

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We are writing to request that you redesignate the Houthis, also known as Ansarallah, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The Houthis operate as an Iranian-backed terrorist organization with the objective of advancing Tehran's influence around the region.¹ Executive Order 13224 defines terrorism or activities of terrorism as "a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, property, or infrastructure...[that] appears to be intended to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion."² Targeting commercial shipping vessels in retaliation for Israel acting in self-defense after one of the deadliest days for the Jewish people since the Holocaust clearly falls within this definition of terrorism. Their actions pose a significant threat to the safety and security of maritime activities in the region.

Since Hamas's October 7th terrorist attacks against Israel, the Houthis have openly declared their unwavering support for Hamas and its barbaric acts against Israelis. Utilizing ballistic missiles, drones, and even hijacking vessels by boarding them from a helicopter, the Houthis are actively attacking ships they believe are destined for Israel.³ There have been more than ten documented instances of tankers and ships being attacked or boarded by the Houthis, with numerous near misses.⁴ In November, the Houthis hijacked the commercial tanker *Galaxy Lender*, a clear violation of international maritime law.⁵ On

¹ Lolita C. Baldor, Who are the houthis and why hasn't the US retaliated for their attacks on ships in the Middle East? (2023), apnews.com/article/yemen-attacks-iran-ships-retaliation-15d10ed74c7f3cc7fd36fa0f77f73e54 (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

² Executive Order 13224 - United States Department of State, [state.gov/executive-order-13224/#:~:text=For%20the%20purpose%20of%20the,intimidation%20or%20coercion%3B%20or%20to](https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/#:~:text=For%20the%20purpose%20of%20the,intimidation%20or%20coercion%3B%20or%20to) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

³ Isabel Debre & Jon Gambrell, Yemen's Houthi rebels hijack an Israeli-linked ship in the Red Sea and take 25 crew members hostage, *The Associated Press*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://apnews.com/article/israel-houthi-rebels-hijacked-ship-red-sea-dc9b6448690bcf5c70a0baf7c7c34b09&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1703269665943463&usg=AOvVaw3xYgvyevsFphyvW8crF5P8> (last viewed Dec 23, 2023)

⁴ Avi Scharf, THE RED SEA FRONT: ALL THE SHIPS ATTACKED BY YEMEN'S HOUTHIS (2023), [haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-12-15/ty-article-magazine/red-sea-shipping-yemen-houthis-ships-attacked/0000018c-5df7-d6f9-afbc-5dff7a430000](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2023-12-15/ty-article-magazine/red-sea-shipping-yemen-houthis-ships-attacked/0000018c-5df7-d6f9-afbc-5dff7a430000) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

⁵ Christian Triebert & David Botti, Satellite Imagery Shows Ship Hijacked by Houthis Near Yemen Port, *The New York Times*, November 21, 2023,

January 9, it was reported that U.S. and British naval ships shot down at least twenty-one Houthi drones and missiles, one of the largest barrages fired by the Houthis at commercial ships passing through the strait.⁶ It is crucial to note that more than 117,000 ships transit through the Bab el Mandeb Strait annually, averaging several hundred each day.⁷ Given the indiscriminate targeting by the Houthis, every international tanker passing through the strait is a potential target and remains at risk.

The situation has escalated to the point where major shipping, logistics, and oil companies, including A.P. Moller-Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd, CMA CGM, and BP have announced they are rerouting their vessels away from the Red Sea and incurring additional costs to protect their cargo and crew.^{8 9 10} This decision was prompted by a series of recent attacks and near misses, leading Hapag Lloyd to express concern, stating, “It’s very worrisome because ships heading to the Suez have to pass through the strait.”¹¹

It has also been reported that Tehran is providing real-time intelligence to the Houthis to target ships passing through the Red Sea.¹² While the U.S. led operation Prosperity Guardian is an important and positive step to utilize naval vessels from more than twenty nations to protect commercial vessels against attacks, Iran’s direct involvement and support for the attacks against the international order cannot go without further action.¹³

The Houthis’ attacks on unarmed commercial ships not only undermines the United States’ national security but also its economic security. Currently, nearly fifteen percent of international trade flows

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/21/world/middleeast/houthi-hijack-ship-galaxy-leader.html> (last visited Jan 11, 2024)

⁶Rebeca Falconer, U.S. forces report shooting down barrage of Houthi missiles, drones in Red Sea, Axios, January 9, 2024 <https://www.axios.com/2024/01/10/us-uk-forces-shoot-down-houthi-missile-drone-attack-red-sea> (last visited Jan 11, 2024)

⁷ Benoit Faucon, Costas Paris & Gordon Lubold, HOUTHİ REBEL ATTACKS RATTLE GLOBAL SHIPPING - WSJ (2023), [wsj.com/world/middle-east/houthi-rebel-attacks-target-global-shipping-7e55d7ae](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/houthi-rebel-attacks-target-global-shipping-7e55d7ae) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

⁸ Benoit Faucon, Costas Paris & Gordon Lubold, HOUTHİ REBEL ATTACKS RATTLE GLOBAL SHIPPING - WALL STREET JOURNAL (2023), [wsj.com/world/middle-east/houthi-rebel-attacks-target-global-shipping-7e55d7ae](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/houthi-rebel-attacks-target-global-shipping-7e55d7ae) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

⁹ Global shipping firms to avoid Suez Canal as attacks from Yemen’s Huthi rebels increase (2023), france24.com/en/middle-east/20231216-french-shipping-group-cma-cgm-pauses-all-container-shipments-through-the-red-sea (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

¹⁰ Christian Moess Laursen, BP joins Maersk, Hapag-Lloyd in pausing shipments through Red Sea - WSJ (2023), [wsj.com/business/energy-oil/bp-to-pause-all-shipments-through-red-sea-following-attacks-cd603dad](https://www.wsj.com/business/energy-oil/bp-to-pause-all-shipments-through-red-sea-following-attacks-cd603dad) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

¹¹ Costas Paris, MAERSK, HAPAG-LLOYD AVOID RED SEA VOYAGES AFTER ATTACKS ON SHIPS (2023), [wsj.com/articles/maersk-hapag-lloyd-rethink-red-sea-voyages-after-attacks-on-ships-f117b471](https://www.wsj.com/articles/maersk-hapag-lloyd-rethink-red-sea-voyages-after-attacks-on-ships-f117b471) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

¹² Benoit Faucon & Dov Lieber, Iranian Spy Ships Helps houthis Direct Attacks on Red Sea Vessels, Wall Street Journal, December 22, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iranian-spy-ship-helps-houthis-direct-attacks-on-red-sea-vessels-d6f7fd40> (last visited Dec 22, 2023)

¹³ Jon Garamone, Ryder Gives More Detail on How Operation Prosperity Guardian Will Work, The Department of Defense, December 21, 2023, https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3624836/ryder-gives-more-detail-on-how-operation-prosperity-guardian-will-work/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1703270770604598&usg=AOvVaw3WoXPvKUBMS5nOSYomD0K_ (last visited Dec 23, 2023)

through the Red Sea and commercial ships' detours will inevitably result in higher costs for consumers.¹⁴ Companies such as IKEA and Abercrombie & Fitch Co. have already warned of inventory delays due to the mounting security situation, forcing companies to look for alternative, more likely expensive shipping methods.¹⁵ In December 2023, container ship traffic through the region was down twenty-eight percent compared to November 2023.¹⁶ This economic burden and looming threats to our national supply chain stems directly from the Houthis and their targeting of all ships, regardless of their connection to Israel.

In the interest of combating terrorism, maintaining international order, and protecting the United States' national and economic security, we urge you to redesignate the Houthis as a FTO.¹⁷

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Brian Mast
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

¹⁴ Sharon Wrobel, Houthi attacks on Israel-linked ships in Red Sea to raise prices of far east imports (2023), [timesofisrael.com/houthi-attacks-on-israel-linked-ships-in-red-sea-to-raise-prices-of-far-east-imports/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/houthi-attacks-on-israel-linked-ships-in-red-sea-to-raise-prices-of-far-east-imports/) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).

¹⁵Elizabeth Napolitano, Ikea warns of product delays and shortages as Red Sea attacks disrupt shipments, CBS News, December 21, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ikea-product-delays-red-sea-attacks-shipping-houthis-hamas-israel/> (last visited Jan 11, 2024)

¹⁶ Georgina McCartney and Arathy Somasekhar, Oil tankers continue Red Sea movements despite Houthi attacks, Reuters, January 9, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/oil-tankers-continue-red-sea-movements-despite-houthi-attacks-2024-01-09/> (last visited Jan 11, 2024)

¹⁷ Terrorist designations and state sponsors of terrorism - United States Department of State, [state.gov/terrorist-designations-and-state-sponsors-of-terrorism/](https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designations-and-state-sponsors-of-terrorism/) (last visited Dec 18, 2023).