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Cover photo: Yemeni demonstrators at Al-Sabaeen Square in Sana'a city hold up a poster of Iranian military officials during a Houthi-organized rally in support of Iran during its conflict with Israel on June 13, 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 12-day military confrontation between Israel, the US, and Iran has come to a halt. This was no ordinary exchange of fire; all parties employed their most advanced military capabilities, and both Iran and Israel suffered significant casualties, in addition to material and, perhaps more importantly, psychological losses.

After days of a relentless Israeli air campaign, the conflict's turning point came with the US **bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities** using B-2 strategic bombers. In turn, Tehran responded by **striking** the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar – an attack that caused no actual damage but was instead a symbolic gesture, aimed at saving face rather than intended to inflict harm. US President Donald Trump **announced** the cessation of hostilities shortly thereafter.

After a tenuous de-escalation, both parties eventually stepped back and began to assess their losses. Iran sustained severe damage to its infrastructure, as well as the loss of senior military figures and nuclear scientists. Its ballistic missile program also received major blows from Israeli strikes. Material damage was less severe in Israel, though the country faced a level of threat not experienced in decades. Air raid sirens rang almost constantly, and civilians spent much of the conflict in shelters. Reports also indicate that the frequency and intensity of Iranian strikes temporarily threatened to **deplete** Israel's stockpile of Arrow interceptor missiles, putting the country's defensive capabilities to the test.

The US entry into the battle, while seemingly abrupt, marked a deceptively calibrated approach, with strikes on Iran's nuclear capabilities intended to **balance** between delivering a sharp message to Tehran and preventing broader escalation. Any intensification could easily have **threatened** other countries in the region, particularly those hosting American military bases. It also risked pushing Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz or reigniting conflict around the Red Sea's vital Bab al-Mandab Strait.

On June 23, Trump **announced** the end of military operations between Iran and Israel, calling it "a comprehensive ceasefire agreement." In a separate post, Trump commented on Iran's retaliatory strike on Al-Udeid, describing it as an "extremely weak" response to the destruction of Iran's nuclear facilities. He noted that 14 missiles had been launched and subsequently intercepted. In the same post, Trump thanked Iran for notifying the United States in advance of the attack, which helped **prevent** any casualties and loss of life. President Trump also affirmed that the US strikes had "**obliterated**" Iran's nuclear program. However, this narrative was challenged by intelligence reports, which estimated that the strikes had merely **delayed** Iran's nuclear development, rather than eliminating it entirely.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu soon thereafter **declared** a historic victory, stating that Israel had neutralized "two existential threats – the threat of annihilation through nuclear weapons, and the threat of destruction from 20,000 ballistic missiles." Meanwhile, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, made his **first public appearance** since the war's outbreak, after spending much of

the conflict underground in secure facilities. He proclaimed that Iran had emerged victorious and emphasized that the United States had received a “powerful slap,” asserting that the world had failed to break Iran’s will. The resulting narratives, with the US, Israel, and Iran each congratulating themselves on a victory, were a clash of triumphal discourses.

Amid the power politics, Yemen’s Houthi group (Ansar Allah) entered the fray in an effort to **amplify** Tehran’s narrative of victory over what it calls the “forces of global hegemony and arrogance.” For the Houthis, the war between Israel and Iran was not merely a regional confrontation; it was a strategic moment to reaffirm their image as a strong and central player within the Axis of Resistance. As with previous confrontations, Houthi rhetoric during the conflict crafted a carefully curated narrative that links endurance to victory. This explains why, for years, the group has been **determined** to maintain ongoing friction with Israel: for the Houthis, vis-à-vis Tehran, the failure of Washington and Tel Aviv to decisively win the war is a success for the Axis powers. This posture has served not only to elevate the group’s standing within the Axis of Resistance (especially after November 2023) but also provides a pretext for the group to further **securitize** territories under its control and **develop** its military capabilities.

Houthi Involvement: Moral Support Over Military Involvement

During the confrontation between Iran and Israel, Houthi military performance was markedly limited, particularly when compared to the period preceding the Trump administration’s air campaign, when missiles and drones were launched toward Israel on a near daily basis. Instead, the group chose a deliberately cautious approach, opting to avoid triggering any major military engagement. While their missile and drone capabilities have proven capable — occasionally **reaching targets** deep inside Israel — they remain insufficient to produce a meaningful shift in the balance of power in a regional conflict such as that which unfolded.

According to a Yemeni security source, US strikes from March to May led to the significant depletion of the Houthis’ missile stockpiles. American airstrikes under Operation Rough Rider targeted several key storage facilities, launch platforms, and manufacturing workshops. The source noted that some of the large depots hidden in mountainous areas were not completely destroyed, but emphasized that the airstrikes succeeded in sealing off access points, leaving the Houthis unable to reach or reuse them to this day.

Wearied from months of a prolonged campaign and aware of the threat of escalation, the Houthis directed their attention instead toward a media and political campaign in support of Iran. On June 13, as Israeli strikes on Iran commenced, the Houthi Political Bureau was **quick to issue a statement** condemning Israeli aggression and affirming Tehran’s full and legitimate right to respond. Both official and unofficial **voices** in the Houthi-controlled capital of Sana’a echoed such condemnations. Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a senior figure in the group, **declared** that the Israeli strikes on Iran were sufficient proof of “the Zionist enemy’s barbarity and terrorism.”

But Houthi rhetorical support was not limited to condemnations and post-strike comments. Even before the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Iran, an official in the Houthi-aligned Defense Ministry **warned** Israel to tread lightly, stating that the group possessed multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) designed specifically to bypass and overwhelm Israeli air defenses – the first time the Houthis claimed to possess such technology. The announcement mirrored Iranian remarks that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had **unveiled** a multi-warhead “Kheibar” missile for the first time. Such statements are no coincidence; the Houthis often issue warnings and messages that serve as indirect channels for Iran to communicate strategic signals to its adversaries.

Support for Tehran began to creep into Houthi domestic rhetoric as well. During the June 13 “million man march” – weekly demonstrations in Sana’a which the group uses to project an image of popular support for its political decisions and positions – protesters **denounced** Israeli aggression and affirmed Iran’s legitimate right to respond. On June 20, additional **demonstrations** were held under the slogan: “Steadfast with Gaza and Iran Against Zionist-American Crimes.” Participants expressed their support for Tehran’s response to Israeli aggression, waved Iranian flags, and affirmed the unity of the cause and their shared stance in confronting the “common enemy.”

At the height of the escalation, on June 21, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea **announced** that the group would target American ships and warships in the Red Sea if the United States participated in any attack on Iran. This was the first official statement clearly signaling a potential return to targeting maritime navigation, following Trump’s decision to **cease** US military operations in Yemen in May, under the agreement that the Houthis would concurrently end attacks on American vessels. Sarea’s hefty threats were accompanied by ominous statements from the president of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, Mahdi al-Mashat, who **declared** that “Yemen will confront any potential aggression against Iran with all legitimate means,” and warned that “fire will reach every country” involved in supporting the aggression against Iran. However, such statements appeared to be nothing more than empty threats, as the group refrained from any confrontation despite US attacks on Iran crossing the group’s red line. Iran, too, was called out on a bluff, after the IRGC issued hollow **warnings** that it would target any ship carrying weapons or providing support to Israel.

Following the end of the Iran-Israel confrontation, Houthi leaders were quick to extend congratulations to Tehran: Al-Mashat conveyed his **congratulations** to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on what he described as Iran’s “victory” over the United States and Israel, while the group’s leader, Abdelmalek al-Houthi, **congratulated** Tehran on what he called a “great victory” over the Israeli enemy. Al-Houthi was careful to co-opt Iran’s performance, calling it a triumph for the entire Islamic world. He emphasized that the defeat suffered by the Israeli occupation and its Western partners marked a strategic shift in favor of the Axis of Resistance. He added that any effort to topple or subjugate Iran’s Islamic regime was futile, affirming that Yemen stands as a partner, offering all that it can.

The Houthis continued their efforts to mobilize societal and popular support for Iran following the conflict's end. The capital Sana'a, along with several other areas under Houthi control, witnessed **massive rallies** under the slogan: "Celebrating Iran's Victory, Standing Firm with Gaza Until Triumph." The crowds expressed their support for both the Palestinian and Iranian peoples, framing Iran's victory over the Zionist and American enemies as a victory for the entire Islamic nation.

Attacks Against Israel Resume

Four days after the conclusion of the Iran-Israel confrontation, the Houthis **resumed** regular military operations against Israel with a missile attack targeting the town of Be'er Sheva. Two days later, the group **announced** a series of missile and drone attacks, signaling a return to its pre-conflict policy of near-daily attacks. Houthi military spokesman Sarea even suggested that the group had been quietly launching projectiles for days, a claim which seems to match Israeli statements that they had **downed** a drone as early as June 25.

Israeli officials have previously described Houthi attacks as nothing more than "a pesky **fly**." In response to small Houthi penetrations of Israeli defenses, Israel has repeatedly launched destructive blows to Houthi infrastructure and ports. Following the July 1 Houthi attacks, which **triggered** a number of alert sirens across Tel Aviv, Defense Minister Israel Katz **declared** that Yemen's fate would mirror that of Iran. He stated that Israel had "struck the head of the snake in Tehran" and would now strike its tail in Yemen, adding that "any hand raised against Israel will be cut off." Following the third Houthi operation, which targeted Ben Gurion Airport, **Israeli** forces carried out airstrikes on the morning of July 7, striking the ports of Hudaydah, Ras Issa, and Al-Salif, as well as a power station in the Al-Katheeb area.

Even following the repeated destruction of Houthi infrastructure, the group has continued its rhetorical posturing. Following the Israeli strikes, the group issued a statement **reassuring** its domestic supporters that it could easily withstand Israeli attacks. The group would rebuild, and more importantly, strikes had not impacted their ability to launch operations in defense of Gaza. Houthi Sarea went so far as to allege that the group had **intercepted** Israeli projectiles with locally made surface-to-air missiles, which had "surprised" and "disoriented" Israeli pilots.

Where Are Things Heading?

The Iran-Israel war sparked a clash of conflicting narratives, within which the Houthis emerged as the most assertive and forceful arm in Iran's Axis of Resistance. The group distinguished itself by openly reaffirming its allegiance to Tehran at a time when other factions appeared to **retreat**. Not only did the group differentiate itself with a limited attack during a political charged period, but it waged an important narrative battle clearly aimed at supporting Tehran. But even more importantly, Houthi rhetoric also served to further the group's own goals within the Axis, reflecting a growing ambition and desire to distinguish itself as a cohesive and influential unit, particularly given the gap left by the late Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. As such, during the Israel-Iran conflict, Houthi discourse made an important shift from "supporting Gaza" to "supporting Gaza and Iran." Such a shift ultimately serves the Houthis' own narrative — both to domestic and external audiences — that they are not merely a local faction, but an integral part of a broader struggle for the Muslim nation.

The more the Houthis demonstrate their capacity to engage symbolically and operationally in broader regional conflicts, or to continue disrupting global trade routes, the greater their importance will rise in the eyes of regional and international actors — including Riyadh, Washington, Tel Aviv, and Tehran. Domestically, this behavior and broader strategy allow the Houthis to frame the economic hardship and deteriorating living conditions faced by civilians in their areas as the "price of victory," recasting the struggle as justification for the ongoing failure to provide basic services.

On the other side, Israel — as reflected in statements by its defense minister — has explicitly linked the events in Iran to what could unfold in Yemen, following the resumption of Houthi operations threatening Israeli targets. Militarily, Israel may now find itself more at ease in carrying out its threats, especially with its confrontation with Tehran temporarily halted, allowing it to redirect its strike capabilities toward more intense operations in Yemen. As a result, the Houthis find themselves navigating an increasingly complex equation — one that balances rhetorical overreach against the limits of their capabilities, regional ambitions against mounting domestic economic pressures, and the allure of playing the role of external resistance against the necessity of consolidating internal legitimacy and governance.

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