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### Middle East

## US cracks down on money flow to Iran-backed Houthis

Treasury imposes sanctions on entities in Turkey and Yemen after attacks on commercial vessels around Red Sea



The Yemen-based Houthis have attacked commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since mid-November © Stringer/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

#### James Politi YESTERDAY

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The US has slapped sanctions on groups in Turkey and Yemen allegedly responsible for funnelling money to Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in a crackdown driven by their attacks on commercial vessels passing through the Red Sea.

The move by Washington expands its efforts to curb financial flows to Iranian-backed groups in the Middle East — including Hamas, Hizbollah and the [Houthis](#) — since the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

Based in Yemen, the Houthis have launched a series of attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden since mid-November using missiles and drones, raising concerns about significant disruption to international trade as ships have been forced to [reroute trips](#) around the tip of South Africa.

The US Treasury department [said on Thursday](#) it was placing sanctions on one individual and three entities “responsible for facilitating the flow of Iranian financial assistance to Houthi forces and their destabilising activities”.

“Today’s action underscores our resolve to restrict the illicit flow of funds to the Houthis, who continue to conduct dangerous attacks on international shipping and risk further destabilising the region,” said Brian Nelson, the US Treasury under-

secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence.

The sanctions were placed on the head of the Currency Exchangers Association in Sana'a, Yemen's capital, and three exchange houses in Yemen and Turkey. According to the US Treasury, they "facilitated the transfer of millions of dollars to the Houthis at the direction of . . . Sa'id al-Jamal", a financier affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps — Quds Force.

The White House has accused Iran of being "deeply involved" in planning the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, including providing the group with "tactical intelligence" to help it target maritime vessels.

Earlier this month, the Pentagon strengthened a multinational military task force with key US allies to protect "freedom of navigation for all countries" in the area. Denmark's [AP Møller-Maersk](#), the operator of the world's second-largest container ship fleet, said this week that it will resume sending vessels through the Red Sea after the coalition began providing naval security.

It is unclear how much the task force will deter the Houthis, as the group has warned that it may carry on with its attacks as long as Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza continues.

The new US sanctions against Houthi financial networks come amid growing concern that the war in Gaza could spill over into a broader regional conflict — a scenario that has so far been avoided.

Benny Gantz, an influential Israeli minister and a member of the war cabinet, [threatened to escalate](#) military operations against Hizbollah, which has been launching attacks against targets in northern Israel.

"The situation on Israel's northern border demands change," [Gantz](#) told reporters. "The stopwatch for a diplomatic solution is running out."

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