

Middle East war

US strikes Houthi targets in Yemen as fears grow of wider Mideast war

Joe Biden defends Israel's right to defend itself as it escalates offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon



Houthi supporters hold posters depicting Hezbollah's late leader Hassan Nasrallah in Sana'a, Yemen © Yahya Arhab/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Felicia Schwartz in Washington and Andrew England in London YESTERDAY

The US military conducted multiple strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen on Friday, resuming offensive action there as fears grow of a wider war in the Middle East.

US Central Command said it carried out strikes on 15 [Houthi](#) targets at a number of locations around the country.

"These actions were taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for US, coalition and merchant vessels," Centcom said in a statement.

The strikes against the Houthis, who have controlled Yemen's populous north since seizing the capital Sana'a and ousting the government in 2015, came as Iran and the wider region braced for Israel's response to this week's [Iranian missile barrage](#) against the country.

The Iranian-backed Houthis have been attacking merchant shipping and US naval vessels in the Red Sea and firing drones and missiles at Israel since [Hamas's October 7 attack](#), saying they are acting in solidarity with the Palestinians. Their assaults have severely disrupted shipping through one of the world's most important maritime trade routes.

The group has issued new threats against Israeli targets after last week claiming responsibility for a failed attack on American warships in the Red Sea. Earlier this week the Houthis claimed to have shot down an American-made MQ-9 Reaper drone, which is primarily used for surveillance.

Regional tensions have intensified since Iran fired about 180 missiles at Israel on Tuesday. It said it was in retaliation for the Israeli assassination of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Lebanese militant movement Hezbollah last week and the killing of Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July.

US President Joe Biden has urged Israel to keep its response to the missile strikes "proportional", and to avoid targeting Iranian nuclear sites or oil infrastructure.

But Biden on Friday made clear that the US also supports Israel's military response to threats from the region.

"The Israelis have every right to respond to the vicious attacks on them, not just on the Iranians but on everyone from Hezbollah to the Houthis," he said.

"The main thing we can do is try to rally the rest of the world . . . to try to tamp this down. When you have proxies as irrational as Hezbollah and the Houthis, it's a hard thing to determine," Biden added.

Israel has dramatically escalated its offensive against Hezbollah in the past two weeks and carried out one of its heaviest bombardments of Beirut overnight, with multiple air strikes that aimed to kill surviving leaders of Iran's most important proxy.

Residents across the Lebanese capital heard several large blasts, and flames and large plumes of smoke were seen rising from the southern suburb of Dahiyeh in the early hours of Friday. The

attacks were targeting Hashem Safieddine, the heir apparent to Nasrallah, according to a person familiar with the situation. It was not immediately clear whether they were successful.

Hours later, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei defended this week's missile assault on Israel, as he delivered a sermon at Friday prayers in Tehran for the first time in almost five years.

"What [Iran's] military forces did was the least punishment for the occupying Zionist regime for its shocking crimes," he told worshippers, amid chants of "death to Israel".

Nearly 2,000 people have been killed in Israeli attacks on Lebanon since last October, the majority in the past two weeks, Lebanon's health minister said. More than 1.2mn people have been displaced, triggering one of the worst crises for the country in decades.

The Israel Defense Forces said on Friday that they had killed 250 Hezbollah fighters, including four battalion commanders, since the start of the ground offensive in Lebanon earlier this week.

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