

Yemen's Huthi rebel media says 68 killed in US strikes on migrant centre

AFP – Huthi rebel-controlled media in Yemen said Monday that US strikes hit a migrant detention centre in the movement's stronghold of Saada, killing at least 68 people.

The US military has hammered the Iran-backed Huthis with near-daily strikes since March 15 in an operation dubbed "Rough Rider", seeking to end the threat they pose to vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The Huthis launched strikes targeting Israel and Western vessels in the Red Sea, in what they describe as solidarity with the Palestinians, since Hamas conducted the worst-ever attack on Israel in October 2023.

On Sunday, the US said it had hit more than 800 targets in Yemen since mid-March, killing hundreds of Huthi rebels including members of the group's leadership.

Just hours later, Huthi media said the latest barrage by US forces had hit a migrant detention centre.

"The civil defence has announced that 68 African migrants were killed and 47 others wounded in the US attack targeting a centre for illegal migrants in the city of Saada," the Huthis' Al-Masirah TV said.

AFP could not independently confirm the veracity of Al-Masirah's claim that the strikes had hit a migrant detention centre, or the toll.

AFP has contacted the US military for comment.

According to a statement cited by Al-Masirah from the Huthi administration's interior ministry, the centre housed "115

migrants, all from Africa”.

The broadcaster showed footage of bodies stuck under the rubble and of rescuers working to help the casualties.

Each year, tens of thousands of migrants brave the Eastern Route from the Horn of Africa, seeking to escape conflict, natural disasters and poor economic prospects by sailing across the Red Sea towards the oil-rich Gulf.

Many hope for employment as labourers or domestic workers in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries, though they face a perilous journey through war-torn Yemen.

The UN migration agency (IOM) said it was closely monitoring the situation following the latest strike but said the facility in question was not being managed by their personnel.

“It is imperative that all efforts are made to avoid harm to civilians and to protect those most vulnerable in these challenging circumstances,” the IOM said in a statement.

– ‘We will continue’ –

The Huthis are, like Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, backed by Iran, which is Israel’s arch-foe.

They began targeting shipping in late 2023, preventing ships from passing through the Suez Canal – a vital route that normally carries about 12 percent of global trade – forcing many companies into a costly detour around the tip of southern Africa.

In a statement that provided its most detailed accounting of the operation so far, the US military command responsible for the Middle East said: “Since the start of Operation Rough Rider, USCENTCOM has struck over 800 targets.

“These strikes have killed hundreds of Huthi fighters and numerous Huthi leaders.”

“The strikes have destroyed multiple command-and-control facilities, air defence systems, advanced weapons manufacturing facilities, and advanced weapons storage locations,” CENTCOM said.

Despite the strikes, the Huthis – who control large swaths of Yemen – have continued to claim attacks against both US vessels and Israel.

CENTCOM said that “while the Huthis have continued to attack our vessels, our operations have degraded the pace and effectiveness of their attacks. Ballistic missile launches have dropped by 69 percent. Additionally, attacks from one-way attack drones have decreased by 55 percent.”

“Iran undoubtedly continues to provide support to the Huthis. The Huthis can only continue to attack our forces with the backing of the Iranian regime,” the military command said.

“We will continue to ratchet up the pressure until the objective is met, which remains the restoration of freedom of navigation and American deterrence in the region,” it added.

– Strikes on Sanaa –

Al-Masirah TV on Sunday reported that US strikes on the rebel-held Yemeni capital Sanaa had killed at least eight people and wounded others.

The channel also broadcast footage of the rubble of destroyed homes and cars, as well as blood stains on the ground, while rescuers collected what appeared to be human remains in white cloth.

Also on Sunday, Huthi media said earlier strikes on Sanaa had killed two people and wounded several more.

The United States first began conducting strikes against the Huthis under Joe Biden’s administration, and President Donald Trump has vowed that military action against the rebels will

continue until they are no longer a threat to shipping.

AFP