



## **SAGE Intelligence Brief –**

### **ESCALATING TENSIONS IN THE BAB EL MANDEB**

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#### **Executive Summary:**

The potential for military strikes by Washington and London against the Houthi rebels in Yemen signify a critical juncture in the ongoing conflict. The primary motivation behind these strikes lies in mitigating the economic repercussions of re-routing international shipping, which has led to increased travel time and higher trade costs. While naval and air strikes are anticipated, a comprehensive land war component is missing, hindering the complete degradation of Houthi capabilities. Saudi Arabia and Egypt emerge as potential interveners, each facing distinct challenges, with Egypt's involvement particularly contingent on political, economic, and public sentiment factors.

#### **Military Dynamics:**

The proposed strikes aim at crippling Houthi arms infrastructure and command centres, gradually escalating if harassment of commercial shipping persists. However, the absence of a ground component limits the effectiveness of these measures, allowing Houthi attacks to potentially endure.

#### **Regional Players:**

Saudi Arabia, with a shared border, is logistically well-positioned for intervention. However, strained relations between the Biden administration and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) diminish the likelihood of Saudi involvement. Egypt, heavily reliant on transit fees from the Suez Canal, has a significant economic stake in stabilizing the region. Yet, political considerations, tied to public support for Palestine and potential domestic unrest, may impede a substantial intervention.

#### **Political Considerations:**

The Israeli-Hamas conflict has complicated regional responses, with Houthi attacks framed in solidarity with Palestine. Egypt's intervention is complicated by public sentiment favouring Palestine, posing a risk of widespread disquiet and political instability. Economic inducements may be necessary to sway Egypt's stance.

**Arab Intervention Dilemma:**

Potential Arab involvement risks being perceived as supporting Israel's actions against Hamas, generating discontent on the Arab street. This complicates decision-making in both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, raising concerns about unforeseen consequences and domestic backlash.

**Conclusion:**

The strategic landscape in the Bab El Mandeb demands a nuanced approach. While military strikes may address immediate concerns, a comprehensive strategy necessitates addressing political, economic, and regional sensitivities. Without a ground component and considering the intricate web of regional dynamics, a sustained solution to the Houthi threat remains elusive. The involvement of key Arab states hinges on navigating complex geopolitical considerations, presenting a formidable challenge for international policymakers.

*This analysis is subject to evolving developments in the region, and further updates may be warranted.*

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**About SAGE International:**

Led by South Australian, John Bruni, SAGE is the only non-partisan, independent geopolitical think-tank & consultancy in Adelaide.

We provide research and analysis of international crises, power dynamics & security policy.

SAGE also trains and mentors university students in thinking about international relations, defence and security issues.

SAGE is partnered with Trends Research & Advisory in Abu Dhabi UAE, the International Development and Security Cooperation (IDSC) in Manila, the Philippines, AsiaPower Watch in Paris, France and the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

We are also recognised by the 'On Think Tanks' global directory.