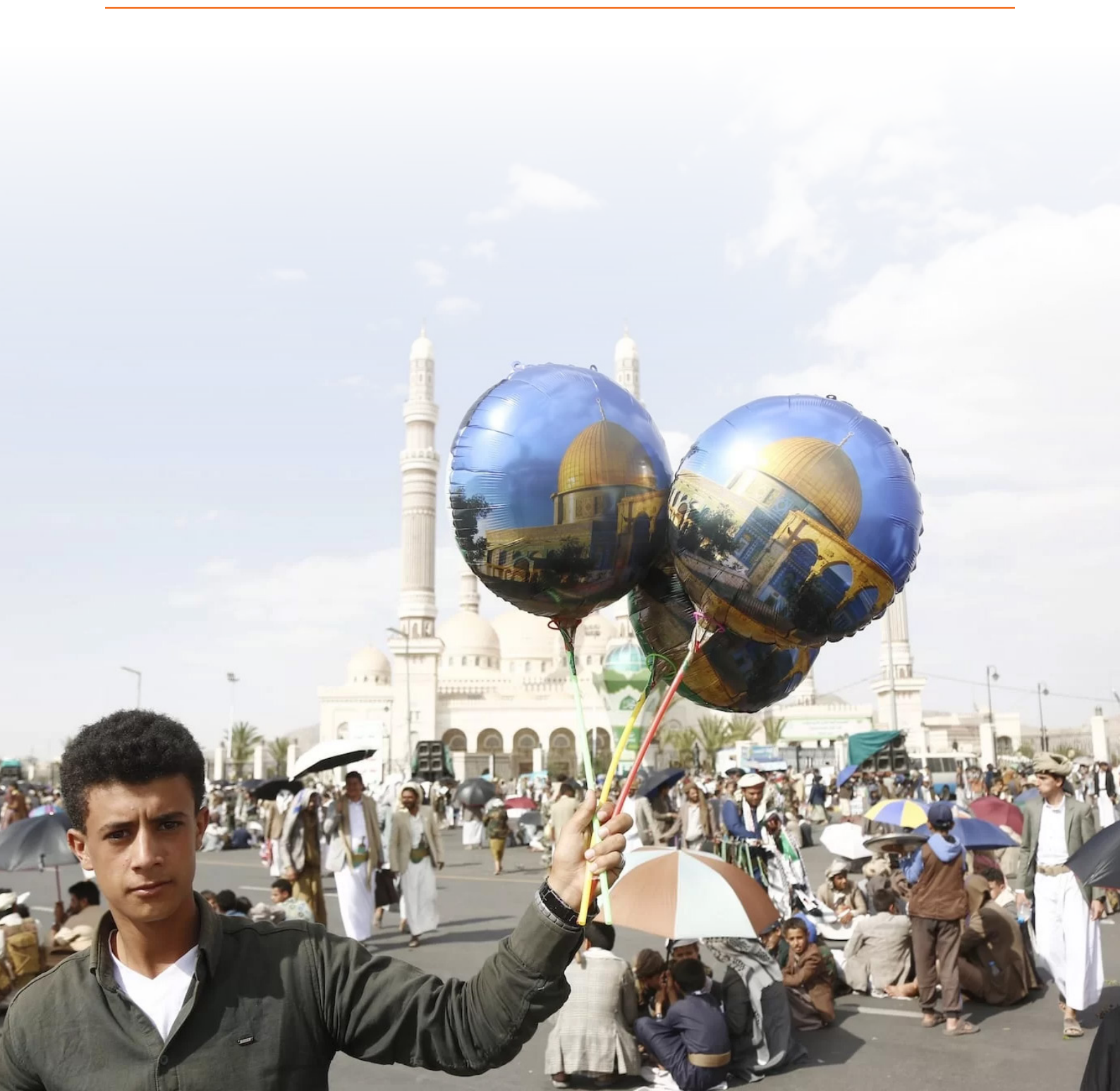


Israel's Genocide in Gaza Destabilizes Yemen and the Region



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By: Magnus Fitz

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Cover photo: A young man sells balloons bearing the image of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during a Houthis-organized demonstration in support of Iran, and against Israeli and American air-strikes, in Al-Sabaeen Square in Sana'a city on June 27, 2025 // 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.

The Middle East has been marked by escalating violence and deepening volatility since October 7, 2023. Hamas' assault against Israel opened the door for the realization of long-standing Israeli ambitions of a reconfigured region, which has fanned the flames of instability in several countries. In Gaza, these ambitions have been propelled not merely by Western indifference but by direct abetment. In Yemen, instability has manifested in Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and against Israel, which has invited direct military action by some of the world's great military powers.

The sum of Israel's wars—from Gaza and the West Bank to Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran—has been tens, if not **hundreds**, of thousands of deaths and immense destruction, sowing the seeds of future instability. In particular, the ongoing destruction of Gaza threatens to deal a death blow to the international rules-based order of the post-World War II era, the dire consequences of which the region and the world will grapple with for decades to come.

Before the US-Houthi ceasefire took effect on May 7, American warplanes carried out more than a **thousand** airstrikes on Yemen as part of Operation Rough Rider—the US campaign to counter the Houthis and restore freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. Throughout the eight weeks the campaign lasted, US bombs caused more than 700 reported civilian **casualties**. The bombing of a fuel storage facility at the port of **Ras Issa** in Hudaydah on April 18 killed more than 80 civilians (an “apparent war crime,” according to **Human Rights Watch**), and a strike against a **migrant detention center** in Sa'ada on April 28 killed at least 60 African migrants. Post-ceasefire, the Houthis have sustained their attacks against Israel, while Israeli airstrikes have continued to claim lives and damage critical infrastructure in Yemen. On June 10, the Israeli Navy **struck** the port of Hudaydah, and on June 14, the Israeli Air Force reportedly **targeted** Houthi military chief of staff Mohammed al-Ghamari. On July 6, around **20 Israeli fighter jets** carried out more than 50 strikes against Hudaydah and surrounding ports. The full extent of civilian harm from Israeli operations remains unreported.

While the bombs dropped on Yemen over the past three months have been American, **British**, and Israeli, the manner in which the Houthis have invited military action was intentionally conspicuous. The group may not have predicted the intensity, but it surely foresaw a military response when it **announced** it would resume attacks on shipping in March following Israel's decision to block the entry of aid into Gaza, and again directly after the US ceasefire, when the group **proclaimed** that the deal did not cover Israel and that its attacks in support of Gaza would continue. After all, former US President Joe Biden had, in close cooperation with the UK and with support from other allies, spent the last year of his term attempting to bomb the Houthis into submission, through **Operation Poseidon Archer**. In opting to escalate, despite the foreseeable risks to both their own ranks and civilians, the Houthis bear part of the responsibility for the compounded suffering of the population over which the group claims authority.

In understanding the cause of these airstrikes and the destruction they've wrought, Houthi agency is important. The Sana'a Center has reported extensively on the number of ways the Houthis have instrumentalized Gaza for political gain. The group has **cracked down on civil society**, ramped up its **recruitment of child soldiers**, **increased repression**, and **consolidated its position domestically** through increasingly authoritarian measures. No analysis is complete, however, without due attention to how Israeli aggression, with Western support, has served to destabilize the region while also creating political and moral space for actions such as those carried out by the Houthis.

The End of International Law

Through indiscriminate bombings and **weaponized hunger**, Israel has killed more than **57,000** Palestinians – potentially as many as 86,000, according to the recent **Gaza Mortality Survey** – since October 7, 2023. Food distribution sites operated by the Israel- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) have been turned into “**killing fields**,” according to a recent Haaretz exposé. As **reported** six months ago by UNRWA Senior Emergency Officer Louise Wateridge, Gaza has the highest number of child amputees per capita. Israel now stands **accused** of acts of genocide, the gravest of international crimes, and the most serious allegation that can be levied against a state. As the consensus grows among **international human rights** organizations, **legal experts**, and **genocide scholars** that the situation in Gaza demands such a characterization, so too does the moral justification for intervention.

Failure to prevent mass atrocities in Srebrenica in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s, followed by NATO's unauthorized (though seen as justified by NATO member states) intervention in Kosovo in 1999 to stop Serbian ethnic cleansing of the local Albanian population, ushered in an age of interventionist optimism. The “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) doctrine was formulated by the International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001, and adopted unanimously at the 2005 UN World Summit. The norm was subsequently **declared dead** by pundits following the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011, and again following the failure of the international community to respond to mass killings in Syria. Setting aside **important debates** around R2P's universality, very little differentiates what the Houthis are doing now—morally or methodologically—from the interventionism championed by Western states for most of the 21st century. Rather than a credit to the Houthis, this points to an abject failure of Western liberal democracies to enforce their own “rules-based order” and take meaningful steps toward ending the Palestinian genocide.

The response from Western states to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea has been predicated on upholding international law and the **protection of civilians**—protection that has been denied to civilians in Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, Western states set up legal and political instruments to prevent their recurrence; the Holocaust itself gave birth to “genocide” as a distinct legal category. As these instruments are all but abandoned by their very architects, international law—and the liberal international order itself—has become yet another casualty of the Palestinian genocide.

The political gains made by the Houthis from opposing Israeli actions are also a reflection of the timid positions taken by neighboring states. Political and economic elites in **Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey** have maintained ties with Israel. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan have, throughout the Red Sea crisis, **facilitated** Israeli trade via ports in the UAE and Bahrain. This disconnect between the region’s political leadership and the overwhelming public support for Palestinian liberation has allowed pro-Houthi sentiment to **grow exponentially**. A principled pro-Palestinian position was forfeited by regional states as a result of their deep entanglement with Israeli and US interests. This has severely constrained their ability to respond coherently to Houthi actions—even as they exact **significant tolls** on the region’s port economies.

Israel’s Wars in the Middle East

Aside from creating the political and moral space for military responses, Israel’s aggressive foreign policy—mirroring its **policy of terror** in the occupied Palestinian territories—is directly and indirectly serving to destabilize the region. Its invasion and bombardment of Lebanon have led to the **displacement** of more than 1.3 million people, out of an estimated population of 5.5 million. Following a ceasefire with Hezbollah in November 2024, Israel has sustained military operations in southern Lebanon, the sum of which has been nearly 3,000 **violations** and more than 200 deaths, **according** to Lebanese authorities. Defying the stipulations of the ceasefire, Israel continues to occupy **five strategic positions** in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military carried out **a series of airstrikes** on Beirut in late March and early April, and again in June, on the eve of Eid al-Adha, targeting alleged Hezbollah **drone-manufacturing sites**. On July 9, Israel **announced** new ground incursions into Lebanon, reportedly targeting Hezbollah infrastructure and personnel.

In neighboring Syria, in the immediate wake of the Assad regime’s fall in December 2024, Israel launched major, preemptive **military operations** to capture Syrian territory and destroy the country’s military capabilities. Over six months later, the Israeli military still holds positions in southern Syria, with the intention of staying **“for the foreseeable future.”** Airstrikes have continued to **target** Syrian military bases as well as cities, such as Damascus and the port city of Latakia, resulting in numerous casualties. Geir Pedersen, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, has **condemned** the airstrikes and called on Israel to “stop endangering Syrian civilians and to respect international law and Syria’s sovereignty.”

For the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the muted response from allied governments has been interpreted as *carte blanche* for further military action in the region. In the early hours of June 13, Israel launched its **long-awaited**, large-scale attack on Iran. The attacks targeted nuclear facilities, such as the Natanz uranium enrichment site, key nuclear scientists and military personnel, and **civilian sites**, such as the Iranian state broadcaster. Iran responded in kind, with missile barrages against Tel Aviv. The Houthis quickly **pledged** their full support for Iran, though the overall response was minimal, reportedly due to Iran's **wish** to prevent greater US intervention. The rationale for Israel's attack – that Iran is on the verge of developing nuclear weapons – was undermined by **US intelligence assessments** indicating that Tehran remains years away from acquiring nuclear arms and was not actively pursuing them.

As had been widely **reported**, Israel does not possess the so-called bunker-buster bombs necessary to decisively hit Iran's underground enrichment plant in Fordow, and as such, needed American help to **finish the job**. US President Donald Trump obliged on June 22, launching airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, including Fordow. While no comprehensive and independent impact assessment has been published, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Araghchi, **described** the damage as "serious and excessive." The sites, however, were unlikely to have been "completely and totally obliterated," as **claimed**. An early **Pentagon assessment**, **disparaged** by Trump, suggested that airstrikes failed to "destroy the core components of the country's nuclear program," although a later **assessment said** the strikes may have degraded Iran's nuclear program by up to two years. Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), **suggested** that Iran could resume its enrichment process within months.

The ceasefire enacted on June 24 appears to be holding, but tensions remain high, and Trump has **made it clear** that further bombardment of Iran is still an option. Despite US pressure, renewed negotiations on Iran's nuclear program have **yet to materialize**.

The **detrimental effects** of Iran's "**forward defense**" doctrine on regional stability have long been evident to observers of Yemen. However, the ongoing bombing campaign by Israel—the only nuclear power in the Middle East—and the US—the **second-greatest** nuclear power in the world—hardly reads as a credible non-proliferation strategy.

Palestinian Liberation is a Prerequisite For Regional Stability

Israel's endeavor to **reshape** the Middle East has been justified by its broad conceptualization of security—one that employs an elastic definition of threats and a maximalist interpretation of the measures permissible in responding to them. Yemen has hardly been insulated from the convulsions of ensuing Israeli militarism.

The political fragmentation and military imbalance that characterize Yemen's internal dynamics—exacerbated by environmental challenges and economic collapse—are enough to complicate any endeavor toward peace. But it is clear that these challenges are compounded by the destabilizing role Israel plays both domestically and regionally. The Red Sea crisis has transformed the international approach to Yemen to one viewed primarily through a security lens. The needs of Yemenis—**18 million** of whom require humanitarian assistance and 4.5 million of whom are displaced within their own country—have been sidelined by concerns for regional security and freedom of navigation. For Western states, their failure to hold Israel to account for its genocide in Gaza undermines their credibility as honest brokers in Yemen and further aggravates the country's already fragile political, military, and economic landscape.

Inevitably, Israel's military adventurism is generating political shockwaves whose outcomes are still unfolding. Conflict often initiates new cycles of violence, drives displacement and economic precarity, and fosters the growth and emergence of militant non-state actors. Much like the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 gave rise to the Islamic State a decade later, Israeli belligerency today is surely laying the groundwork for future conflicts, the full extent of which may not be understood for years.

Although it is politically convenient to compartmentalize the region's many crises, Yemen forcefully illustrates the extent to which geopolitics intertwine. As the peoples of the region wrestle with complex political and economic challenges, few of which can be attributed to a single cause, and none of which offer easy solutions, justice for Palestinians, based on principles enshrined in international law, remains the primary prerequisite for a peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

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This commentary is part of a series of publications produced by the Sana'a Center and funded by the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The series explores issues within economic, political, and environmental themes, aiming to inform discussion and policymaking related to Yemen that foster sustainable peace. Any views expressed within should not be construed as representing the Sana'a Center or the Dutch government.



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