

YEMEN'S HOUTHIS REBELS CRITICISE U.S.-LED TASK FORCE IN RED SEA

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Yemen's Houthis criticised a new U.S.-led task force that will patrol the Red Sea following a series of attacks by the Iran-backed rebels in a waterway that's essential to global trade.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesman, said late Friday that the U.S. move in the Red Sea, which comes amid a ceasefire in the country's civil war, contradicts Washington's claim of supporting the UN-brokered truce.

The task force "enshrines the aggression and blockade on Yemen," he claimed on his Telegram social media account.

Abdul-Salam apparently referred to a Saudi-led coalition the rebels have been fighting for years. The coalition, which until recently was backed by the U.S., imposes an air and sea blockade on Houthi-held areas.

Iran is the main supporter of the Houthis who seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. The Saudi-led coalition entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in March 2015. Years of inconclusive fighting has pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine.

Another Houthi leader, Daifallah al-Shami, also criticised the U.S.-led task force, saying it sends negative signals.

The new task force of two to eight ships aims to target those smuggling coal, drugs, weapons and people in the Red Sea, according to Vice Adm. Brad Cooper.

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