

# US should be skeptical about ‘Iran-backed’ fighters

  
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Israel carried out air strikes on August 28 that killed the civilian political leaders of Yemen’s Ansarullah (Houthi) movement. Though they grossly violated international law, the bombings were nonetheless celebrated in Washington. Corporate media like The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal reported the strikes as a “symbolic and psychological blow” that demonstrated “improved Israeli intelligence” against the Houthis and their Iranian sponsors, while neocons like Mark Dubowitz of the mysteriously funded Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a pro-Israel think tank, applauded the attack on the “Houthi-controlled terror leadership”. But despite the “mission accomplished” attitude from Israel and its neoconservative loyalists in America, the attacks will likely do very little to stop the Houthis, whose campaigns reflect Yemen’s own history of resistance rather than Iranian control. The group remains extraordinarily independent, producing much of its own weaponry and pursuing a strategy driven by its own political grievances with Israel and the United States. Their central grievance is the US-backed Israeli genocide and famine currently being perpetrated against the Palestinians in Gaza, with whom the Houthis identify — because, as political scientist Norman Finkelstein explains, “What was done to Gaza was done to them.” Before Israel set out to fulfill the demands of its ultra-nationalist politicians to “destroy all of Gaza’s infrastructure to its foundation” and “erase the Gaza strip from the Earth,” Yemen was the country considered to have the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with over 23 million people in need of humanitarian assistance by 2022. Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, like Gaza’s today, has been entirely man-made. More specifically, it has been perpetrated by Saudi Arabia, the US, and Israel. They imposed a brutal blockade and bombing campaign that reportedly caused the deaths of nearly 377,000 people in Yemen between 2015 and 2021, more than 85,000 of whom were children who starved to death. The Houthis’ identification with the Palestinians of Gaza is therefore neither rooted in religious “fundamentalism” nor in subservience to Tehran — it reflects a deep sense of solidarity forged through parallel suffering at the hands of US-backed clients in the Middle East. This explains why, despite the assassination of its civilian leadership, the Houthis have vowed to “escalate [their] operations as long as Israel continues its policy of genocide and starvation”. The corporate media largely ignores these motivations, obfuscating the political grievances of Israel’s enemies by recasting them as irrational and intrac-



Protesters, mainly Ansarullah (Houthi) supporters, demonstrate in support of Palestinians in Gaza, at Sabeen Square in Sanaa, Yemen, on August 29, 2025. ● REUTERS

table. Treating the Houthis as mere Iranian proxies has about as much explanatory power — and serves the same propagandistic function — as George W. Bush’s claim that America suffered the 9/11 attacks because “they hate us for our freedoms.” By erasing the role of US military action on behalf of Israel in generating the very groups that threaten it, Israel and its American lobby are able to portray Houthi attacks as further evidence of a region-wide Iranian conspiracy to destroy Israel. This Axis of Resistance, the story goes, simply can’t be reasoned with and potentially threatens the United States as well, therefore requiring unlimited funds and unconditional support from American taxpayers. As the Israeli cabinet pushes President Donald Trump to attack its regional adversaries, Washington ought to be skeptical of Israel’s intelligence about them, especially regarding the purported threat posed by the so-called “Iran-backed” network of fighter groups. It was with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s encour-

agement that the US launched its own air campaign against Yemen in March, an intense bombing which failed to deter Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping lanes but killed hundreds of civilians. That bombing campaign revealed, among other things, that US and Israeli intelligence on Yemen remains outdated and often wildly inaccurate. Revealing their ignorance of Houthi operations, the Pentagon may even have relied on anonymous X accounts to coordinate targeting, a method that led directly to air strikes that killed innocent civilians. Further evidence of US and Israeli ignorance is the continued deployment of expensive MQ-9 Reaper drones over Yemen, dozens of which have been shot down by Houthi surface-to-air missiles. That the Pentagon is willing to risk hundreds of millions of dollars on these missions underscores how little Washington actually knows about Houthi capabilities and positions. Yet despite the demonstrable shortcomings of Israeli and American intelligence, US analysts continue to treat the

Houthis as directed by Iran and motivated by Islamic fundamentalism. Even attacks on American MQ-9 drones are routinely cited as proof of Tehran’s vast arms-smuggling network, which we are told supplies the Houthis with the SAM missiles to bring the drones down. But as reporting from Drop Site News and other independent media has shown, the Houthi movement produces a substantial portion of its own weaponry, rendering it largely independent of foreign support. That the Houthis keep their arsenals and bases well-hidden and fortified helps to explain why Israel chose to target the Houthis’ civilian political leadership rather than its military commanders. Houthi self-sufficiency exposes a striking irony: While the Houthi arsenal is in large measure indigenously produced, Israel’s weaponry is mostly foreign-made and funded by American taxpayers. Like the bombs that drop every month or so in Syria and Lebanon and every day in Gaza, the bombs that fall on Yemen are financed by Washington.

The persistence of Houthi operations, despite assassination campaigns, bombings, and sanctions, demonstrates that their movement will not be stopped with bombs and bullets. As Trump himself acknowledged after concluding his own air strikes on Yemen, even though “we hit them very hard,” the Houthis have “a great capacity to withstand punishment,” adding that “there’s a lot of bravery there.” The fortitude and capabilities of the Houthis cannot be explained away by alleged Iranian control. To reduce them to Tehran’s puppets is to erase their actual grievances and the solidarity with Gaza that drives their campaign. It is precisely their shared suffering — not foreign directives — that explains why the Houthis have been more willing than any other group in the region to take up arms for Gaza, and why Washington’s blank-check support for Israel’s wars will not stop them. Indeed, it will only deepen their resolve.

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A student stands in the ruins of one of his former classrooms, which was destroyed in June 2015, at the Aal Okab school in Saada, Yemen. Students continue their lessons in UNICEF tents nearby. ● GILES CLARKE/UNOCHA