

Third front: On the expanding nature of the conflict in West Asia

The Hindu

Paper - II
(IR)

The missile attack on Sunday on Israel by Yemen's Houthi rebels marked the second breach of Israel's highly fortified skies by Houthi weapons in two months, pointing to the expanding nature of the conflict in West Asia. In July, an Iranian-made drone launched by the Houthis from Yemen, roughly 2,000 km south of Israel, had killed one person and wounded 10 others in Tel Aviv. In retaliation, Israel launched an air strike on Hodeida, a Houthi-controlled Red Sea port in Yemen. But that has done little in deterring the Houthis. Israeli authorities have provided conflicting accounts about the attack on Sunday (September 15, 2024). They first said the missile had landed in central Israel and caused a fire but added later that it had "fragmented mid-air". Another official said it was intercepted, breaking it into parts but not destroying it. Whatever the facts, it should remain a security concern for Israel, which has been fighting a disastrous war in Gaza for over 11 months, and a slow-burning war with Lebanon's Hezbollah in Israel's north, that the Houthis are penetrating its air space. Israel might launch retaliatory strikes on Yemen again, but the question is whether this would deter the Houthis.

The Houthis, who control parts of Yemen, have survived multiple air strikes by foreign powers ever since they captured Sana'a, Yemen's capital, in 2014. A Saudi-led coalition, which backed a rival government in Yemen, declared war against the Houthis in 2015, months after Salman ascended the throne and Mohammed bin Salman became the Defence Minister. But Saudi bombing failed to dislodge the Houthis, which eventually led to a fragile ceasefire between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed government in Yemen. When Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023 and Israel launched its retaliatory invasion, the Houthis "declared war" against Israel, primarily targeting tankers in the Red Sea. In response, a U.S.-led coalition declared an air strike campaign against the Houthis. But months of air strikes led by the U.S. and the U.K. have done little in diminishing Houthi fire power. Israel faces the same dilemma when it comes to tackling



the Houthi problem. The Houthis, who have direct Iranian support, are entrenched in Yemen. By taking up the Palestine cause, they are both serving Iran's strategic purpose and consolidating power at home. And the drone and missile attacks on Israel are an indication of what is to come in Israel's unending wars. If Israel went to Gaza to crush Hamas 11 months ago, the Jewish state is now fighting three enemy militias at the same time-Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis-with no military solution in the offing. This means that unless there is an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the security situation in West Asia will deteriorate on multiple fronts.

About Houthi

- The Houthis, officially known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), are an armed religious and political movement in Yemen.
- Houthis are Zaydi Shiites, or Zaydiyyah. Shiite Muslims are the minority community in the Islamic world, and Zaydis are a minority of Shiites, significantly different in doctrine and beliefs from the Shiites who dominate in Iran, Iraq, and elsewhere.
- They are a minority in Yemen, which is predominantly Sunni Muslim, but they are a significant one, numbering in the hundreds of thousands and making up as much as a third of the overall population.
- Its members advocate regional autonomy for Zaidis in northern Yemen.
- They have been fighting Yemen's Sunni-majority government since 2004.
- The Houthis took over the Yemeni capital Sanaa in September 2014 and seized control over much of north Yemen by 2016.
- The Houthi movement began as an effort to maintain tribal autonomy in northern Yemen and protest Western influence in the Middle East.
- Today, the Houthis seek a greater role in the Yemeni government and continue to advocate for Zaidi minority interests.
- The movement is known for its virulently anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric.
- Several of the group's leaders have been designated as terrorists by the United States.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements-

1. The main base of Houthi rebels is in Yemen.
2. Houthi rebels have the support of Iran.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: "Israel fighting three enemy militias simultaneously highlights the urgent need for a ceasefire." **Comment on this statement.**

Answer's Approach:

- ❖ In the first part of the answer, discuss the three fronts of the current Israeli conflict.
- ❖ In The second part discuss Israel's urgent need for a ceasefire with Hamas.
- ❖ Finally give a way forward.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.