

Trump Says the U.S. Will Cease Strikes on Houthi Militants

It was unclear whether the Houthis were going to stop impeding international shipping, which was the objective of the American bombing campaign.

**By Zolan Kanno-Youngs and Vivian Nereim
New York Times**

The United States and Houthis in Yemen reached a deal to halt American airstrikes against the group after the Iranian-backed militants agreed to cease attacks against American vessels in the Red Sea, President Trump and Omani mediators said Tuesday.

Mr. Trump broke the news of the truce during an unrelated Oval Office meeting with Canada's prime minister, surprising even his own Pentagon officials.

"They just don't want to fight," Mr. Trump said. "And we will honor that and we will stop the bombings. They have capitulated, but more importantly, we will take their word. They say they will not be blowing up ships anymore."

But despite his claim of success, it remained unclear whether the United States had achieved its objective of stopping the Houthis from impeding international shipping after a costly seven-week bombing campaign.

The Houthis themselves stopped short of declaring a full cease-fire, saying that they would continue to fight Israel. And Houthi officials and supporters swiftly portrayed the deal as a major victory for the militia and a failure for Mr. Trump, spreading a social media hashtag that read "Yemen defeats America."

For more than a year, the Houthis have been [firing projectiles and launching drones](#) at commercial and military ships in the Red Sea in what the militia group has described as a show of solidarity with Gaza residents and with Hamas, the militant group controlling the Palestinian territory.

In mid-March, the United States began striking hundreds of targets to try to reopen international shipping lanes. The campaign [has cost well over \\$1 billion](#), congressional officials said they learned in closed-door briefings with Pentagon officials last month. The rate of munitions used in the campaign has [caused concern](#) among some U.S. military strategists, who are worried it could undermine readiness for a potential conflict with China.

After Mr. Trump unexpectedly broke the news of the deal between the Houthis and the United States, Oman's foreign minister, Badr Albusaidi, said his country had mediated the agreement.

"In the future, neither side will target the other, including American vessels, in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait, ensuring freedom of navigation and the smooth flow of international commercial shipping," he said in a statement on social media.

For his part, Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a senior Houthi politician, said that if the United States halted its attacks on Yemen, the Houthis would halt their attacks on a smaller group: "American military fleets and interests."

However, Mr. Al-Bukhaiti said the Houthis would continue military operations until Israel lifted its siege on Gaza, "no matter the sacrifices, even if we have to fight until Judgment Day."

His statement left unclear whether the Houthis would stop attacking other vessels in the crucial shipping lane. The Houthis have said that they were targeting only ships with links to Israel or the United States, but the militia has in the past targeted vessels with no obvious link to either. In an interview with The New York Times on Tuesday, Mr. Al-Bukhaiti did not answer specific questions as to whether the group would continue to attack Israeli-linked ships.

Mahdi al-Mashat, another senior Houthi official, made clear the group intended to retaliate against Israel for its bombing of the main international airport in Yemen on Tuesday. Mr. al-Mashat said the response from the Houthis would be "earth-shattering, painful, and beyond the capability of the Israeli and American enemy to bear."

Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a senior member of the group, also described Mr. Trump's announcement as a "victory" for the Houthis, implying in a social media post that the agreement meant that the United States was no longer supporting Israel's battle against the Houthis.

The U.S. Central Command, responsible for operations against the Houthis, referred questions about the agreement to the White House. The White House declined to elaborate on Mr. Trump's remarks or respond to inquiries about what the administration would do if the Houthis continued strikes against Israeli vessels.

Mr. Trump, who is prone to make offhand remarks that can upend foreign policy, appeared to catch his own Defense Department off guard. Three Pentagon officials said Tuesday afternoon that the military had yet to receive word from the White House to end its offensive operations against the Houthis. The officials were scrambling to figure out how Mr. Trump's announcement had changed military policy.

The new U.S. truce with the Iranian-backed militants comes as American officials are working to negotiate a deal to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions, and the agreement with the Houthis could play a role in those broader discussions.

Two Iranian officials said on Tuesday that Iran used its influence with the Houthis as part of Oman's effort to broker a cease-fire and get them to stop firing on U.S. ships. The officials, one in the foreign ministry and one with the Revolutionary Guards, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

The Houthis receive weapons and funding from Iran, and are part of a network of what is regionally known as Iran's axis of resistance. A recent social media post by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth threatened action on Iran over Houthi attacks on American ships.

For the past few weeks, Iranian officials have publicly distanced themselves from the Houthis, saying Iran has no control over the group and that their actions are a response to the war in Gaza. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said in mid-March that "Houthis act independently based on their own interests and personal views," and denied Iran had any proxy militia in the region.

Ahmad Zeidabadi, a prominent reformist analyst, wrote on social media that the cease-fire news between the United States and Houthis was "the best news for him" and the worst news for hard-liners in Iran who support proxy militias in the region.

Still, national security experts cast doubt that an agreement would lead to a long-term cessation of attacks in the Red Sea. Mr. Trump's announcement came just hours after the Houthis released a statement that said it was fighting a "holy war in aid of the wronged Palestinian people in Gaza" and confronting an "Israeli-American-British" enemy.

The Houthis have described their attacks as an attempt to pressure Israel into increasing the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza, where more than two million Palestinians have struggled to obtain food and water — a blockade that has only deepened recently.

Palestinians in Gaza have been under siege by Israel since Hamas carried out a deadly attack in southern Israel in October 2023 and took hostages. Israeli and Houthi forces have also conducted strikes against each other.

"I would anticipate the Houthis will continue to look to strike Israel, as well as what the group calls 'Israeli-linked' ships in the Red Sea," said Gregory Johnsen, a former member of the U.N. Security Council's Panel of Experts on Yemen. "If that happens, what does the U.S. do: restart the strikes or let Israel deal with the Houthis?"

He also expressed skepticism that the commercial shipping industry would return to the Red Sea en masse, given that the Houthis "haven't been defeated or degraded to the point that they can't carry out these attacks."

"They've only promised not to, and whether or not the shipping industry is willing to take the Houthis word for it remains to be seen," he said.