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The Cradle's Military Correspondent
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The stunning audacity of Yemen's drone strike on Tel Aviv

Yemen's unprecedented drone strike on Israel's economic powerhouse has further shattered the occupation state's perceived invulnerability. Moreover, it announced the launch of Ansarallah's fifth phase of war: 'Target Tel Aviv.'

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On 19 July, a low-altitude drone breached Tel Aviv airspace from the sea and detonated, causing one fatality and injuring ten others.

The incident sent shockwaves through the occupation state, with a panicked populace and bewildered policymakers grappling with the Israeli army's "mega-failure" to intercept a single drone amid prolonged aggression against Gaza and the mounting tensions with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The attack's impact was magnified by its direct hit on Tel Aviv, the heart of Israel's governmental and economic power, starkly exposing inadequacies in its defense strategies and further alarming a population that has for months been questioning the effectiveness of its military preparedness.

It wasn't long before the de facto Yemeni authorities in Sanaa claimed responsibility for the attack, calling the strike a retaliation for Israeli massacres and threatening more to come.

But how did a Yemeni drone reach the heart of Israel's most fortified region and strike a blow to Israeli military pride?

Tactical evolution of suicide drones

Suicide drones, as they are known, are a relatively modern weapon, posing significant challenges even for technologically advanced states like the US and Israel. These drones vary in range, warhead size, speed, and guidance methods.

Analysis of the wreckage revealed that the "Yaffa" drone, an enhanced version of Yemen's Sammad drones, was employed in the operation. The name is deeply symbolic as it references the ancient port city of Jaffa, also known as *Yaffa* in Arabic, which now forms part of modern-day Tel Aviv.
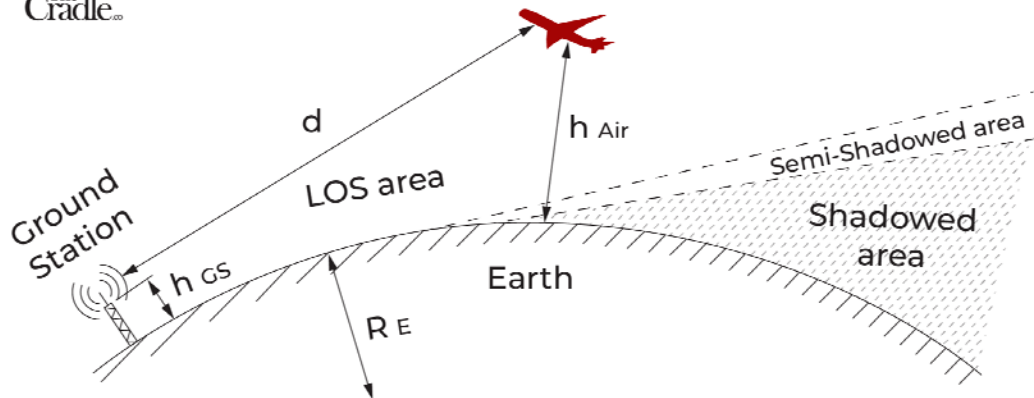

Yaffa Drone

Its rectangular wing shape and V-shaped tail distinguish it, but it is notably the more powerful 275 cc (16 kW) engine that sets it apart. This engine enables the drone to cover distances exceeding 2000 kilometers – sufficient to reach Tel Aviv from Yemen.

Unlike with ballistic missiles, the difficulty in tracking drones lies in their ability to take unconventional paths, maneuver through winding routes, and hide behind terrain features, making them hard to detect by radar systems.

This detection challenge is a daily issue in northern occupied Palestine, where drones operated by Lebanese resistance groups often go unseen by the
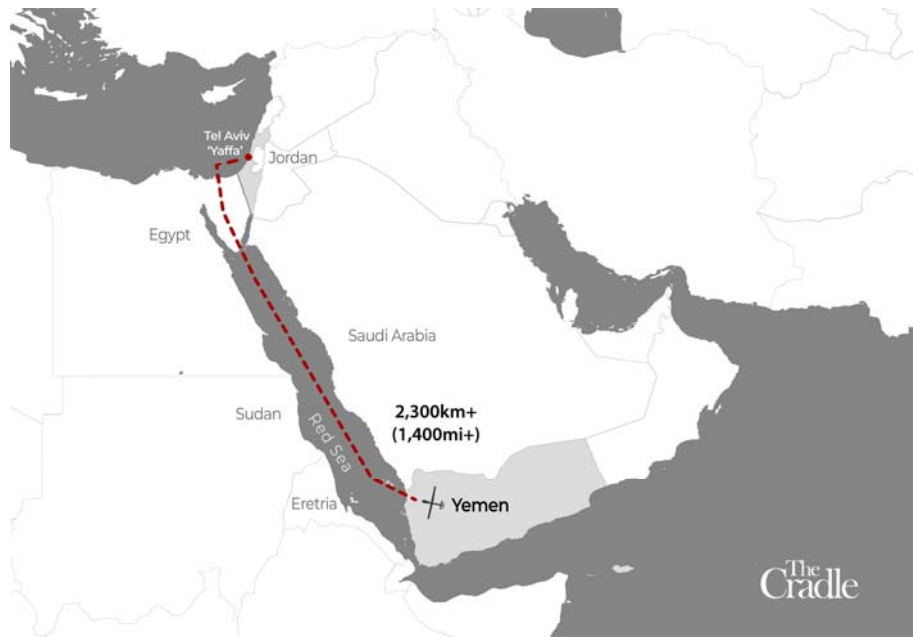
increasingly blinded occupation army.

Moreover, drones are typically constructed from lightweight materials such as fiberglass, carbon fiber, or various reinforced plastics that do not reflect radar waves effectively, which is crucial for detection and tracking.

Their low speeds reduce the need for the metallic compositions necessary in constructing conventional military hardware like missiles and fighter jets. Consequently, drones can be mistaken for birds by radar systems. This confusion has occurred regularly in northern occupied Palestine since the war's onset, with Israel's Iron Dome defense system spotted expending its limited supply of $50,000 projectiles shooting at birds during this conflict.

Yaffa's route to Tel Aviv

The suicide drone likely took an unconventional path to evade detection. Previous Yemeni attempts have been intercepted in Egyptian Sinai airspace, with Israeli-allied Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt contributing to these detection and interception efforts.

On the night of the attack, however, no US aircraft carrier groups were in the Red Sea, and the nearest carrier, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, was positioned in the Indian Ocean. Israel's air force has suggested that the drone may have taken a non-traditional route via Eritrea, Sudan, and Egypt, crossing near the Suez Canal before entering the Mediterranean and turning   east   toward   Tel   Aviv.

Possible path of Yaffa drone that targeted a building in Tel Aviv

Some aspects of that route seem unlikely: the Suez Canal area is heavily patrolled by Egyptian air defense, with its 8th Brigade stationed there, so the Israeli announcement may have been an attempt to pressure Egypt.

Israel's response: Bombing Hodeidah

On 20 July, Israeli aircraft launched punishing airstrikes on the besieged Yemeni port of Hodeidah, specifically targeting areas designated for fuel and oil storage, as well as destroying port cranes used for loading and unloading cargo and a power station.

But these were civilian targets in a country already suffering from the effects of the Saudi-led coalition blockade, which has caused severe shortages of fuel and essential resources needed for power generation and transportation.

The strike at these particular target banks, which killed at least six and wounded dozens of others, appears to be primarily aimed at creating significant explosions and large fires to help Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu score points at home.

But the Israeli response against civilian targets also reveals that Tel Aviv suffers from a dearth of intelligence on potential Yemeni military targets. It was also evident that the selected targets were ones that Saudi Arabia and the US have refrained from striking due to fears of Yemeni retaliation, which could strike Saudi commercial ports or oil exports in one of the world's most vital energy passages.

Indeed, Riyadh was quick to deny any involvement in the assault, fearing reprisals from Sanaa, although reports that Israeli jets used Saudi airspace for this attack suggest otherwise.

Video footage shows that Israel used F-35 and F-15 fighter jets, as well as Boeing 707 tanker aircraft, due to the distance involved – a range exceeding 4,000 kilometers round trip. Israeli-released footage suggests that the strikes were carried out using Spice guided missiles launched from outside the Yemeni air defense range.

Some of these missiles are equipped with boosters that extend their range up to 150 kilometers, which only showcased Israeli operational limitations against Yemen in a broader conflict, in which Sanaa's air defenses will be surely activated against enemy aircraft, drones, and projectiles.

Yemen's retaliation

Yemeni officials, led by Ansarallah leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi and Yemeni Armed Forces Spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree, quickly announced a decision to launch retaliatory strikes against Israel, in which they declared Tel Aviv to be an "unsafe zone" and warned of Yemen's readiness for a "long war" against the occupation state.

Given the targeting of vital civilian infrastructure, this places several Israeli targets on the list of potential Yemeni target banks. These include fuel tanks in Haifa, clearly shown in video footage taken by a Hezbollah drone weeks ago, as well as fuel tanks in Ashkelon and the power stations adjacent to these tanks.

What concerns Israelis the most, however, is Yemen's potential targeting of vital gas platforms in the Mediterranean Sea, stationary targets highly susceptible to significant ignition and explosion. While there are currently only three active Israeli gas fields – Karish, Tamar, and Leviathan – in operation, these fields have become essential to Israel's energy independence.

Underestimating Sanaa's resolve

The damaging Israeli strike on Hodeidah Port was based on an assumption by Tel Aviv that it would deter a Yemeni counterstrike. But Yemen's Ansarallah Movement, which has endured years of punishing Saudi, Emirati – and now US and UK – military attacks, has shown no inclination whatsoever to halt its operations in support of Gaza.

While the Israelis may have felt an obligation for a quick military fix by striking Hodeidah – the port, incidentally, has already reopened for business – it comes at the expense of any logical assessments of losses and gains. Already facing strategic defeat in Gaza and unable to follow through with its threats against Lebanon, Tel Aviv has cracked open a new front with Yemen, the most fearless component of West Asia's Axis of Resistance.

The Israelis are between a rock and a hard place, desperately trying to cleave to old narratives of regional military superiority to keep domestic faith in the Zionist project, yet unable to score victories anywhere.

Based on Yemen's oft-declared resolve not to retreat from any escalation, it is expected that the outcome of the Hodeidah strike will lead to a compounded retaliatory operation against the occupation state. Israel, however, has limited operational freedom due to issues related to geographic distance – such as the airspace and uninterrupted refueling access required – which makes waging war against Yemen a nonstarter.

Harsher strikes on critical Israeli centers are likely to drive Israel into greater missteps and strategic errors, especially at a time when escalation and the further weakening of its deterrence are counterproductive to its interests.

By targeting the Yemenis directly, Israel has underestimated the resolve and capabilities of a [formidable adversary](), potentially choosing the worst possible opponents in this round of conflict.

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