

One of the busiest shipping lanes in the world can't just become the Wild West

One of the world's busiest shipping lanes can't just become the Wild West – that's the rationale for this.

Western nations said they would not allow Houthi attacks on international shipping to continue. Deterrence in the form of western warships didn't work.

Yes, they could shoot down the missiles and the kamikaze drones using hugely expensive missiles. But the multi-national naval presence didn't stop the Houthis from launching them.

[Middle East crisis – latest: US and UK 'launch strikes against Houthi targets'](#)

The British and American governments needed to follow through with their threats – to stop the attacks, to restore safe shipping, to restore the international rule of law and to uphold their own credibility – they hope.

But where does it lead? Is it an isolated symbolic strike? A new layer of deterrence? A demonstration that they meant what they said?

Does it stop at this? Unlikely. Houthi leaders have said already that they will respond. This threat is baked into the US/UK decision to strike.

Is it part of a more established campaign to stop the Houthis? If so, then how? To destroy them? Not without a different, much larger operation. This is not about removing the Houthis – they are an established force – a government effectively.

Analysis:

Strikes on Yemen a high-risk balancing act that could trigger regional war

What are the other options?

The Houthis claim their attacks on shipping are in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

Among regional populations, the Houthis are seen, not insignificantly, as backing support for Gaza with action.

So the West could seek to remove the Houthi pretext by accelerating efforts to end the Gaza conflict and solve the Israel-Palestine question. But that's hardly likely quickly.

The Americans have shown an unwillingness or inability to influence Israeli actions in Gaza. And for that they have not just lost credibility among regional leaders but populations too.

Of course the Houthi-Palestinian alliance is only part of their motivation. Their Iran-backed attacks are also about regional influence, their own deterrence, testing the West and capitalising on existing destabilisation.

The only positive here is that no one actually wants conflict.

The West didn't want to take this action (although it's not unhelpful politically for Rishi Sunak to be able to play his military action card for the first time in his premiership). But big picture, he doesn't want this headache.

Joe Biden absolutely doesn't need another war or another opening in the Middle East war. The Iranians too don't want war with the West.

But everyone wants to assert their control on the region, their influence to mould the region to their advantage.

All this shifts attention away from Gaza. That's good news for

Israel which will be under less scrutiny regarding its military operations there.

It's terrible news for the Gazan people whose continued plight will be far less in focus.