gaza](#)

[war](#) rages on.



The Iran-backed rebels, who control the capital Sanaa, northern Yemen and parts of the Red Sea coast, said five of its members were killed in the strikes and vowed to retaliate.

Mr Malik fears the people of Yemen are going to continue to suffer as a result of the action.

“It is without doubt the most challenged and poorest country in the Middle East, there is high water scarcity, effectively it has been in civil war and has social issues and drug issues,” he said.

“The people I met were so lovely and honest and what is happening is utterly depressing, the international community needs to be doing more, they need to push the boat out.

“These people have already been through too much pain and suffering and it is going to continue for sometime.”

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Featured image: Former British Labour MP and international development minister Shahid Malik has criticised US and UK bombing of Houthi installations in Yemen. Photo: PA

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