

## **The United States and Escalation of Middle East Conflicts: A Brief**

On February 6, 2024, the UK and the US jointly launched a fresh bout of airstrikes targeting Houthis in Yemen. Earlier, six Kurdish fighters were killed in a drone attack that hit the training ground at al-Omar base in Syria. The US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have accused “Syrian regime-backed mercenaries” of carrying out the attack. No casualties were reported among US troops.<sup>1</sup>

On February 6, 2024, US Secretary of State Blinken was in Cairo for a meeting with Egyptian leaders. This was Blinken’s fifth visit to the region since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, hoping to press ahead with a potential cease-fire deal and postwar planning. He is also seeking progress on the potential normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and on preventing an escalation of regional fighting. But on all fronts, he faces major challenges: Hamas and Israel are publicly at odds over key elements of a potential truce.

Israel has dismissed US calls for a path to a Palestinian state, and Iran’s militant allies in the region have shown little sign of being deterred by US strikes.

The US has vowed to take more retaliatory action targeting Iran-backed militants in the Middle East following the death of three US troops in Jordan.

The US military launched its offensive in Iraq and Syria over the weekend in retaliation against the attacks on its bases. It separately targeted the Houthis in Yemen amid the ongoing crisis in the Red Sea. There will be more action taken to respond to the death of the three US service members on January 28, 2024.<sup>2</sup>

Blinken is later expected to visit Israel as well as Qatar. a task made exponentially more difficult by stepped-up attacks by Iran-backed militias in the region and increasingly severe U.S. military responses in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Red Sea that have intensified since last week. Blinken's visit also comes amid growing concerns in Egypt about Israel's stated intentions to expand the combat in Gaza to areas on the Egyptian border that are crammed with displaced Palestinians.

Israel's defense minister has said Israel's offensive will eventually reach the town of Rafah, on the Egyptian border, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have sought refuge and are now living in increasingly miserable conditions.

U.N. humanitarian monitors said on February 6, 2024, that Israeli evacuation orders now cover two-thirds of Gaza's territory, driving thousands more people every day toward the border areas. Egypt has warned that an Israeli deployment along the border would threaten the peace treaty the two countries signed over four decades ago. Egypt fears an expansion of combat to the Rafah area could push terrified Palestinian civilians across the border, a scenario Egypt has said it is determined to prevent.<sup>3</sup>

Blinken, who was meeting on February 6, 2024, with Egyptian President el-Sissi, has said repeatedly that Palestinians must not be forced out of Gaza.

Egypt along with Qatar have been trying to mediate an agreement between Israel and Hamas that would lead to the release of more hostages in return for a several-week-long pause in Israeli military operations. The outlines of such a deal were worked out by intelligence chiefs

from the US, Egypt, Qatar, and Israel late last month and have been presented to Hamas, which has not yet formally responded.

Blinken is hoping to get an update on Hamas' response to the proposal in both Cairo and Doha. He will be later in Doha on February 6, 2024, and then will travel to Israel to brief Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 7, 2024, about what he heard from the Arab leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier, Blinken met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on February 5, 2024, in Riyadh. The meeting comes during continued strikes by both Iranian-backed proxy groups and US forces.<sup>5</sup>

Blinken and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed regional coordination to achieve an enduring end to the crisis in Gaza. They also spoke of the urgent need to reduce regional tensions, given a surge in attacks across the region that is triggered by counterattacks by the US and its partners.

The talks came as the US military confirmed that it struck explosive-laden drone boats.<sup>6</sup>

Saudi Arabia is still interested in normalizing relations with Israel in a potentially historic deal, but only if there is a credible plan to create a Palestinian state.

Blinken underscored the importance of addressing humanitarian needs in Gaza and preventing the further spread of the conflict," and he and the crown prince discussed the importance of building a more integrated and prosperous region.

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until Israel crushes Hamas' military and governing abilities and wins the return of the 100-plus hostages still held by the militant group. Hamas and other militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in the attack and abducted around 250. More than 100 captives, mostly women and children, were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Earlier on February 5, 2024, Netanyahu said Israel had defeated 18 of Hamas' 24 battalions, without providing evidence. "We are on the way to absolute victory, and I want to tell you that we are committed to it, and we will not give it up."<sup>7</sup>

Earlier, on February 4, 2024 the US forces carried out a new strike on Houthi militants in Yemen, the third straight day that Western allies targeted Iranian-backed armed groups.<sup>8</sup> President Biden has ordered further retaliation for the killings of 3 U.S. soldiers at the Tower 22 base in Jordan on January 28.<sup>9</sup> Iran condemned the wave of strikes carried out by the US in Yemen, as well as against Iran's powerful military wing and affiliated militias in Syria. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said on February 4, 2024, after the attacks on Yemen that the two countries were "stoking chaos, disorder, insecurity and instability" across the region.<sup>10</sup>

Earlier on February 3, the US and Britain launched strikes against 36 Houthi targets in Yemen. Targets included missiles and launchers, air defense systems, radars, and weapons storage facilities.

The U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said these strikes are intended to disrupt further and degrade the capabilities of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia to conduct their reckless and destabilizing attacks against US and international vessels lawfully transiting the Red Sea.

The US and British militaries conducted the strikes with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. The Houthis, a militant group that seized control of much of Yemen in 2014, has for months launched attacks on civilian and military vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden using an array of missiles, one-way attack drones, and remotely piloted vessels packed with explosives. Like the militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis have cast their actions as a protest of Israeli military action on the Gaza Strip and US support for it. Since January 12, 2024, the US forces have conducted numerous strikes, typically saying that they have destroyed missiles that were prepared to be fired.<sup>11</sup>

The strikes were meant to disable further Iran-backed groups that have attacked US and international interests in response to the Israel-Hamas war. The strikes marked the third time the US and Britain had conducted a large, joint operation to strike Houthi launchers, radar sites, and drones. But the Houthis have made it clear that they have no intention of scaling back their assault.<sup>12</sup>

Much earlier, on February 2, 2024, the US military shot down seven drones launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen into the Red Sea; the US forces also shot down a drone fired in the Gulf of Aden and US forces took out four more drones that were prepared to launch. The strike destroyed six anti-ship cruise missiles.

The US warned that its response after the Jordan base attack would not be limited to one night, one target, or one group. While there has been no suggestion the Houthis were solely responsible, they have been one of the prime US adversaries since Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023, killing more than 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages.<sup>13</sup>

The Houthis have been conducting almost daily missile or drone attacks against commercial and military ships transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and they have made clear that they have no intention of scaling back despite pressure from the American and British campaign.

The Biden administration has indicated that this is not the last of its strikes. The US has blamed the Jordan attack on the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias. Iran has tried to distance itself from the drone strike, saying the militias act independently of its direction.

The Pentagon said the strikes targeted sites associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defense, radars, and helicopters. The British military said it struck a ground control station west of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, which has been used to control Houthi drones that have launched against vessels in the Red Sea.

The strikes in Yemen are meant to underscore the broader message to Iran that Washington holds Tehran responsible for arming, funding, and training the array of militias – from Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen – who are behind attacks across the Middle East against US and international interests.

The Houthis' attacks have led shipping companies to reroute their vessels from the Red Sea, sending them around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope – a much longer, costlier, and less efficient passage. The threats also have led the US and its allies to set up a joint mission where warships from participating nations provide a protective umbrella of air defense for ships as they travel the critical waterway that runs from the Suez Canal down to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

During normal operations, about 400 commercial vessels transit the southern Red Sea at any given time.<sup>14</sup>

It was the latest sign of spreading conflict in the Middle East since war erupted between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023.

The Biden administration accuses Iran-backed militias of attacking US troops at bases in Iraq, Syria and Jordan, Yemen's Iran-linked Houthis have been regularly targeting commercial ships and warships in the Red Sea.

The Houthis, who control the most populous parts of Yemen, say their attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians as Israel strikes Gaza. However, the US and its allies characterize them as indiscriminate and a menace to global trade.

Faced with mounting Red Sea violence, major shipping lines have abandoned the critical trade route for longer routes around Africa. This has increased costs, feeding worries about global inflation while sapping Egypt of crucial foreign revenue from shippers sailing the Suez Canal to or from the Red Sea.

The US has conducted more than a dozen strikes against Houthi targets in the past several weeks, but these have failed to stop attacks by the group.<sup>15</sup>

Biden's emerging strategy on Yemen aims to weaken the Houthi militants but stops well short of trying to defeat the group or directly address Iran, the Houthis' main sponsor, experts say.

The strategy blends limited military strikes and sanctions and appears aimed at punishing the Houthis while limiting the risk of a wider Middle East conflict.<sup>16</sup>

Much earlier, on February 2, 2024, the US launched airstrikes in Iraq and Syria against more than eighty-five targets linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated militias, killing 40 people. More U.S. military operations are expected in the coming days.

The strikes intensified a conflict that has spread into the region since war erupted between Israel and Hamas. Earlier on February 4, 2024, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani had described the US strikes on Syria and Iraq as a "strategic mistake" that would only increase "tension and instability in the region."<sup>17</sup> Earlier on February 2, 2024, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said his country would not start a war. Still, it will "respond strongly" to anyone who bullies it. Hamas said Washington was pouring "oil on the fire."<sup>18</sup> President Biden blamed the attack on groups supported by Iran and had promised retaliation, placing further strain between the US and Iran, two longtime adversaries. The strikes in Iraq and Syria appeared calibrated to head off a wider escalation in the region, targeting Iran's proxies but doing little if any damage to Tehran's assets in the region.<sup>19</sup> US troops have been attacked over 160 times in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan since Oct. 7, usually with a mix of rockets and one-way attack drones, prompting the US to mount several retaliatory attacks even before the latest strikes. Iranian advisers assist armed groups in both Iraq, where the US has around 2,500 troops, and Syria, where it has 900.<sup>20</sup>

Syria and Iraq condemned US strikes on Iran-backed militias in their countries, saying such attacks only impede the fight against Islamic State terrorists and threaten to drag the region even deeper into instability.

The targets were described as command-and-control operations, intelligence centers weapons facilities, and bunkers used by the Quds Force part of Iran's IRGC and affiliated militias. The Quds Force oversees Iran's proxies around the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> In the wake of the strikes on February 2, 2024, in Iraq and Syria, Hussein al-Mosawi, spokesperson for Harakat al-Nujaba, one of the main Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, said the US "must understand that every action elicits a reaction". But later he also struck a more conciliatory tone. "We do not wish to escalate or widen regional tensions," he said.

Meanwhile, Iraq has attempted to rein in the militias, while also condemning US retaliatory strikes as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and calling for an exit of the 2,500 US troops who are in Iraq as part of an international coalition to fight Islamic State. In January, Iraqi and US military officials launched formal talks to wind down the coalition's presence, a process that is likely to take years.

The question being asked now is whether Iran will respond or de-escalate. David E. Sanger and Farnaz Fassihi in their article "American officials say there were no back-channel discussions with Tehran" published in the New York Times, on February 3, 2024, said that:<sup>22</sup>

The betting in Washington and among its allies is that the Iranians would choose the latter course, seeing no benefit in getting into a shooting war with a far larger power, with all the risks that implies. But it is not yet clear whether the varied proxy forces that have conducted scores of attacks on American bases and ships — who rely on Iran for money, arms, and intelligence — will conclude that their interests, too, are served by backing off. In the aftermath of the strike against Iranian forces and the militias they support, American officials insisted there was no back-channel discussion with Tehran, no quiet agreement that the U.S. would avoid high-value targets like missile sites, drone-launching facilities, ammunition stores, and command-and-control complexes, in response to an attack last Sunday that took the lives of American soldiers. "There's been no communications with Iran since the attack that killed our three soldiers in Jordan," John Kirby, a spokesperson for the National Security Council, told reporters in a call on Friday night after the retaliatory strikes were completed. But even without direct conversation, there has been plenty of signaling, in both directions. Biden is engaged in a military, diplomatic, and election-year gamble that he can first restore some semblance of deterrence in the region, then help orchestrate a "pause" or cease-fire in Gaza to allow for hostage exchanges with Israel, and then, in the biggest challenge of all, try to reshape the dynamics of the region. For their part, the Iranians have been broadcasting in public that they want to take down the temperature — on the attacks, even on their quickly advancing nuclear program — even if their ultimate objective, is to drive the United States out of the region once and for all, remains unchanged. Their first response to the military strikes on Saturday morning was notably mild.

President Biden's action was expected as he is under pressure in an election campaign where Donald J. Trump, his opponent, calls him weak.<sup>23</sup>

According to experts, Iran projects its military power through dozens of armed groups across the Middle East, but it does not fully control their actions. These groups have unstable relationships with Iran, but all share its desire for the US military to leave the region, and for Israel's power to

be reduced. Iranian rhetoric, echoed by its allied groups, often goes further, calling for the elimination of the Israeli state.

Like Iran, most of the allied groups follow the Shiite branch of Islam. The exception is Hamas, whose members are Sunni Muslims.

Iran has provided weapons, training, financing, and other support to the groups, particularly to those in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, according to evidence obtained through weapons seizures, after-action forensics, foreign asset tracking, and intelligence gathering. Some training is outsourced to Hezbollah in Lebanon, according to U.S. and international experts.

More recently, Iran has also been enabling the militias to obtain some weapons parts on their own and to manufacture or retrofit some weapons themselves, according to officials in the Middle East and the US. In addition, most of the groups, like Hamas, have extensive money-making enterprises, which include both legal activities like construction and illegal ventures like kidnapping and drug smuggling.

Despite its support for the militias, Iran does not necessarily control where and when they attack Western and Israeli targets, according to experts. It does influence the groups and at least in some cases seems able to halt strikes.

After Iraq-based militants struck the US base in Jordan on January 28, the group the Pentagon suggested was responsible, Kata'ib Hezbollah, affiliated to the IRGC, announced it was temporarily standing down at the behest of Iran and the Iraqi government.

Each militia, however, also has its agenda, depending on its home country.

The Houthi movement is now showing strength to its domestic audience by taking on major powers, attacking shipping headed to and from the Suez Canal, and drawing retaliatory strikes from the US and its allies.

That has allowed it to claim the mantle of solidarity with Palestinians and aligns the group with Iran's goal of challenging Israel and its chief ally, the US.

By contrast, Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has the longest-standing ties to Iran, is part of the Lebanese government. Its decisions about when and how much to attack Israel consider the risks of Israeli reprisals on Lebanese civilians. A 2020 US Department of State report estimated that Iran's support for Hezbollah was \$700 million annually at that time. Iran provides various weapons to it.

Iran has also been providing smaller direct cash subsidies to its proxies in recent years, in part, experts say, because it is financially squeezed by US and international sanctions.

According to a November 2023 report from the United Nations, in addition to direct aid, some of the groups in Iran also provide them in-kind funding like oil, which can be sold, or, as in the case of the Houthis, thousands of AK-47s that can also be put on the market.

Most importantly, though the e Houthis are supported by Iran they retain some independence of operation. Much the same could be said of other groups.

Iran tends to portray what it calls the “Axis of Resistance” as being under its leadership and control, and part of its regional strategy. But when addressing Western audiences, Iran often contends that while the groups share similar views, Iran is not directing them.<sup>24</sup>

The earlier retaliatory US airstrikes on Iranian-backed militias in Syria and Iraq were part of an effort to stop attacks on American forces in the Middle East without provoking Iran into direct conflict.

Most importantly, the U.S. strikes cannot replace a Gaza ceasefire in calming the tensions in the Middle East region. Without a cease-fire in Gaza, the attacks will continue.<sup>25</sup>

Much earlier, the Possible fallout from the strikes could be disastrous for the US as warned by the military spokesperson for the Iraqi prime minister, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

Iran had claimed the attacks would only hasten the withdrawal of US troops from both countries and insisted that no IRGC personnel had been present in the areas struck by US forces.

Iran’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Nasser Kanaani, said it was “an adventurous action and a strategic mistake that will result in increased tension and instability in the region,” adding that the attacks would only lead to the US government becoming “more engaged” in the region than it was before.

The US decision to strike inside Iraq relayed to the Iraqi government in advance, was always an elevated risk since political pressure had been mounting in the Iraqi parliament for months to conclude negotiations that ended with an agreement for US troops to withdraw.

Initial responses suggested that political pressure on the US would now build, especially if the death toll of sixteen inside Iraq started to rise. The low death toll for the size of the attack reflects the warnings the militias received that an attack was imminent.

There had been no direct contact between the US and Iran before the attacks, but messages had been sent via third parties that a US attack on Iranian soil would be viewed differently from attacks on Iraq and Syria. The Iranian-backed groups inside Iraq have coalesced into a loose coalition termed Islamic Resistance in Iraq and contain at least six different militias.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza continues unabated.

International mediators are making a full-court press to seal a proposed truce deal thrashed out last week in Paris. But a top Hamas official in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, said on February 3, 2024, that the proposed framework was missing some details.

The war has sent regional tensions soaring, with a surge in attacks by resistance groups in solidarity with Gaza triggering counterattacks by key Israel ally the US.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army claimed on February 3, 2024, that it had struck more than 3,400 Hezbollah targets across southern Lebanon since the start of the war, as well as more than 50 targets linked to Hamas allies in Syria.<sup>27</sup>

Iraq on February 3, 2024, hinted at a desire to de-escalate tensions in the Middle East after retaliatory strikes launched by the US.

Hussein al-Mosawi, spokesperson for Harakat al-Nujaba, one of the main Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, had struck a more conciliatory tone, saying that “we do not wish to escalate or widen regional tensions.”

Mossawi said the targeted sites in Iraq were mainly “devoid of fighters and military personnel at the time of the attack.” Suggesting there was not too much damage could allow him to justify the lack of a strong response.

Iraqi spokesperson al-Awadi condemned the strikes as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty, particularly since some of them targeted facilities of the Population Mobilization Forces (PMF). The PMF, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias, was officially brought under the umbrella of the Iraqi armed forces after it joined the fight against the Islamic State in 2014, but in practice, it continues to operate outside state control.<sup>28</sup>

The US does not want any escalation of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East region. But any grand bargain between Israel and its enemies appears unlikely as the war still rages in Gaza. The war has isolated Israel globally and with it also the US, its principal support. Meanwhile, the Palestinian death toll from four months of war has reached 27,585, mostly women and children.<sup>29</sup> A representative of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA has called Rafah “a pressure cooker of despair”.<sup>30</sup>

The Gaza war has leveled vast swaths of the tiny enclave and starvation. humanitarian monitors said on February 6, 2024, that Israel’s evacuation orders in the Gaza Strip now cover two-thirds of the territory or 95 square miles. The affected area was home to 1.78 million Palestinians, or 77% of Gaza’s population, before Hamas’ Oct. 7 cross-border raid that ignited the war.<sup>31</sup>

Today, the Palestinian cause has the support of Muslims across the world and much of the global South. There is increasing support for Palestine among Western nations also. For Iran, the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the Islamic Republic’s very foundation and ideology dating back to the 1979 Islamic revolution. Iran’s rhetoric against both Israel and the US has been a constant since the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Even today the support for Palestinian independence is very pronounced in Iran. It has supported various militia groups against Israel. Much earlier, Iranian strikes in Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria were all meant primarily for domestic political compulsions to prove that the regime was strong enough to deter perceived enemies. The very recent killing of Brigadier General Sayyed Razi Mousavi was in Syria and the bombings which devastated a memorial for General Qassim Suleimani, which killed one hundred people, forced the regime to take revenge. These Iranian strikes were a display of Iran’s military power and resolve to not only Israel, the USA, and its allies but also Iran’s regional proxies such as the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and militias in Syria and Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen. Thus, the Iranian strikes must be understood in the greater context of the Middle East situation and the tensions that spring forth from the Gaza-Israel war. Undoubtedly, Iran and Pakistan want friendly relations and continue with their carefully handled border situations. Meanwhile, Iran said that regional armed groups aligned with it respond to US aggressors at their discretion only.

Most importantly, experts have very correctly cautioned that any US strikes against Iran itself could force it to respond forcefully, pulling the US into another major Middle East war.<sup>32</sup>



Given the domestic politics of the November elections, the Biden administration will surely respond to the Jordanian attack. Also, any response by the US will aggravate the situation which may lead to even wider conflict in the Middle East.

The awaited American response will pressure Iran to react again sooner rather than later. Given Iran's enmity with both Israel and the US, it will have to somehow save face and act against them somehow, though not directly but in an indirect manner. Iranian support for its regional proxies will continue unabated. Iran will never directly confront either the US or Israel as its leadership is wise enough to avoid its collapse in that.

Given the tense situation in the Middle East region and the escalations in the conflicts, there are bound to be some miscalculations, accidents, and even unintended consequences as before in the history of wars. If Iran is further provoked it will surely fight back. What is likely to happen next? Iran will retaliate to the US attacks through its proxies in the region. The target would be the US forces in the region. Some 40,000 US troops are stationed across the Middle East, mostly in countries with close ties to it.

There are currently about 900 U.S. troops stationed in Syria, where they support Kurdish forces and work to enforce U.S. sanctions against Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based group backed by Iran.

Some of those troops are deployed in southeastern Syria, which is served by a border outpost in Jordan.<sup>33</sup>

At an air base in Azraq, Jordan, the US has about 2,000 troops, Special Operations forces, and military trainers. There are about 13,500 US forces based in Kuwait, and thousands more in countries including Bahrain, which hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. Qatar has an air base used by US Central Command.<sup>34</sup> These American troops would be the most likely targets.

Iran will never go to war against the US and will only retaliate through its proxies in the region. Neither will the US go to war with Iran itself. It will only hit the many Iranian proxies in the region. But this cannot stabilize the region at all. If the Biden administration is serious about calming down the tensions in the Middle East, then it should immediately pressure Israel for a two-month ceasefire, as is being talked about in the media. Only the US can force Israel to back down now. Further US attacks against Iranian-backed militias will only exasperate the tensions thereby causing accidents and will only cause a further spiral in the conflicts. More than military muscle, the US needs enlightened diplomacy to save the region from further conflict and instability.

The earlier Iranian strikes in the region, the very recent January 28 Jordan base strike killing American soldiers, and the later US strikes in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen are cause for concern. These military strikes now imply that greater conflict in the Middle East emanating from the Israel-Gaza war cannot be contained and can spill out eventually in unforeseen circumstances. Although all countries in the region and beyond are trying to avert a regional escalation leading to a larger war, complex regional linkages will lead to further conflict in various manners. The Middle East region will see more instability in the future. The only way to stabilize the region is by ending the Israel-Gaza war and swiftly moving on the path of the universally agreed two-state solution leading to an independent Palestine. However, there is no evidence that such a path is achievable. Given the reluctance of both Israel and the US, a two-state solution is not happening at all. Thus, the decades-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict will persist causing the entire Middle East region to be further embroiled in persistent conflict, turmoil, and instability to the detriment of world peace.

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Butler, Graig Graziosi, and Alisha Rahaman Sarkar, British-owned ship hit by missile in Red Sea as US destroys Houthi drones - live updates, Independent, February 6, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Alisha Rahaman Sarkar, "Blinken returns to Mideast in push for hostage deal and postwar plan for Gaza", [https://news.yahoo.com/plans-place-us-strikes-against-172919437.html?fr=sycsrp\\_catchall](https://news.yahoo.com/plans-place-us-strikes-against-172919437.html?fr=sycsrp_catchall).

<sup>3</sup> MATTHEW LEE, WAFAA SHURAF A and SAMY MAGDY, Blinken seeks progress on Gaza cease-fire-for-hostages deal in meetings with Egyptian mediators, AP, February 6, 2024, <https://news.yahoo.com/blinken-seeks-progress-gaza-cease-081115164.html>

<sup>4</sup> MATTHEW LEE, WAFAA SHURAF A and SAMY MAGDY, Blinken seeks progress on Gaza cease-fire-for-hostages deal in meetings with Egyptian mediators, AP, February 6, 2024, <https://news.yahoo.com/blinken-seeks-progress-gaza-cease-081115164.html>

<sup>5</sup> John Hudson and Mikhail Klimentov, Blinken meets with Saudi crown prince amid surge in regional violence, WP, February 6, 2024

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/06/israel-hamas-war-news-gaza-palestine/>

<sup>6</sup> US Secretary of state heads to Egypt for talks, The Guardian, February 6, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2024/feb/06/middle-east-crisis-live-updates-latest-rafah-strikes-israel-gaza-hamas-war-end-blinden-heads-egypt-unrwa-funding-hostage-deal-ceasefire>

<sup>7</sup> MATTHEW LEE, WAFAA SHURAF A and SAMY MAGDY Blinken seeks progress on Gaza cease-fire-for-hostages deal in meetings with Egyptian mediators, AP, February 6, 2024, <https://news.yahoo.com/blinken-seeks-progress-gaza-cease-081115164.html>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Says It Hit a Houthi Missile That Threatened Red Sea Ships, New York Times, February 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/02/04/world/us-strikes-israel-hamas-news>

<sup>9</sup> Biden has ordered further retaliation to killings of U.S. soldiers, officials say., New York Times, February 4, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/02/04/world/us-strikes-israel-hamas-news#biden-has-ordered-more-responses-to-killings-of-us-soldiers-officials>

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Hassan, "Iran lambastes U.S. after strikes in Yemen, Iraq, Syria", Washington post, February 4, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/04/israel-hamas-war-news-gaza-palestine/>

<sup>11</sup> Dan Lamothe, Alex Horton, Missy Ryan and Dan Rosenzweig-Ziff, "U.S. and British forces hit air defenses, missiles and radars in Yemen, Pentagon says", Washington post, February 3, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/03/israel-hamas-war-news-gaza-palestine/>; Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, "US, Britain wage strikes against Iran-linked Houthis in Yemen, Reuters, February 3, 2024", <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-carrying-out-new-strikes-yemen-us-officials-say-2024-02-03/>;

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New York Times, February 3, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/02/03/world/us-strikes-israel-hamas-news>

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<sup>12</sup> US and UK hit 30 Houthi targets to further weaken Iran-backed groups.

Joint operation to further disable militias follows attacks on US and international interests amid war in Gaza, Associated Press, February 4, 2024, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/03/us-uk-airstrikes-houthis-yemen>

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<sup>14</sup> US and UK hit 30 Houthi targets to further weaken Iran-backed groups.

A joint operation to further disable militias follows attacks on US and international interests amid the war in Gaza.

Associated Press, February 4, 2024, 2024

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/03/us-uk-airstrikes-houthis-yemen>

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