



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Iran will not directly intervene in conflicts in the region, but how long will it be able to control its proxies?



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The government in Tehran reacted indifferently, even formally, to the US and UK air strikes on the Houthi military infrastructure in Yemen.

Tehran's **criticism** stating that the US and the UK committed a "clear violation of Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and a breach of international laws" by attacking the positions of the Houthis sounded as if it was coming from a distant country not affected by the conflict.

However, Iran is at the very centre of tensions in the Red Sea region, just as it is behind all other current conflicts in the Middle East through its militant branches.

The regime in Tehran expected the US and UK military response to come after 2 months of Houthi attacks on merchant and military ships in the Red Sea region.

Iran directly provoked the action of the Western allies last Thursday by supporting its Yemeni military branch.

Hence, only a formal reaction to the action of the Western alliance came from Tehran, without much zeal for revenge and calls for a fight against the "Satan".

## Warning that the defensive is over

Iran will not get directly involved in the armed conflicts raging across the region, even after the 2 largest allied Western armies have done so by striking Houthi targets in Yemen.

The response by the US, UK and a coalition of several other armies participating in the Red Sea operation came as a warning to Tehran that allies will not be on the defensive forever, given that Iran's proxy in Yemen has been blocking one of the most significant global maritime arteries.

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The coalition led by the US Army has already concentrated a large combat force in the region, showing that it is sufficient for deterrence and, as of 2 days ago, for offensive actions.

Tehran has been avoiding a significant conflict with the West in its own backyard, which is why its direct participation in regional crises is unlikely and almost entirely excluded.

On the other hand, all Iranian proxies in the region are operating in full force and have shown that they have the capacity to destabilise the entire area. Iran's support for their actions is constant, given that it has been involved in all phases, from planning to operational management.

## Synchronised escalation

The Houthis' attacks on ships in the Red Sea came after Hezbollah attacked northern Israel and actions by pro-Iranian groups on US and allied targets in Syria and Iraq.

In this synchronised action of pro-Iranian militants across the Middle East, the centre stage belonged to Hamas and its attack on Israel on October 7, followed by its war against Israeli forces in Gaza.

After these events, Tehran realised its intention to escalate the conflict in Gaza in a broad area of the Middle East while remaining out of the picture, leaving the "dirty work" to its combat satellites throughout the region.

Since the terrorist attacks on Israel and the military response that followed, Iran has reduced the intensity of the provocations carried out by militias loyal to it. This is why there were only occasional and limited attacks

by Hezbollah on the territory of Israel and similar actions in Syria and Iraq.

### The US-led coalition's strikes on Houthi positions marked the end of a strategy of restrained responses to attacks by pro-Iranian forces in the region

Tehran's **principal goal** was to raise military tensions at several points and to put pressure on Israel to stop its action against Hamas, particularly for Israel to fail in its intention to eliminate this pro-Iranian faction as a factor in the Palestinian camp.

The Houthi military campaign went in the same direction so that the disruption of navigation in the Red Sea would make the allies put more pressure on Israel to end its anti-Hamas operation in Gaza.

However, the US-led coalition's strikes on Houthi positions marked the end of a strategy of restrained responses to attacks by pro-Iranian forces in the region, particularly in Syria and Iraq.

US troops responded only 10 times to as many as 130 attacks to which they have been exposed in Syria and Iraq since October 7.

## Destabilisation has reached its maximum

Through its 10 military proxies in 6 countries of the region, Iran has achieved the maximum escalation of the conflict in Gaza and its spill over into the broader area. It has succeeded in what the majority of Arab neighbours wanted to avoid as the greatest danger to the region's stability since October 7.

The interests of some of them, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to maintain an increase of economic activities with stability have been severely threatened in the long term.

Iran does not want to get directly involved in current conflicts as long as its proxies do the job satisfactorily. However, it is not definitive whether Iran will be able to control them to the full extent in the future, particularly if it decides to call on them to de-escalate at some point.



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That moment might come with the end of the Israeli operation in Gaza and the beginning of the process of building a new governance architecture in the Palestinian territories. Iran will want to influence that process, but it will not be able to do so as long as it acts as the principal factor in the destabilisation of the entire region.

At the same time, the attacks by US and allied forces on Houthi positions are also a message that the idea of an endless spill over of conflict throughout the Middle East region is over. After that, Iran and its proxies no longer have the scope and resources for any new escalation.

The only potential new zone of conflict remains the forcible blockade of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, but Tehran has no remaining proxy available for such an action. It would have to participate in this directly, which means direct engagement against the Western allies.

Iran has been avoiding this since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Since then, it has been building a network of satellite military and

political organisations throughout the Middle East to exert its destabilising influence on the region through them, and not directly.

An allied attack on Houthi positions in Yemen could be the point from which Tehran would start de-escalation through its tentacles in the region.