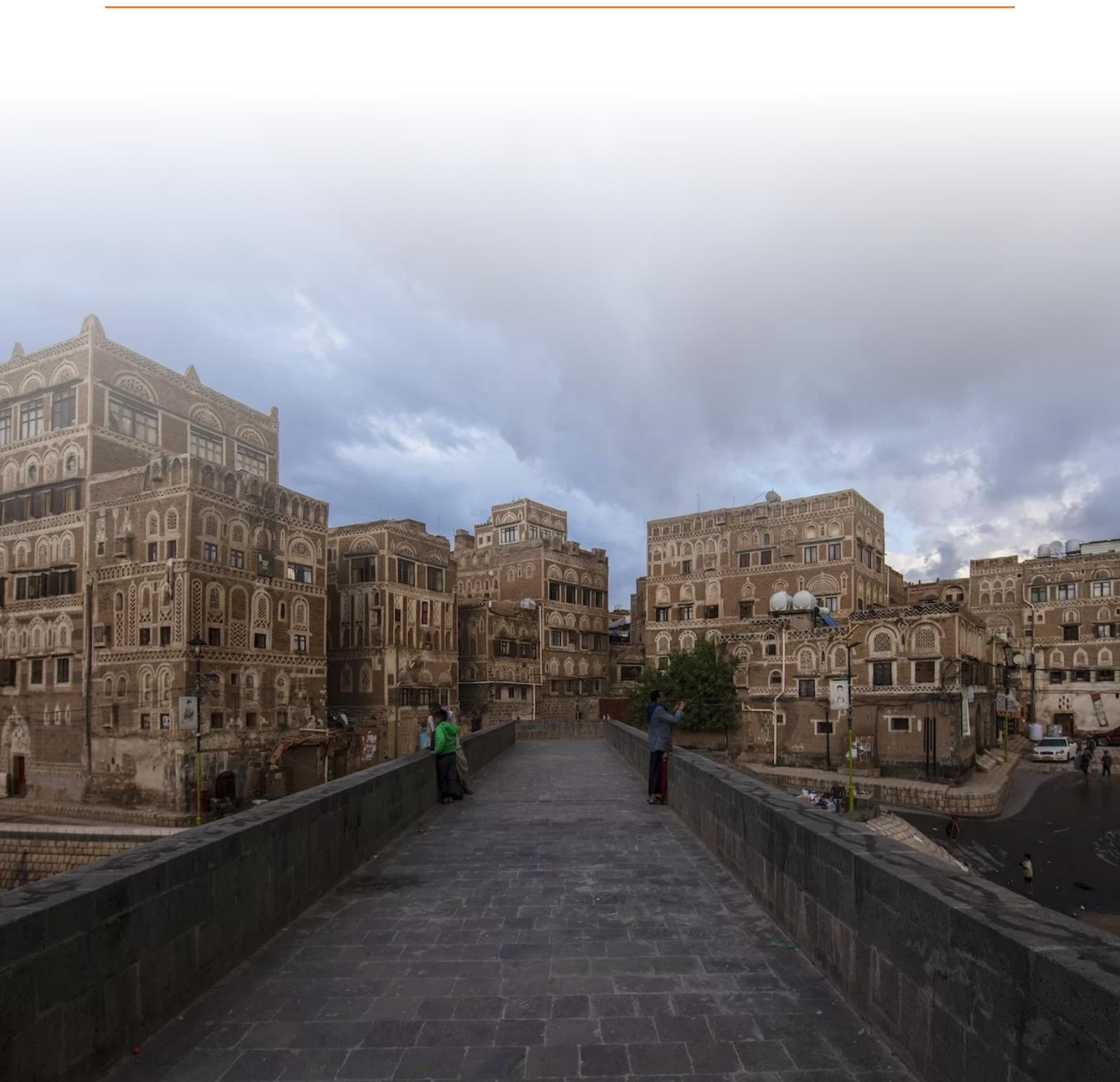


# Israeli Strikes Target Houthi-Appointed Cabinet, PM and Other Ministers Killed

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**Cover photo:** The Old City of Sana'a on July 30, 2020 // Sana'a Center photo.



The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies is an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region. The Center's publications and programs, offered in both Arabic and English, cover political, social, economic and security related developments, aiming to impact policy locally, regionally, and internationally.

### Sana'a Center Staff

On August 28, Israeli strikes targeted a high-level meeting of ministers appointed by the Houthi group (*Ansar Allah*) in Sana'a, **killing** Prime Minister Ahmed Ghaleb al-Rahawi and other cabinet officials. Airstrikes hit residential neighborhoods of Sana'a city a day after Houthi forces **launched** a ballistic missile toward Israel's Ben Gurion Airport. For over a year, Israel has **targeted** ports, airports, and infrastructure in Sana'a and other Houthi-held areas of Yemen in response to regular missile and drone barrages by the group, which states it is fighting Israel in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

The Houthis **confirmed** the death of Al-Rahawi, along with at least 11 other individuals. While the attack represents a significant escalation in the ongoing conflict between the Houthis and Israel, the officials confirmed to have been killed held limited influence within the group's decision-making structures.

## Confirmed Casualties

- Prime Minister Ahmed Ghaleb al-Rahawi
- Justice and Human Rights Minister Mujahed Ahmed Abdullah Ali
- Economy Minister Maeen Hashem al-Mahaqri
- Agriculture Minister Radwan Ali al-Rubaei
- Foreign Affairs Minister Jamal Amer
- Electricity and Energy Minister Ali Saif Mohammed Hassan
- Culture and Tourism Minister Ali Qasem al-Yafei
- Social Affairs and Labor Minister Samer Mohammed Ahmed Bajaala
- Information Minister Hashem Ahmed Sharafeddine
- Youth and Sports Minister Mohammed Ali Ahmed al-Mawlid
- Director of the Prime Minister's Office Mohammed Qasem al-Kabsi
- Cabinet Secretary Zahed Mohammed al-Amdi

Tight Houthi **restrictions** on information emerging from Sana'a have fueled speculation surrounding the death or injury of key figures within the Houthis' senior leadership. Israeli officials **told** Reuters they had targeted the Houthi chief of staff and defense minister. The group immediately attempted to dispel rumors about Houthi-appointed Defense Minister, Mohammed al-Atifi, and the Chief of Staff of the Houthi armed forces, Mohammed Abdelkarim al-Ghamari, the latter of whom reportedly survived an Israeli **assassination attempt** in June, by releasing **written statements** attributed to them.

There are conflicting reports on the specifics of the Israeli attack, including the total number of strikes and their exact locations. It is also unclear whether the ministers were killed together in a single airstrike or in a series of strikes across the Houthi-held capital. Israeli forces reported targeting a “facility” where Houthi leaders were gathered. Tribal sources told the Associated Press that the strike that killed Al-Rahawi targeted a villa in Beit Baws, a neighborhood in the south of Sana’a city. Sources in Sana’a also told France24 that a house in Beit Baws was among the targeted sites.

Meanwhile, a Yemeni journalist reported that strikes targeted a house belonging to a Houthi supervisor near Sifr (Zero) Street in Sana’a city’s Haddah neighborhood, to the west of Beit Baws, and that the area had been cordoned off by Houthi security forces. Satellite imagery indicates that a building in Haddah may have been damaged. Other reports that Israeli airstrikes targeted Houthi military facilities near Attan Mountain and the Presidential Palace remain unconfirmed.

The Houthis have already appointed a new acting prime minister, Mohammed Miftah, the former deputy prime minister and a religious cleric and hardliner who wields considerable political influence. On September 1, a funeral and military procession were held at Sana’a city’s Al-Saleh Mosque. The dead were then interred in the Martyr Burial Grounds on Sabaeen Street. The cemetery has served as the burial site for other leaders linked to the group, including Houthi-appointed President Saleh al-Sammad, who was killed in a Saudi-coalition airstrike in 2018.

In the aftermath of the airstrikes, the Houthis raided the Sana’a offices of the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO). UN officials said that at least 11 staff members have been detained, adding to the dozens of local UN staff held by the group for more than a year. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for their immediate release.

On September 1, the Houthis announced that they had struck the tanker Scarlet Ray with a ballistic missile as it sailed off the coast of the Saudi port town of Yanbu. The Liberia-flagged chemical tanker is owned by a company with ties to Israeli shipping magnate Idan Ofer. The UKMTO reported that the missile missed the ship; this was corroborated by a statement from the ship’s owner, who said the Scarlet Ray was undamaged and under the command of its captain. The following day, the Houthis claimed to have launched four drone attacks against Israel, reportedly targeting the Israeli military’s general staff building, Ben Gurion Airport, the port of Ashdod, and a power plant in central Israel. Israeli forces say they intercepted one projectile.

Below, Sana’a Center experts react to the Israeli strikes and analyze the future of the conflict between the Houthis and Israel.

## Houthis Face Defining Juncture

**Abdulghani Al-Iryani**

Israel's killing of the Houthi prime minister and many members of his cabinet is not a decapitation of the group in the way previous Israeli operations were for Hezbollah or Iran. The cabinet, indeed the entire government, is merely a front for the real power holders in the Houthi movement – senior officers that do not appear in the media and remain anonymous to the general public. This was the reason that the victims of the Israeli strike were going about their normal routines – they were not expecting to be targeted. The cabinet meeting, reportedly to discuss arrangements for *Mawlid al-Nabawi*, the Prophet Mohammed's birthday, takes place every year. Breaking the security taboo of predictability may be expected of civil servants, but not from well-trained security officers whose protocols have protected senior Houthi leaders through ten years of war.

The aftermath of the attack presents the Houthis with a choice between escalation and de-escalation. They have announced that they will avenge their fallen comrades, firing a new, more advanced missile at Israel, demonstrating their commitment and ability to retaliate. Having done so, they are now in a position to examine their options as another [attack on Iran](#) by Israel and the US appears to be on the horizon.

Now, the Houthis have to decide whether they will stick with Iran till the end, as they have been claiming, or will consider the off-ramp that this attack has provided them. The group has so far insisted on standing up to Israel and America, affirming their belief that, with God's help, they will win any confrontation. They believe that their membership in the Axis of Resistance is non-negotiable. One wonders if they are taking into account the possibility that if Iran goes down, they will go down with it, but if Iran commits to negotiations with the US, it may sell out the Houthis for its own benefit. After all, Iran has, in the past, offered to help “resolve the Yemen conflict.”

On the other hand, pragmatists within the Houthi group, who watched the tantalizing peace deal with Saudi Arabia slip away due to military action in the Red Sea, may argue that now is a good moment to say to the Axis of Resistance, and to their own base, “We have done enough for Gaza and Palestine.” They could turn to Oman to mediate a ceasefire with Israel, as they did with the US last May, sparing themselves further losses and hoping to resuscitate their peace deal with Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis are facing a defining juncture that may determine the future of war and peace in Yemen. Will they go for broke and escalate further, or take the off-ramp and sue for peace? I would place my bet on the latter.

## Israeli Strikes a Prelude to Further Escalation

**Hussam Radman**

The recent Israeli escalation against the Houthis coincided with three regional developments: First, there has been intensified international **diplomacy**, led by Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, alongside mounting global pressure, to bring the war in Gaza to an end. Second, negotiations between Iran and the West have reportedly hit a **stalemate**, and Iranian proxies in **Iraq** and **Lebanon** are facing growing pressure to disarm. Third, Israel has announced **plans** to proceed with a full-scale occupation of Gaza, despite sharp internal disputes between the Israeli government, **security establishment**, and the **public**.

The latest Israeli attack appeared to have several operational goals. First was to eliminate links within the Houthi leadership — particularly Mohammed Abdelkarim al-Ghamari, who serves as the chief of staff of the Houthi military and acts as the operational bridge between political directives and military execution. He plays a central role in coordinating the Houthis' cross-border operations. Israel has unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Al-Ghamari before, underscoring the extent of his operational security protocols. A Houthi **statement** attributed to him immediately following the strikes is a clear attempt to refute reports of his death, reflecting his growing significance within the group.

A second objective was to dismantle Houthi political assets. While the Houthi-appointed "Government of Change and Construction" was not a true decision-making authority, it held symbolic and political legitimacy, cementing Houthi rule and giving them a quasi-state appearance. Its elimination could discourage non-Houthi political figures from aligning with the group moving forward. The targeting of Houthi-aligned politicians deviated from previous strikes' operational objectives, which focused on targeting civilian economic assets, including oil depots, power stations, ports, and airports. Although such strikes, alongside US attacks on the Houthis' missile arsenal and weapons depots from March to May, weakened the group, the Houthis remain undeterred in their attacks on Israeli ports and infrastructure.

The strikes also reflect broader Israeli political objectives, as the government attempts to shift global attention away from Gaza and toward the Houthis and other Iran-backed groups in the region. The confrontation with the Houthis also legitimizes Israel's long-term naval presence in the Red Sea, under the pretext of guaranteeing maritime security.

The assassination of Houthi politicians echoes Israel's previous attempts to target enemy foreign leaders, including attacks on the **Iranian consulate in Damascus** and the killings of high-profile figures like Hamas leader **Ismail Haniyeh** and Hezbollah leader **Hassan Nasrallah**. These provocations have sparked **internal debate** in Iran between the hardline Islamic Republican Guard Corps (IRGC) and a more moderate government approach. Iran has reportedly **signaled** its openness to temporarily

suspend uranium enrichment in hopes of reengaging with the European countries, but has also made clear that its missile program and regional influence are non-negotiable.

The Houthi response is likely to range from limited symbolic attacks, such as isolated missile strikes on Israeli territory, to more coordinated campaigns, including sustained assaults on Israeli targets and commercial shipping in the Red Sea – a strategy the group may be **employing** already. More extensive operations, involving simultaneous missile and drone salvos, would likely depend on external actors, particularly Iran, and whether the allies agree to engage in a broader confrontation.

Meanwhile, Israel will continue operations in Yemen. The escalation appears to be a prelude to one of two strategic paths: either a full-scale military campaign against the Houthis in Yemen, targeting political and military assets, infrastructure, and the group's leadership; or a second wave of attacks on Iran.

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