



UNGA Follow Up and FM's Op-Ed

3 messages

Tue, Sep 29, 2026 at 1:27 PM

Hello ,

I hope your UNGA has gone well and things are wrapping up. I wanted to reach out and say thank you again for attending the Yemen Roundtable last week on the sidelines of UNGA. The delegation was very appreciative of the turnout and level of conversation we achieved in such a short time.

Also in case you missed it, I wanted to include [FM Afrah Abdulaziz Al-Zouba's recent Op-Ed published in the Telegraph today](#). She argues that Houthi cooperation with militant groups across the Red Sea poses a growing threat to global shipping through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait effectively labelling this group "**The Red Sea Axis.**" She asks governments to treat these groups as a connected network and calls for coordinated sanctions, intelligence sharing and support for Yemeni forces.

Best,



A new terrorist axis has arisen, covering both sides of the Red Sea.pdf
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Date: [Redacted] er 2026 at 13:28
To: [Redacted]
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Tue, Sep 29, 2026 at 3:38 PM

Hey Tom,

It was great meeting you as well. I'm happy to help facilitate either of those, I will update the Embassy (again) with your interest in an interview or a background briefing and get back to you shortly.

Also if you are ever near the Press Club in DC, I'd be happy to take you for a drink after work someday, just let me know.

Best,

William

[Redacted]

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Afrah Abdulaziz Al-Zouba

A new terrorist axis has arisen, covering both sides of the Red Sea

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Houthi fighters on the Bab al-Mandeb Strait in Dhubab, Yemen Credit: Houthi Military Media Center/EPA/Shutterstock



Afrah Abdulaziz Al-Zouba

Show biography

Published 29 September 2026 2:45pm BST

Yemeni government forces have pulled back from Mayyun Island, at the narrowest point of the Bab al-Mandeb strait, the southern entrance to the Red Sea. Much of the world's trade moves through the Bab al-Mandeb. The

takeover of Mayyun by the Houthis was part of a strategy, which has been unfolding for years, and the forces behind it may matter more than the territory itself.

Iran's network of proxies and terror groups has been significantly degraded in recent times. But one part of that system was not broken. It was promoted. In the early days, the Houthis relied on Tehran. They are now part of a terrorist network – call it the Red Sea Axis – which will control both sides of the Bab-al-Mandeb. This should be understood before anyone decides what to do next.

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The Red Sea Axis straddles the strait, reaching into the Horn of Africa. It is made up of different groups which outsiders would not expect to work with one another, dependent on no single sponsor, having abandoned the ideologies that once limited membership. In this respect it resembles al-Qaeda, which has a documented history of cooperation with Iran despite deep sectarian and ideological differences.

The evidence for the Axis was never speculative. The reports of the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen reveal Houthi cooperation with al-Shabaab in Africa far past smuggling. It includes weapons transfers, shared operations, Houthi engineers sent to Somalia to teach drone modification, al-Shabaab fighters trained in Houthi camps, al-Qaeda operatives alongside Houthi intelligence.

Somali intelligence has intercepted communications between the Houthis, al-Shabaab and Islamic State. In May, the United States's own counterterrorism strategy named Houthi cooperation with al-Shabaab as an emerging alliance defining today's threat environment.

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The record existed before Mayyun. What does not exist is the will to act on it.

How Houthis advanced on Bab al-Mandeb strait



- 1 September 10: Hay district
- 2 September 10: Al-Khawkhah district
- 3 September 10: City of Mokha and Hanish Islands
- 4 September 11: Town of Dhubab

The Houthis wanted more than money. The Panel of Experts found their cooperation with al-Shabaab is not transactional but a deliberate strategy to extend their regional influence. The strait was the objective. By raising the cost of global trade at will, they acquire what captured territory never could: a force that cannot be struck without consequence or left out of any settlement about Yemen's future. Whether or not they hold the ground they took, a movement able to contest this strait has changed what the world must plan for.

This Houthi-led network may prove more durable than the one it replaces. The Iranian “axis of resistance” has limits: one patron, one ideology, a capital that could be pressured, limits on who would join. The Red Sea Axis has none of these. Sect and doctrine alike are subordinated to a commitment to the death of common enemies, making the arrangement uglier but far harder to break. It has money of its own, from smuggling and extortion.

The Red Sea is no longer a risk to be priced: it is a condition of world trade. Carriers have routed around the Cape for two years, and war-risk premiums are built into almost everything moving between Asia and the Atlantic. Those costs came at a time when the Houthis could only threaten the strait from the hills above it. Now they hold the shore and the islands within the strait: they will no longer be threatening the waterway from a distance. They will be standing in it.

For the first time, a single network sits astride both ends of the Arabian Peninsula – the Bab al-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz. And those who fought for that ground are already exporting that capability – missiles, drones, explosive-laden boats – to a second coastline, 1,800 miles long, 12 miles across the water.

I will not overstate what my country can do. Our forces have held a shoreline against a movement supplied by a state. We can board a Dhow ship in our own waters. We cannot maintain a constant watch over 1,800 miles of coastline, or reach the financiers and shipping agents behind each shipment. We have said so, publicly and repeatedly.

But Yemen has not been passive. Our coast guard and navy have interdicted a succession of shipments this year of drone guidance systems, components for explosive boats, and anti-tank missiles.

In August we intercepted a vessel carrying drone components out of Djibouti, exposing a Tehran-managed network responsible for more than a dozen shipments through Bandar Abbas. When a Houthi drone boat sank an Indian-flagged merchant vessel, it was the Yemeni coast guard that pulled its 14 crew from the water. We did all this on a fraction of the budget any navy would call adequate, while fighting to regain control.

I have spent most of my career in development and peacebuilding. I was deputy secretary-general of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference and sat on the constitution-drafting committee. The Houthis sat at that table with us. Then they rejected the outcome and marched on Sana'a.



Houthi supporters hold a rally in Sana'a to celebrate the group's takeover of the Bab al-Mandeb Credit: Mohammed Hamoud/Getty Images Europe

What Yemen needs is not another pledging conference. It is four things. We need recognition, in law and in sanctions listings, that this is one network rather than unrelated actors, so the agents, facilitators and financiers holding it together become targets instead of footnotes. We need intelligence-sharing connecting the Yemeni and Horn of Africa sides of one organisation. We need support for the forces still fighting inland, in Taiz, Marib and al-Jawf.

And we need an end to the habit – still common in Western capitals and parts of the UN system – of treating the internationally recognised government and an armed terrorist group as interchangeable equals. That habit has a price, and at Bab al-Mandab the world saw it.

The president of our Presidential Leadership Council has said that what happened at Bab al-Mandab is not a purely Yemeni affair. He is right. A waterway is not a domestic matter.

The old Iranian proxy network took 10 years to assemble in plain sight while the world argued whether it existed. Its successor, the Red Sea Axis, did not need that much time. I am not asking anyone to rely only on Yemen's account; the evidence is public and documented by others. I ask only that the Axis be viewed as a single, connected reality rather than separate entities. And recognised for what it is.

Yemen is where the future of the Red Sea and one of the world's major trade routes will be decided. We would prefer not to decide it alone.

Dr Afrah Abdulaziz Al-Zouba is Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Yemen

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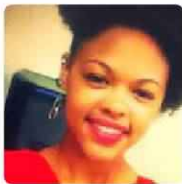
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