


Implications of Israeli–Iranian Confrontations on Yemen

Situation Assessment

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Introduction

Last June, the Middle East witnessed a grave development: the outbreak of the first direct military confrontation between Israel and Iran. This escalation began with Israeli strikes targeting Iran's nuclear facilities, followed by the assassination of several Iranian nuclear scientists and key figures within the military and security sectors. These events highlighted the extent of Israel's penetration into Iran's intelligence and security infrastructure.

The depth of this breach became even more apparent when it was revealed that Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, had managed to construct drone manufacturing facilities inside Iran through its network of agents embedded in various institutions. These facilities played a pivotal role in launching attacks on Iranian targets during the initial phase of Israel's offensive on June 13.

Israel named its military operation "Rising Lion," while Iran responded with a counteroffensive dubbed "True Promise (3)." In its retaliation, Iran deployed ballistic missiles and drones, targeting military, security, and civilian sites across several locations in Israel, including Tel Aviv.

Although international pressure and U.S. mediation eventually brought the hostilities to a halt, the aftermath of the confrontation continues to unfold. This persistence suggests the conflict may expand to areas controlled by regional allies and proxies. One of the most likely flashpoints is Yemen, where the Houthi armed group—supported by Iran—controls much of the country's northern and western regions, including the capital, Sana'a. This strategic control makes Yemen a probable testing ground for Iran's deterrence strategies and a possible front for escalating the broader confrontation.

This study explores the political and military implications of the Israeli–Iranian confrontation for Yemen, with a particular focus on the potential for escalation. It analyzes both the direct and indirect effects of the conflict on Yemen's internal landscape and evaluates how these dynamics may shape the country's future. Additionally, the study outlines possible scenarios and assesses their implications for Yemen's stability in the face of an evolving regional conflict.

Iranian Influence in Yemen and the Red Sea

Since the outbreak of the Yemeni war more than a decade ago, Iran has strategically utilized the Houthi movement to advance its foreign policy objectives. This approach serves two main purposes: first, to strengthen Tehran's negotiating leverage with the West, and second, to expand its regional influence—particularly in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait—as a counterbalance to its regional rivals.

The Houthi threat to maritime navigation began to escalate in 2018. In July of that year, Houthi forces attacked two Saudi oil tankers, prompting Saudi Arabia—the world's largest crude oil exporter—to temporarily suspend oil shipments through the Bab al-Mandab Strait. In the aftermath, the Houthis issued a direct threat to shut down the strait entirely to maritime traffic, a move that was widely interpreted as an extension of Iranian policy. This perception was reinforced by Iran's concurrent threat to close the Strait of Hormuz if it were prevented from exporting its oil. That warning came in response to the Trump administration's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement and its declared intent to bring Iranian oil exports to a halt. The parallel threats—from the Houthis regarding Bab al-Mandeb and from Iran concerning Hormuz—delivered a coordinated message to regional and international actors: Tehran was effectively using the Houthis as a proxy force to extend its strategic reach and safeguard its geopolitical interests.

Regional and International Reactions

The unfolding developments triggered swift responses at both regional and international levels. In January 2020, Saudi Arabia announced the establishment of the Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, comprising eight member states: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Yemen, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti. According to its founding statement, the council was created “in recognition of the critical need for coordination and consultation regarding the Red Sea as a primary maritime corridor between East Asia and Europe « .

This announcement came in the wake of heightened tensions between the United States and Iran, particularly following the U.S. assassination of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in Iraq.

Iran's subsequent participation in joint naval exercises with Russia and China in the Gulf of Oman and the Pacific Ocean further signaled its broader strategic ambitions. These developments likely influenced the formation of the Red Sea council, as member States sought to counter Iran's expanding influence in the region—especially amid Houthi activity near the strategic maritime chokepoint of Bab al-Mandab .

Iran, positioned on the opposite side of the Arabian Gulf and backing the Houthis in the Red Sea, has remained deeply involved in the region's political and military dynamics. Its aim to gain leverage over Bab al-Mandab through its Houthi allies positions it as a primary suspect in the regionalization of its conflict with Gulf States—extending its conflicts from the Strait of Hormuz to the Bab al-Mandab . From Tehran's perspective, «the newly formed Red Sea council represents part of a broader Western project to assert dominance and protect Israeli interests—even if Israel is not formally part of the alliance » .

Iran's decision to activate the Houthis in response to recent regional developments was far from unexpected. It represented the culmination of years of sustained support and preparation, including various forms of military assistance. This long-term backing enabled the Houthis to transform from a marginalized rebel movement, once confined to the remote mountains of northern Yemen, into a dominant power that has controlled the capital, Sana'a, and more than half of Yemen's governorates for over a decade.

Tehran routinely mobilizes its Yemeni proxy in times of perceived threat. This pattern became particularly evident following recent developments at the end of 2024, which dealt severe blows to Iran's regional network of allies. Chief among these setbacks were the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria after the revolutionary forces' victory in December 2024, and the weakening of Hezbollah, whose leadership and weapons depots were largely destroyed in a series of Israeli airstrikes beginning in September. In the face of these losses, Iran increasingly turned to the Houthis—now viewed as its most powerful and dependable proxy

This shift in reliance was clearly demonstrated during the most recent .

confrontation between Israel and Iran, when the Houthis emerged as the only group to take direct military action in support of Tehran. They launched a series of missile attacks against Israel, reinforcing their status as Iran's most active and loyal regional partner

Direct implications of the Israeli–Iranian Confrontation for Yemen

• Political Tensions and Military Escalation

Despite sustaining significant setbacks in its brief clashes with Israel in late June, Iran was quick to claim victory. Mere hours after an unannounced ceasefire took effect, Tehran organized public celebrations to declare what it described as a triumph over Israel. In parallel, Israeli officials also claimed a successful outcome in their confrontation with Iran.

As expected, the Houthi political and media rhetoric mirrored that of Tehran. Houthi leaders and affiliated media outlets echoed Iranian assertions of victory, presenting Iran's proclaimed success—despite the absence of concrete military gains—as their own. Through this alignment, the Houthis reinforced their role as Tehran's most capable and committed proxy in the region.

While efforts by Iran and its allies to portray recent events as a strategic victory continue, Yemen's political landscape remains fraught with tension, uncertainty, and deepening polarization. Prospects for de-escalation appear bleak: peace negotiations are effectively stalled, hopes for a long-awaited settlement have faded, and anticipation has replaced resolution as the defining mood on the ground.

International and UN-led efforts to revive talks between Yemen's warring factions have diminished, largely in response to shifting regional and global dynamics. Meanwhile, the Houthis have found themselves engaged in a confrontation that they themselves chose the timing for, increasingly seeing themselves not merely as a domestic power, but as a significant regional actor. This evolving posture was reinforced by a quietly brokered understanding with the U.S. administration, reached through indirect talks, which aimed to de-escalate tensions—an understanding publicly confirmed by President Donald Trump in May 2025.

Currently, the Houthis are employing a rhetoric of threats and disruption, targeting both regional and global stability. They continue to threaten the use of force to obstruct trade and maritime navigation in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait. Through such posturing, they expect regional states to engage with them on the basis of these threats—effectively allowing them to set the terms for any future agreements. This applies both to potential domestic settlements with other Yemeni factions and to external negotiations with Gulf States. However, the Houthis clearly prefer the latter option: international negotiations where they portray themselves as Yemen’s sole legitimate representatives, dismissing all other parties as mere agents and mercenaries.

Although recent regional developments have gone against the interests of the Houthis and their Iranian-led axis—especially following the setbacks suffered by Hezbollah and the Assad regime—they insist that these setbacks do not apply to their own position. Their reasoning lies in the fact that they still retain firm control over northern Yemen and remain capable of launching missile attacks against Israel. Unless this strategic posture is directly addressed, the Houthis are likely to continue asserting themselves militarily by provoking renewed clashes along frontlines with government forces in key provinces such as Marib, al-Dhalea, and Taiz. From time to time, signals from the group indicate a willingness to escalate—especially when doing so appears to align with their interests, particularly at moments when domestic and regional actors are eager to avoid further conflict amid rising regional tensions.

Reconfiguration of Local and Regional Alliances

The recent confrontations between Tehran and Tel Aviv are likely to reshape both local and regional alliances in response to the evolving strategic landscape. In recent months, the Houthis have succeeded in attracting segments of their rivals’ popular base—at least on an emotional level—by portraying themselves as the only Yemeni faction actively defending Gaza amid the ongoing Israeli war, now approaching its second year.

However, a significant shift has occurred among the Houthis’ adversaries.

Two key factions within Yemen’s internationally recognized government—the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the National Resistance (NR)—have reached a political understanding based on converging interests. Whether this rapprochement was orchestrated by Abu Dhabi, which sponsors both factions, or emerged from internal dynamics, it signals an effort by the United Arab Emirates to reassert its influence in Yemen. This move comes after several years of diminished Emirati presence, particularly in comparison to Saudi Arabia’s growing role in southern and eastern Yemen.

In parallel, negotiations to reopen the strategic Sana’a–Aden road—specifically near the al-Dhalea front, where the Houthis are in active confrontation with rival forces—have revealed the assertiveness of UAE-aligned STC leaders. These leaders, who are part of the coalition operating in that region, were eager to emphasize their decisive authority over the outcome of such talks.

On Yemen’s western coast, where the National Resistance operates under Brigadier General Tareq Mohammed Saleh—another key figure backed by the UAE—efforts are underway to rebrand his leadership. Saleh has expressed interest in launching development projects to improve basic services for the local population, while also signaling—through coordinated public statements—that key military decisions remain beyond the control of Yemeni actors.

Taken together, these developments point to a possible shift in the nature of alliances in Yemen. The original coalition, once singularly focused on defeating the Houthis, now appears to be evolving toward more pragmatic partnerships aimed at restoring stability. This includes reopening roads long closed by years of conflict and shifting the focus from prolonged military confrontation to initiatives that prioritize civilian life and recovery.

At the regional level, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—have demonstrated a unified stance in response to recent developments. These three key players jointly hosted the U.S. President during his regional tour in May and collectively condemned Israel’s strikes on Iran. In the same spirit of coordination, they also denounced Iran’s retaliatory attack on the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar.

Despite this broad consensus, important differences persist in how each state approaches regional challenges, particularly the Yemen conflict and strategies for dealing with the Houthi movement. These divergences indicate that future alliances may be shaped—or reshaped—according to each country's specific vision for resolving the war in Yemen and addressing Iranian influence, especially actions carried out through proxy groups. The recent military confrontations between Iran and Israel are likely to fuel Tehran's efforts to escalate tensions with its Gulf adversaries, while deliberately avoiding direct escalation with the United States or Israel—at least for the time being. This approach reflects a sobering realization within Iran: its actual military capabilities fell far short of its aggressive rhetoric about destroying Israel.

Although Iran failed to match Israel's military strength during the latest round of conflict, it retains the ability to strike at its Gulf rivals—either directly or through allied groups. Chief among these proxies are the Houthis, who have previously targeted both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with missile attacks, and who continue to represent a central element of Iran's asymmetric warfare strategy in the region.

Key Outcomes and Direct Implications of the Israeli–Iranian Confrontation for Yemen

• Political Dimension:

Despite Iran's recent military setbacks, the Houthis are now attempting to reposition themselves as the leading force within the so-called "Axis of Resistance"—particularly in the wake of the collapse of the Assad regime and the significant decimation of Hezbollah's leadership and operational strength.

This effort at political rebranding further complicates an already challenging negotiation environment. The Houthis now view themselves as the frontline representatives of the resistance axis in its confrontation with Israel and its allies, and are therefore unlikely to accept any peace initiative that does not recognize this self-ascribed status. In line with this posture, they are expected to intensify their rhetoric, branding their Yemeni and Gulf opponents as "agents of Israel"—a move that signals their willingness to resume conflict if it aligns with their broader political agenda.

• Military Dimension:

Iran continues to use the Houthis as a testing ground for new weapons systems, and the group's military operations have increasingly extended beyond Yemen's borders, particularly into the Red Sea. This expansion of activity has heightened regional security concerns and raised the risk of broader military escalation. Of particular concern are the Houthis' maritime operations, which are emerging as a major source of instability in one of the world's most critical maritime corridors.

Timeline of Key Events in the Israel–Iran Military Confrontation

No.	Event	Date
1	Israel launches surprise airstrikes targeting several Iranian nuclear facilities and assassinate senior commanders in the Iranian military and Revolutionary Guard.	June 13, 2025
2	Iran retaliates with ballistic missiles and drones targeting multiple areas across Israel.	June 13, 2025
3	Escalation of mutual attacks; Iranian missiles land near Dimona and the Soreq Nuclear Research Center.	June 15, 2025
4	The Iranian Navy intercepts a tanker suspected of links to Israel in the Gulf of Oman.	June 16, 2025
5	Iran launches a new wave of missiles, hitting a military facility in the Negev; Israeli strikes on Iranian infrastructure continue.	June 19, 2025
6	The United States announces it has struck Iranian nuclear facilities using B2- bombers.	June 22, 2025
7	U.S.-led mediation results in a temporary and unpublicized de-escalation.	June 24, 2025

Future Scenarios and Their implications on Yemen

Based on the preceding analysis, three primary scenarios can be envisioned for the trajectory of Israeli–Iranian confrontations, each carrying distinct implications for Yemen:

• Full-Scale Regional Escalation between Iran and Israel

If efforts to de-escalate the current tensions fail, the region could witness a broad and open conflict. In such a scenario, Iran would likely activate its network of regional proxies—with the Houthis playing a central role.

Operating from their strongholds in Yemen, the Houthis would be expected to intensify both aerial and maritime attacks, targeting Israeli, American, and Gulf interests. Iran perceives Gulf States as aligned with the U.S. and Israel, making them prime targets in a wider confrontation.

This scenario would likely trigger robust retaliatory strikes by the United States and Israel on Houthi positions within Yemen. The country would become increasingly militarized, transforming into a frontline battleground in the broader regional conflict.

- **Proxy Conflict (A New Cold War)**

A more limited, indirect confrontation may resume, characterized by proxy dynamics rather than open warfare. Iran's allied militias and groups—particularly in Iraq and Yemen—would likely aim to strike a balance between presenting themselves as committed to regional stability while simultaneously demonstrating military relevance and influence.

Under this scenario, the Houthis would remain a key instrument of Iranian leverage. They would likely continue to threaten maritime navigation in the Red Sea and launch periodic missile and drone attacks to exert pressure. Several of these tactics have already been deployed in recent flare-ups with Israel, reinforcing their strategic utility to Tehran.

This proxy-driven environment would sustain chronic insecurity and economic decline in Yemen, barring significant internal changes that might alter the existing power balance or disrupt the proxy alignment with Iran.

- **Temporary Political Settlement**

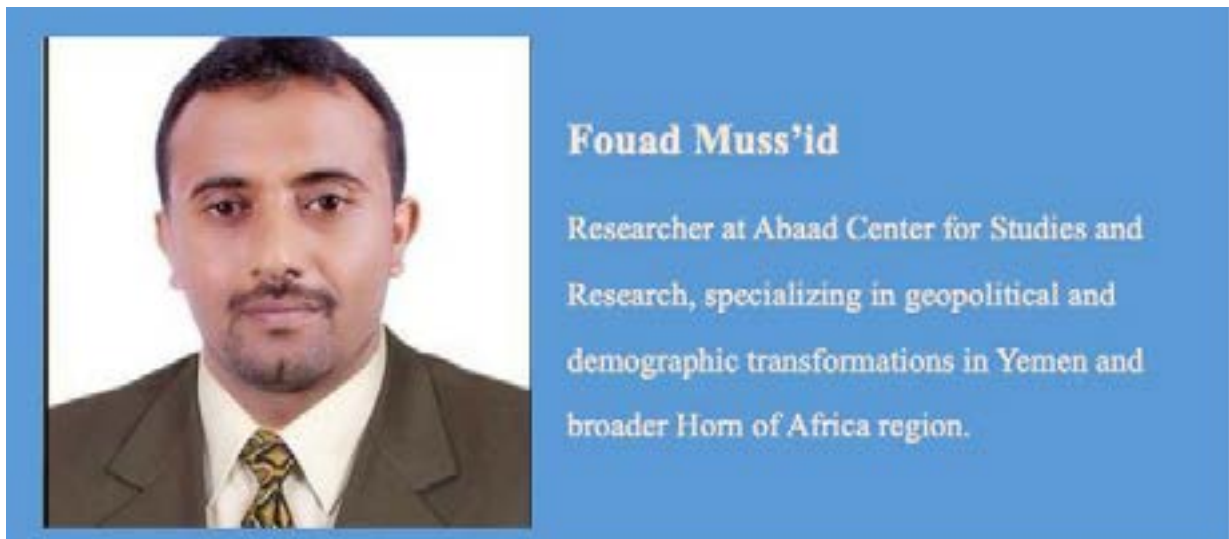
If international diplomatic efforts succeed in brokering a provisional political settlement between Iran and Israel—likely supported by international guarantees—it could offer a temporary reduction in regional tensions.

Under such circumstances, the Houthi threat to maritime security and commercial shipping lanes might recede, at least in the short term.

This scenario could open a window of opportunity for renewed intra-Yemeni negotiations. Dialogue between the Houthis and their rivals may gain momentum under the auspices of UN-led mediation, supported by regional actors. Such efforts could potentially revive hopes for a political process aimed at de-escalating Yemen's internal conflict.

However, any progress achieved under this scenario would likely remain limited and fragile, heavily dependent on shifting regional and global geopolitical dynamics. Moreover, changes within Yemen's internal balance of power—whether military or political—could ultimately have a more decisive influence on the trajectory of future confrontations than any short-lived diplomatic breakthrough.

Even if talks resume, they may fall short of addressing the core demands of Yemen's internationally recognized government and its domestic and external allies, leaving key issues unresolved and the peace process vulnerable to future setbacks.



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