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Strategic Estimates



The Houthis' Position on the Iranian-Israeli Escalation

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As confrontations between Israel and Iran verge on the threshold of open warfare—following Israel's large-scale offensive on 13 June, which targeted nuclear and military facilities and culminated in the assassination of several senior Iranian commanders—the Middle East stands precariously close to a new phase of volatility, marked by far-reaching repercussions and scenarios shaped by chronic instability. Within this volatile landscape, urgent questions have emerged concerning the position of Yemen's Houthi movement regarding the current escalation phase. These questions have gained heightened significance in recent months, as the Houthis have positioned themselves as an active front in the confrontation with Israel, amid enduring ties of strategic alignment and ideological subordination to the Iranian regime. This paper aims to address these questions by analysing the key characteristics underpinning the group's engagement with the latest developments and exploring the strategic and ideological factors shaping its approach to the ongoing escalation cycle.

First: How Have the Houthis Responded to the Current Escalation?

The Houthi movement in Yemen has solidified its position as one of the principal pillars of the so-called «Axis of Resistance,» particularly through its sustained military escalation against Israel since the launch of Operation Flood of al-Aqsa on 7 October 2023. This front has assumed increasing strategic importance, as it remains the only arena where the trajectory of confrontation with Israel is still unfolding. The group has consistently adhered to what it terms a “policy of support for Gaza,” positioning itself as an active participant in the broader confrontation.

Within this framework, several defining

features have emerged in the Houthis' approach to the ongoing Iranian-Israeli escalation, which can be summarised as follows:

1- Signalling a “Qualitative Escalation”:

Amid indications that Israel was preparing to launch precision strikes against Iran and its nuclear facilities, the Houthi group issued a statement on 11 June suggesting the potential deployment of more advanced and effective missile systems—reportedly still withheld from use. Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the group's so-called “Political Council,” warned that forthcoming attacks would be less restrained. He also urged foreign embassies in Israel to avoid maintaining headquarters near likely targets



and called on diplomatic missions to coordinate with the group in identifying high-risk locations.

Although these statements coincided with reports of Israeli intentions to strike Iran, they appear to have been primarily driven by local dynamics on the Houthis' front with Israel. Several indicators support this interpretation. The remarks followed intense Israeli attacks on the Port of Hodeidah, during which Tel Aviv employed naval missiles for the first time. They were also issued shortly after threats from Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant to impose a naval and aerial blockade on Houthi-held territories. This context suggests that the Houthi rhetoric was largely reactive—prompted by Israeli actions and aimed at bolstering morale among the group's support base. While prior Houthi attacks may have yielded some symbolic impact on Israel, they have not resulted in significant casualties. Thus, the group appears keen to signal that it retains untapped military capabilities that could pose a more substantial threat.

2- A Delayed Political Endorsement of Iran:

In the late hours of Saturday, 14 June, the Houthi leadership issued a political statement expressing alignment with Iran. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi declared that his group supported Iran's response and "stands as a partner with Iran in this position with all its capabilities." He portrayed the Israeli strikes on the

Islamic Republic as part of a broader Western campaign aimed at dismantling what he described as an "independent model" supportive of the Palestinian cause. Al-Houthi characterised the Israeli actions as "brazen, criminal, and thuggish," alleging that they violated all international norms and humanitarian principles. He described the assault as a deliberate attack on Iranian military commanders, nuclear scientists, and the Iranian population at large.

He further welcomed the widespread condemnation by Arab and Islamic countries of the Israeli strikes, describing it as "a positive and commendable step," and called for "political, media, and all forms of support to be aligned with the Islamic Republic, which is the party under attack." Al-Houthi also cautioned that "an assault on Iran carries consequences for the entire region."

In parallel, the Houthis' Supreme Political Council issued a strongly worded condemnation of what it termed "the flagrant Zionist aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran." The statement reaffirmed Iran's right to deliver a deterrent response to what was described as "reckless aggression." It framed the Israeli strikes as a consequence of Iran's principled and steadfast support for the Palestinian cause.

In a related development, senior Houthi figure Mohammed al-Bukhaiti stated on 17 June that the group would intervene in support of Iran against Israel, just as



it had previously intervened in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. He also referenced ongoing coordination with Tehran amid its continued military escalation with Israel. In a similar vein, Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthis' Supreme Political Council, asserted that "Iran has the full right to target the interests of any country that collaborates with the Zionist enemy in its acts of aggression," as he put it. He added that "Iran is not an easy target; it possesses sufficient capabilities to respond and enjoys extensive relations and agreements with many countries," according to statements disseminated by Houthi-affiliated platforms.

These statements reflect several key implications, particularly regarding the delayed activation of the Houthi "card" during the current escalation. This delay appears consistent with Iran's prevailing strategy, which may be described as "calibrated and incremental deployment of pressure instruments." These instruments include a network of aligned armed groups across the region, foremost among them the Houthis. In this context, Iran appears to be deliberately withholding the activation of such proxies to preserve them for use in subsequent phases of the confrontation.

3- Israel's Attempt to Assassinate the Houthis' Chief of Staff:

One of the most prominent manifestations of the Iranian-Israeli escalation with relevance to the Yemeni

front surfaced when Hebrew-language media reported that the Israeli Air Force had conducted an assassination operation in Yemen. Israel's public broadcaster cited an official source stating that, if successful, the operation would carry significant strategic implications. Additional reports quoted Israeli officials as confirming that the target of the operation was the Chief of Staff of the Houthi armed forces, Mohammed Abdul Karim al-Ghamari. Notably, the Israeli airstrikes in Yemen coincided with parallel strikes carried out inside Iran.

The significance of this operation rests on several key considerations. First, it marked Israel's initial direct military action against the Houthis since the onset of the current Iranian-Israeli escalation. Second, it constituted Israel's first known attempt to assassinate a senior Houthi military figure. Third, the operation appears to have been designed to achieve one of two objectives: either Israel had acquired actionable intelligence regarding the whereabouts of senior Houthi leadership and sought to capitalise on this window of opportunity, or it intended—through the strike—to provoke a retaliatory escalation by the Houthis in concert with Iran, thereby increasing pressure on the United States to intervene more decisively in the ongoing confrontation.

Second: Determinants Shaping the Houthis' Position

As of the time of writing, the Houthi



movement has adopted a largely cautious posture regarding the ongoing escalation between Israel and Iran. This stance is informed by a series of key considerations and underlying determinants, which can be summarised as follows:

1- Iran's State of Disarray:

The recent Israeli attack carried a significant element of surprise, with most assessments suggesting that Iran was strategically deceived. This led, most notably, to the assassination of several senior Iranian military commanders. It appears that the Houthi group has not yet received new directives regarding the anticipated escalation—whether in the form of intensifying missile and drone attacks or resuming operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. This delay also appears to be linked to the wave of assassinations targeting high-ranking Iranian military figures, particularly those responsible for managing Iran's external networks and regional proxies. Most notable among them was Major General Hossein Salami, the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

2-Iran's Approach to the Israeli Escalation:

The Houthis' restrained stance toward the current escalation cannot be separated from Tehran's broader strategy in managing the latest Israeli strikes. Available indicators suggest that Iran is relying on three core pillars. First, it is continuing its policy

of “strategic patience” combined with a gradual and calibrated escalation designed to minimise the costs of confrontation while avoiding—for the time being—an all-out conflict that would cross established red lines. Second, like other Iranian proxies in the region, the Houthis operate strictly within the boundaries of Iranian directives, which means the group is effectively awaiting updated instructions from Tehran. Third, Iran appears determined to retain specific pressure tools and qualitative assets for use in later stages of the confrontation, indicating a deliberate decision to delay the activation of regional proxies at this phase.

3-Considerations Related to the US Factor:

The Houthis' continued caution is closely tied to the American factor on multiple levels. Most notably, the group seems unwilling—for now—to violate the informal agreement reached with the U.S. administration through Omani mediation, particularly through any uncalculated actions in the Red Sea. Furthermore, any renewed Houthi escalation in the Red Sea or direct targeting of American interests would almost certainly prompt a resumption of US strikes—potentially more forceful than previous responses—against Houthi positions.

4- Fear of Intelligence Exposure:

In light of Israel's apparent deep intelligence penetration of Iran—



demonstrated by the recent Israeli operations and accompanying targeted assassinations—as well as Hezbollah's experience with similar breaches, the Houthis appear increasingly concerned about the risk of “intelligence exposure” to Israel. Such a scenario would place both senior and mid-level leadership under a serious threat of assassination. These concerns are reflected in the group's reluctance to engage more actively in the current escalation and have prompted the adoption of heightened precautionary and security measures to protect its leadership.

Overall, the extent of Houthi involvement in the ongoing escalation between Iran and Israel is likely to remain contingent upon several key factors—chief among them the degree of direct US engagement in the conflict and Iran's capacity to absorb pressure without resorting to the full mobilisation of its regional assets, foremost among which are the Houthis. What remains certain, however, is that should Iran reach a critical threshold of pressure and attrition, it is likely to activate all of its proxies and instruments, perceiving the conflict at that stage as an existential struggle for the survival of the regime in Tehran.

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