

Beat: News

U.S. military strikes Yemen after missile attacks on U.S. Navy ship

WORLD NEWS

Washington, 13.10.2016, 23:28 Time

USPA NEWS - The U.S. military launched cruise missiles on Thursday against three coastal radar sites in areas of Yemen controlled by Iran-aligned Houthi forces, after failed missile attacks this week on a U.S. Navy destroyer, U.S. officials said.

Several hours later Iran announced it had sent two warships to the Gulf of Aden, according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency, establishing a military presence in waters off Yemen.

The U.S. missile strikes, authorized by President Barack Obama, represent Washington's first direct military action against suspected Houthi-controlled targets in Yemen's conflict.

The Pentagon appeared to stress the limited nature of the strikes, aimed at radar that enabled the launch of at least three missiles against the U.S. Navy ship USS Mason on Sunday and Wednesday.

"These limited self-defence strikes were conducted to protect our personnel, our ships and our freedom of navigation," Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook said.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said U.S. Navy destroyer USS Nitze launched the Tomahawk cruise missiles around 4 a.m. (0100 GMT).

"These radars were active during previous attacks and attempted attacks on ships in the Red Sea," one of the officials said, adding the targeted radar sites were in remote areas where the risk of civilian casualties was low.

The official identified the areas in Yemen where the radar were located as near Ras Isa, north of Mukha and near Khoka.

Shipping sources told Reuters sites were hit in the Dhubab district of Taiz province, a remote area overlooking the Bab al-Mandab Strait known for fishing and smuggling.

Iran, which supports the Houthi group, said it had deployed two warships to the Gulf of Aden, to protect ship lanes.

"Iran's Alvand and Bushehr warships have been dispatched to the Gulf of Aden to protect trade vessels from piracy," Tasnim news agency reported.

An Iranian official told Reuters the vessels were deployed a few days ago, but declined to say when they will arrive there.

SAFE PASSAGE

The failed missile attacks on the USS Mason appeared to be part of the reaction to a suspected Saudi-led strike on mourners gathered in Yemen's Houthi-held capital Sanaa last week.

The Houthis, who are battling the internationally-recognised government of Yemen President Abd Rabbu Mansour al-Hadi, denied any involvement in Sunday's attempted strike on the USS Mason.

On Thursday, the Houthis reiterated a denial that they carried out the strikes and said they did not come from areas under their control, a news agency controlled by the group quoted a military source as saying.

The allegations were false pretexts to "escalate aggression and cover up crimes committed against the Yemeni people", the source said.

U.S. officials have told Reuters there were growing indications that Houthi fighters, or forces aligned with them, were responsible for

Sunday's attempted strikes, in which two coastal cruise missiles designed to target ships failed to reach the destroyer. The missile incidents, along with an Oct. 1 strike on a vessel from the United Arab Emirates, add to questions about safety of passage for military ships around the Bab al-Mandab Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping routes.

The Houthis, who are allied to Hadi's predecessor Ali Abdullah Saleh, have the support of many army units and control most of the north, including the capital Sanaa.

The Pentagon warned against any future attacks. "The United States will respond to any further

Threat to our ships and commercial traffic, as appropriate," Cook said.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a leading member of a Saudi-led Arab coalition fighting to end Houthi control, denounced the attacks on the Mason as an attempt to target the freedom of navigation and to inflame the regional situation.

Michael Knights, an expert on Yemen's conflict at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, suggested the Houthis, fighters from a Shi'ite sect, could be becoming more militarily aligned with groups such as Lebanon's Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah.

"Targeting U.S. warships is a sign that the Houthis have decided to join the axis of resistance that currently includes Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran," Knight said.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-9523/us-military-strikes-yemen-after-missile-attacks-on-us-navy-ship.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSIV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Phil Stewart

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619