

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Yemen Crisis

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Abstract

In recent decades, Yemen has continuously been an arena for complex conflicts and confrontations among political-religious groups, tribes, and domestic actors. Furthermore, the country's geopolitical and strategic location has prompted extensive intervention by foreign powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United States, in its domestic affairs. Meanwhile, the religious affinities between the Ansarullah movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran, coupled with Tehran's political and media support, have reinforced perceptions and assumptions regarding a religious and geopolitical rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia as two pivotal regional actors. Additionally, the prospect of a government aligned with Iran emerging in Yemen—a country historically perceived by Riyadh as its strategic backyard—has intensified Saudi Arabia's security and political anxieties. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran defines its engagement in Yemen's developments and revolution, much like its other foreign policy domains, based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution; a discourse that aims to support popular demands, restore the violated rights of the Yemeni nation, and counter foreign hegemony and intervention. Utilizing an analytical-explanatory method, this study seeks to answer the pivotal question: What are the foreign policy strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the Yemeni Axis of Resistance? The findings indicate that by assessing the opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses of its influence in Yemen, Iran employs a combination of political, economic, cultural, and military-security strategies. Through supporting aligned political groups and factions, Iran endeavors to shift the regional balance of power in favor of the Yemeni Front of Resistance.

Keywords: Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Yemen, Ansarullah, Axis of Resistance.

Introduction

The Islamic Revolution, as a transformative discourse inspired by authentic Islam and the intellectual legacy of Imam Khomeini, has exerted profound and enduring influence on thinkers, leaders of Islamic movements, and popular uprisings across the Muslim world, serving as a model for political systems and freedom-seeking movements. One of the most significant achievements of the Islamic Revolution has been the formation of the "discourse of resistance" in the region, which has reinforced collective opposition to hegemonic powers and tyrannical regimes in West Asia. Given that the export of the revolution, the cultivation of influence among oppressed nations, and the expansion of the ideals and values of the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's geographical borders have constituted central objectives of the revolutionary project, the resistance front represents one of the operationalized models for exporting the revolution. Prominent examples of this model are observable in Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Palestinian and Iraqi Islamic resistance groups, the Ansarullah movement in Yemen, and resistance networks in Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In Shia-majority countries, Iran's proxy political strategies have focused on promoting Shia solidarity, often articulated within a sectarian framework (Kasapoglu & Fekry, 2020, p. 10).

In this context, the emergence of new political developments in Yemen following the Islamic Awakening of 2011 has assumed particular importance for the Islamic Republic of Iran, owing to Yemen's strategic geographic position and the presence of a substantial Shia population. As an active regional actor and aspiring hegemon, Iran has sought to secure its regional interests since the onset and escalation of the Yemen crisis. Iran's role in Yemen is oriented toward achieving hegemony and enhancing its regional standing to safeguard its interests, even at the cost of imposing threats and pressures on its adversaries (Taha, 2022, p. 78). Consequently, throughout Yemen's political and social transformations, Iran and Saudi Arabia have adopted opposing positions rooted in their distinct objectives and interests. Iran's advisory and political support for Yemen's revolutionaries—particularly the Ansarullah movement—contrasts sharply with Saudi Arabia's and certain Gulf Cooperation Council members' efforts to stabilize the status quo and consolidate the power of the previous government's affiliates. This divergence has rendered Yemen's political trajectory a matter of strategic significance for both regional powers (Nejat, 2016, p. 139).

The Islamic Republic of Iran, by closely monitoring developments in Yemen, endeavors to prevent the escalation of the crisis through the preservation and enhancement of the resistance axis security complex and the expansion of cooperation and interaction with regional and international actors. From the outset of the Yemen crisis, Tehran has consistently maintained that the conflict cannot be resolved through military means and that a political solution can only be achieved through dialogue and negotiation. In general, the Yemen resistance front has generated numerous strategic outcomes, including the stabilization and development of regional security for front members, the formation and consolidation of a new regional power and security structure, the defeat of terrorism at its point of origin, and the prevention of the collapse of Yemen's political system. Moreover, the active presence of resistance groups in the region has created a secure strategic margin for Iran and reinforced the resilience of the resistance discourse (Roomi et al., 2024, p. 537).

However, Iran's involvement in Yemen has not been without challenges. Numerous obstacles impede its active and effective role in the country; some of these challenges have been deliberately manufactured by states opposed to the Islamic Republic, while others arise naturally from the complexities of Iran's engagement in Yemen. Identifying these challenges and formulating appropriate strategies to exploit opportunities and counter threats constitutes the analytical framework for stabilizing Iran's presence in the resistance axis on the Yemen front. The Islamic Republic of Iran, in order to secure its national security and stabilize its influence in Yemen's strategic depth in the face of "Western-Hebrew-Arab" threats, and in alignment with the doctrine of "threat in response to threat" articulated by Ayatollah Khamenei, requires a coherent set of strategies for sustaining its influence in the Yemen resistance front. This imperative constitutes the central concern of the present study. Accordingly, the principal research question is: what strategies can be formulated for stabilizing and sustaining the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Yemen resistance front, and what are the environmental and peripheral conditions that affect this process?

In the following sections, the study will first review the relevant literature and research methodology, then examine the opportunities, challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of Iran's position in Yemen, and finally present a set of strategic recommendations. This research employs an analytical-explanatory method, aiming to infer, analyze, and explain Iran's foreign policy strategies in Yemen through the

dissection of existing strategic documents. Data collection has been conducted through documentary methods, with a focus on scientific-specialized library research, including academic articles, journals, theses, reports, books, and media sources. The study has also sought to incorporate and critically engage with the perspectives of academic thinkers, experts, and relevant research centers. Given that the outcome of this research is the presentation of strategies, no specific hypothesis has been formulated. The temporal scope of the research spans from the onset of Yemen's Islamic Awakening in 2011 to 2022. The spatial scope is confined to Yemen, and the subject scope encompasses the foreign policy strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the country.

1. Conceptual Framework

One of the fundamental issues after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of the Islamic Revolution's ideals in foreign policy was the export of the revolution and support for the oppressed and liberation movements worldwide, especially in the Islamic world. In 2011, following the spread of the Islamic Awakening wave in Yemen and the formation of the Islamic resistance of the Ansarullah movement to combat the Saudi-led coalition's aggression, the issue of comprehensive support from the Islamic Republic of Iran for Yemen's Houthis became an attractive and important topic for practical, academic, and political circles. Regarding the research background, there is no source with the exact title of the present study, but the sources used each examine an aspect of the research topic according to the authors' objectives. Among the studies conducted in this field, the following can be mentioned:

Diyani (2021), in a study titled "Comparative Explanation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy Toward the Internal Wars in Yemen and Syria (2010-2020)," using a descriptive method, examines the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy toward West Asian crises and raises the question: Why does Iran support the persistence of Bashar al-Assad's political system in the Syrian crisis while seeking the overthrow of Yemen's political system in the Yemen crisis? The researcher concludes that Zionism antagonism as Tehran's primary foreign policy priority has led to contradictory policies toward the Yemen and Syria crises; such that in the Syrian crisis, it supports the persistence of Bashar al-Assad's political system, while in the Yemen crisis, it seeks the overthrow of Yemen's political system.

Rahimi Nejad et al. (2020), in a study titled "The Islamic

Revolution of Iran and Geopolitical Transformations of Zaydi Shia in Yemen: 1979 to 2015," answer the question: What impact has the Islamic Revolution of Iran had on Shia geopolitical transformations in Yemen from 1979 to 2015? The authors, using a descriptive method, conclude that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, the revolutionary spirit evolved among nations and spread to other countries in the form of the Islamic Revolution's ideals, and as a result of this transformation, a wave of self-awareness and Islamic awakening engulfed Islamic countries, especially Shia communities. The teachings of Shia and Imam Khomeini's (RA) revolutionary thought, which led to the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, have played an effective role in expanding Shia and reviving Zaydi Shia and changing Shia geopolitics in Yemen.

Heydari and Sheikhi Zadeh (2020), in a study titled "Requirements of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Strategic Presence in Yemen from a Geopolitical Perspective," using a descriptive and analytical method, examine and analyze the fundamental and strategic goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Yemen after Saudi Arabia's aggression against this country and believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategic presence in Yemen is of the type of active defense strategy from national interests. The research findings indicate that Iran's presence in Yemen is to preserve regional influence and control over the Bab al-Mandab Strait to maintain continuous energy exports.

Rostami et al. (2019), in their study titled "The War of Powers in Yemen and the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran," using an analytical-descriptive method, believe that post-Islamic Awakening political-security issues in the region have created a kind of interconnectedness among Middle Eastern actors, which has intensified security concerns in this region. Accordingly, regional actors in the Middle East with mutual interests generally consider regional security complexes to preserve their survival. The researchers conclude that preserving Yemen actually helps preserve Tehran's survival, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as an active and regional hegemon, has strived since the onset and escalation of the Yemen crisis to adopt a supportive and security approach toward the government-nation in Yemen to secure its regional security.

Dehshiri and Ma'boudi (2018), in their study titled "Evaluation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Strategy Toward the Yemen Crisis," by explaining the Islamic Republic of Iran's approach to the Yemen crisis and considering the general values and principles governing foreign policy and the security conditions prevailing in

the region, evaluate the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategies in the current juncture using Barry Buzan's regional security complex theory and Saudi Arabia's efforts to securitize regional affairs. The article then explains the proposed strategy for the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the Yemen crisis and, by dissecting the de-securitization strategy based on a peaceful and participatory approach, considers it as breaking the security atmosphere in the Persian Gulf region and emphasizing politicizing the crisis and ultimately normalizing regional conditions.

Firouz Kalai (2016), in his study titled "An Analysis of the Most Important Causes of the Military Aggression of the Coalition Led by Saudi Arabia Against Yemen," considers the most important reasons for the Saudi coalition's attack on Yemen to be Yemen's geopolitical position, neighborhood with Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia's alliance with the United States, regional rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia to expand their influence in Yemen's future, Saudi Arabia's fear of forming a democratic government in Yemen, and finally containing Ansarullah and bringing Mansour Hadi to power, and explains part of Yemen's current situation and Saudi Arabia's attack on Yemen.

Talashan (2013), in his study titled "The Islamic Revolution of Iran and Its Impact on Shia Geopolitical Transformations in Yemen," using an analytical-descriptive method, believes that Zaydi Shia ruled Yemen until 1962, when they were ousted by a coup, beginning their geopolitical isolation period, and government pressure along with media weakness sustained the isolation. The Islamic Revolution caused the revival of Shia and the return of Zaydis who had converted to Wahhabism. Zaydi elders and scholars have based themselves on the thoughts of Imam Khomeini (RA) and the Supreme Leader (May his shadow endure) and were the most powerful political current in ousting Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The commonalities of the present research with the mentioned backgrounds are that all backgrounds address the overthrow of Yemen's government under Saudi Arabia's guardianship and emphasize preserving Yemen with Ansarullah at its center. The differences of this study with the mentioned backgrounds are that most of them consider the Islamic Revolution as the factor in developing Shia thought and reviving Zaydi Shia in Yemen, and also seek to marginalize Wahhabi thought in Yemen and Iran's rivalry with Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The innovation of the present research is that it seeks to develop the strategic depth of the Islamic Revolution in Yemen and its permanence to create indigenous

regional security, and expresses Ansarullah's security within the resistance discourse as reinforcing the resistance front's security.

2. Findings

The Islamic Republic of Iran's strategic engagement in Yemen must be understood within a comprehensive framework that simultaneously accounts for the opportunities afforded by regional transformations, the threats emanating from adversarial coalitions, the intrinsic strengths of the Iranian state, and the structural weaknesses that constrain its effective presence. This four-dimensional analysis provides the analytical foundation for identifying viable strategies to stabilize and sustain Iranian influence within the Yemeni theatre of the Axis of Resistance.

The transformation of West Asia's geopolitical landscape following the Islamic Awakening has generated a series of strategic opportunities for Iranian influence in Yemen. Chief among these is the fundamental shift in the regional balance of power. The decline of autocratic political systems across the Arab world has rendered the emergence of new actors in the regional security environment inevitable, disrupting established power equations and altering the relative positions of regional states (Alaei, 2013, p. 862). This transitional period in West Asia—characterized by the weakening of the United States' central role in Persian Gulf geopolitics—has created conditions increasingly favorable for the Islamic Republic to develop relations with regional countries on terms more advantageous to Tehran's strategic interests. The convergence of foreign policy objectives between the Ansarullah movement and the Islamic Republic constitutes a second critical opportunity. As the Yemen crisis unfolded, regional and extra-regional actors directly intervened in Yemen's domestic affairs, while others sought to influence developments from outside its borders (Hatami, 2021, p. 42). Iran, as an active regional actor, has monitored these developments and extended support to Ansarullah. The identity commonalities shared between Tehran and Ansarullah—particularly in the macro-components of revolutionism and Islamism—have facilitated foreign policy convergence, enabling Iran to provide sustained media and political backing to the Yemeni movement.

Third, Iran's resistance discourse enjoys significant potential for influencing regional populations. The Islamic Republic's public diplomacy capacities, grounded in Islamic and Shia values, can be strategically deployed to enhance Iranian influence in countries with substantial Muslim and Shia constituencies, including Lebanon,

Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan (Arjomand, 2016, p. 11). Yemen's Shia population, particularly Ansarullah, maintains close ideological and political affinities with Iran, leading its residents to seek emulation from Tehran as the leader of the Shia world. This dynamic has deepened Iranian influence while simultaneously reducing the power of Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi ideological currents within Yemen. Fourth, divisions within the Saudi-led coalition represent a significant opportunity for Iran. Widespread disputes over currency issues, the exploitation of gas fields and oil wells among Gulf Cooperation Council members, and the lack of consensus regarding Yemen's future governance reveal the coalition's inherent fragility (Dehshiri & Ma'boudi, 2018, p. 161). Given the futility of the military campaign against Yemen, Saudi Arabia's efforts to maintain coalition cohesion have been undermined by these internal fissures, which may facilitate a ceasefire and create space for diplomatic engagement.

Fifth, the strengthening of the Axis of Islamic Resistance in West Asia has created conditions favorable to Iran. The United States' post-September 11 strategy in the Greater Middle East—designed to preserve American strategic interests and stabilize the Zionist regime's position—has largely failed to achieve its objectives. The electoral success of Hamas, Hezbollah's resilience in the 33-day war, the survival of the Syrian government, and the failure of the Saudi coalition in Yemen collectively demonstrate that the Islamic resistance front has consolidated its regional position and now poses a serious challenge to American strategy (Sotoudeh & Mohammadi, 2017, p. 227). Finally, Ansarullah's emergence as a political force in Yemen represents a pivotal opportunity. Following the Islamic Awakening and the removal of Ali Abdullah Saleh, internal conflicts ultimately culminated in Ansarullah's victory and assumption of power (Talashan, 2013, p. 27). The movement, deeply rooted in Yemeni society, seeks to liberate Yemen from U.S. and Saudi domination while preserving its independence and territorial integrity. Its achievements in creating political order, military and logistical organization, ideological formation, and recruitment have established it as a durable force within Yemen's evolving political landscape (Mohseni, 2023, p. 201).

Despite these opportunities, Iran's position in Yemen confronts substantial threats that require careful management. The most immediate is the continued U.S. military presence in West Asia. The United States has incurred its highest military-security costs in this region, pursuing a strategy of "mild hegemony" that combines

cooperation with regional states and confrontation with anti-hegemon forces like Iran (Sotoudeh & Mohammadi, 2017, p. 232). Washington's efforts to control energy resources through state-building and political system improvement directly challenge Iran's regional ambitions. Second, the reconstruction of Arab-American coalitions in the Persian Gulf represents a fundamental transformation in regional security dynamics. Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia have sought to rebuild their alliance with Washington to address regional threats, particularly regarding Syria and Yemen (Henderson & Boghardt, 2017, p. 6). Confronting Iran has become the primary priority for Persian Gulf states, with common concerns over Iran's political and military influence driving defense and security cooperation. This trend is further reinforced by Iran-Russia security cooperation, which has weakened the position of the United States and its allies, paradoxically prompting these states to deepen their bilateral relations with Washington. Third, the formation of a Hebrew-Arab coalition in West Asia represents a new strategic challenge. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Zionist Regime have undergone a substantive metamorphosis, transitioning from historical conflict to semi-open cooperation (Ekhtiari et al., 2020, p. 120). Political elites on both sides have reached a common understanding that Iran's threats now take priority over their differences. This emerging Hebrew-Arab axis, representing a Western-Hebrew-Arab bloc supporting Saudi decisions, aims to create a balance of threat against Iran (Rezaei & Shariati, 2021, p. 359).

Fourth, ethnic and religious conflicts in West Asia have intensified the security environment. The Arab Middle East, with less than 5% of the world's population, has become the central hub of identity-based conflicts and ethnic-religious violence, accounting for one-quarter of such violence globally (Ibrahim, 2002, p. 229). The nation-state building crisis and resulting identity and political legitimacy crises have created conditions conducive to terrorism and sectarian violence, complicating Iran's efforts to expand its influence. Fifth, the growth of Iran-phobia at regional and global levels has served as a key instrument for weakening and isolating the Islamic Republic. Following the 1979 Revolution, Washington pursued the Iran-phobia project, portraying Iran as a major threat to regional and global peace and security (Alavi et al., 2019, p. 52). This narrative has contributed to the formation of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981 and has shaped unfavorable perceptions of Iran in many Arab and Western countries (Jamalzadeh, 2015, p. 21). Sixth, the radicalization of regional space

through the Shia-Sunni divide, promoted by the United States and other actors, has intensified sectarian tensions. Shia-phobia has been strategically deployed to create rifts in the region against Shia governments and Iran, with political, cultural, geopolitical, and ideological dimensions. The "Shia crescent" narrative has been used to justify policies aimed at creating tension and conflict between Shia and Sunni communities.

Seventh, international sanctions against Iran have constrained its regional influence. Almost all sanctions have originated from or been instigated by the United States, with the Security Council and European Union also adopting independent sanction positions against Iran (Yari et al., 2019, p. 78). These sanctions have forced Tehran to focus on internal economic crises, reducing its capacity to expand regional influence. Eighth, the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist groups in West Asia, including Al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS, and Jabhat al-Nusra, has fundamentally affected regional political trends. These Wahhabi-inspired extremist groups pose direct threats to Iran due to its Shia identity, non-Arab character, and proximity to their centers of operation.

Iran's strategic position in Yemen is supported by several inherent strengths. The authority and political stability of the Islamic Republic's system, grounded in high public participation in elections, civil society engagement, elite interaction, and popular legitimacy, provide a foundation for effective regional engagement (Taqavi, 2012, p. 196). The acceptability and legitimacy of Iran's central government enable it to play an effective role in international events, including regional crises, with the support of the majority of society. Iran's geopolitical and geoeconomic position constitutes a second strength. Tehran's control over more than half of the Persian Gulf, combined with its position at the center of the strategic ellipse of oil and gas energy and along transmission routes to major consumption markets, provides significant leverage (Biuck, 2021, p. 208). This unique position has made Iran the focus of world countries seeking to secure their energy supplies. Third, scientific advances in defense and missile industries have strengthened Iran's deterrent capacity. Given its environmental and security conditions, Iran has chosen "missile deterrence" as its main national security strategy (Sajjadi & Hatami, 2019, p. 94). Remarkable advances in cruise, ballistic, and satellite missiles have realized Tehran's goals for a preventive strategy, making military attack a less viable option for rival countries.

Fourth, the values of the Islamic Revolution provide a powerful cultural resource. The Islamic Republic, based on the revolutionary discourse, has strengthened revolutionary sentiment and provided spiritual and political support to Shia movements in regional countries (Arghavani & Arayesh, 2023, p. 15). Many analysts consider the Islamic Awakening and overthrow of Arab dictators to be rooted in the principles of Iran's revolutionary values, creating the prelude for establishing peace and security based on majority democracy in West Asia. Fifth, Shia ideology and its value system, emerging from the 1979 Revolution, positioned Iran as a "third model" between Communism and Liberalism (Smaeili & Haqshenas, 2024, p. 323). The empowerment of Shias at the core has expanded Iran's sphere of influence into peripheral regions, as demonstrated by developments in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Yemen (Marouf, 2013, p. 271).

However, Iran's strategic position in Yemen is constrained by several weaknesses. The idealistic nature of Iran's foreign policy, rooted in the revolution export strategy and the defense of oppressed nations, has manifested an idealistic perspective in contemporary international relations (Qorbani & Karazma, 2013, p. 11). This ideological orientation can generate resistance from regional and extra-regional powers who perceive Iran's actions as aggressive and hegemonic. Second, Iran's biased and transparent reaction to Yemen has created diplomatic vulnerabilities. While Iran has opposed Saudi military operations as violations of Yemen's sovereignty, its open support for the Shia cause has led America and Saudi Arabia to accuse Tehran of interfering in Yemen's internal affairs. The claim that Iranian ships carrying humanitarian aid contain weapons and military ammunition has provided pretexts for coalition members to form alliances against Iran (Jahanbin & Parto, 2013, p. 128). Third, Iran's economic weakness, resulting from unbalanced economic development and reliance on oil revenues, constrains its regional influence (Bolhasani, 2014, p. 129). Outward-looking economic policies, limited use of existing capacities, weakness in budgeting, instability of executive policies, and redundant costs have prevented Iran from fully leveraging its economic potential to support its regional strategies. Fourth, the limited penetration of Iranian media compared to Western media undermines Iran's soft power. Media constitute one of the most effective cultural tools for shaping public opinion and changing societal values (Samiei & Fathi, 2013, p. 79). Iran's media diplomacy, however, has been executed weakly and is not commensurate with the country's cultural and media capacities, limiting its ability to counter hostile narratives.

3. Strategies for Stabilizing and Sustaining Iran's Influence in Yemen

The Islamic Republic of Iran's strategic approach to the Yemen crisis encompasses a comprehensive and multidimensional framework of political, economic, and cultural-identity strategies designed to stabilize and sustain its influence in the country. These strategies, grounded in Iran's broader foreign policy principles—namely the defense of Muslim rights, opposition to hegemonic powers, and the advancement of revolutionary ideals—address the multifaceted dimensions of the Yemeni conflict and its regional implications through an integrated and mutually reinforcing framework that operates across three interconnected domains.

At the political level, Iran's strategy rests upon two interconnected pillars: continued advocacy for the Yemeni people in international forums and diplomatic efforts to prevent additional regional actors from joining the Saudi-led coalition. The first pillar reflects Iran's constitutional obligation to defend oppressed Muslim populations and its self-positioning as a counterbalance to Western and regional dominance. In practical terms, this necessitates activating legal-political mechanisms to support Yemen's beleaguered population through multiple channels: presenting comprehensive reports to human rights monitoring bodies, including thematic rapporteurs on human rights in Yemen; pursuing political and legal measures to condemn Saudi authorities and military commanders through the establishment of a regional criminal court to address crimes perpetrated during the conflict; requesting the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation in Yemen to the International Criminal Court; and activating the possibility of applying the universal jurisdiction of Iranian criminal courts through either the reinterpretation of existing penal codes or the enactment of specific domestic legislation. The second political strategy involves preventing countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Oman from joining or reinforcing their alignment with the Saudi-led coalition. The neutrality decree issued by Pakistan's parliament regarding the Yemen war can be attributed, at least in part, to Tehran's diplomatic efforts and Iran's demonstrated capacity to influence regional equations. Similarly, Iran's policy of strategic self-restraint toward the Yemen conflict encouraged Oman—despite its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council—to refrain from accompanying its fellow members in the coalition. Furthermore, Iran's vocal opposition to Saudi Arabia's aggressive policy in Yemen served as a deterrent to Turkey's potential alignment with

Riyadh; from the onset of the Saudi-led offensive, Ankara's media outlets signaled that Turkey's decision not to join the coalition was motivated, in part, by a desire to prevent any deterioration in its relations with Tehran. Collectively, these diplomatic maneuvers have contributed to limiting the coalition's expansion and preserving Iran's regional position, demonstrating the efficacy of preventive diplomacy in managing regional alignment dynamics.

The economic dimension of Iran's Yemen strategy is equally critical, encompassing both humanitarian assistance and the expansion of economic and commercial cooperation. The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen—a direct consequence of the prolonged conflict and blockade—has created an urgent imperative for international humanitarian action. For Iran, this represents not merely a moral obligation rooted in the constitutional principles derived from Islamic teachings, but also a strategic opportunity to consolidate its presence and influence by positioning itself as a reliable provider of relief and support to the Yemeni people. In a context where international organizations have largely remained silent or ineffective in responding to the Saudi coalition's aggression, Iran's continued humanitarian assistance to Yemen's oppressed population serves both altruistic and strategic functions, reinforcing Tehran's standing among Yemenis and the broader regional public. This humanitarian diplomacy operates as a form of soft power projection that simultaneously alleviates suffering and builds political capital among key constituencies. Beyond humanitarian relief, Yemen represents a substantial economic opportunity for Iran. With a population of approximately 30 million, the Republic of Yemen constitutes one of the region's largest consumer markets. In the year preceding the Saudi coalition's military intervention, Yemen's total imports were estimated at approximately \$12 billion, a significant proportion of which consisted of Iranian goods. Projections suggest that should the economic blockade be lifted, even a 50 percent share of Yemen's import market—equivalent to approximately \$6 billion—would generate some 300,000 jobs for Iranians. Moreover, Yemen's post-conflict reconstruction phase offers a vast market for Iran's engineering services and technical expertise. In this context, Iran's strategy involves a dual approach: in the immediate term, providing consulting and technical services to support the development of essential infrastructure and the establishment of a functioning capital market; and in the medium to longer term, expanding economic and commercial cooperation once the blockade is lifted.

This approach, if executed effectively, would significantly deepen Iran's economic footprint in Yemen and create interdependencies that would sustain Iranian influence well beyond the current conflict, embedding Iranian economic interests within Yemen's post-conflict reconstruction and development trajectory.

The cultural-identity dimension of Iran's strategy in Yemen is perhaps its most distinctive and long-term component, comprising two primary elements: extensive media advocacy to counter Saudi propaganda and the use of cultural diplomacy to strengthen solidarity and foster identity formation among Yemen's Shia population. In the current informational environment, Saudi and aligned media outlets have employed systematic propaganda tactics to distort realities and mislead public opinion regarding the Yemen conflict. These media platforms have deliberately inverted the roles of aggressor and victim, portraying Saudi Arabia—a country that, with the support of several mercenary states, has waged a destructive war against the Yemeni people—as the victim, and presenting the Yemeni people and the Ansarullah movement as sources of danger and aggression. This narrative obfuscates the reality of Yemen's devastation, including the destruction of critical infrastructure through over 2,500 aerial, naval, and ground attacks, and the martyrdom and injury of more than 9,700 civilians, the majority of whom are women and children (Bagherizadeh, 2024, p. 17). In response to this manufactured narrative, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to employ media diplomacy and leverage its cultural capacities to expose the truth, build trust, and reduce the negative impact of Saudi and aligned propaganda on both regional and international public opinion. By providing accurate information and presenting a counter-narrative that highlights the humanitarian catastrophe and Saudi complicity, Iran aims to shape perceptions in ways that favor its political objectives and legitimize its involvement in Yemen. This media advocacy operates as a form of strategic communication that seeks to delegitimize the Saudi-led intervention while legitimizing Iranian support for the Yemeni resistance.

The second cultural-identity strategy involves the use of cultural diplomacy to strengthen solidarity and foster identity formation among Yemen's Shia population. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent transformations in the region has been the most significant factors in reviving the role and position of Shia communities in West Asia. Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic system—characterized by its distinctly Shia identity—the Shia, who had long been marginalized in Arab countries, attracted renewed

attention, and their collective identity in the region underwent a process of reproduction (Hashem Pour & Haghighi, 2020, p. 217). As an Islamic government grounded in religious beliefs and values, Iran has leveraged the components of cultural diplomacy—including identity construction, cohesion-building, and the revival of Zaydi Shia in Yemen—to advance its strategic interests. This has been achieved through several mechanisms: promoting twelve-Imam Shia orientation among Yemeni communities, influencing key Yemeni personalities, disseminating revolutionary discourse and slogans, and supporting Ansarullah as the armed arm of Yemen's Shia in their struggle for rights and recognition. These cultural interventions operate at the level of identity formation and political socialization, cultivating a sense of shared religious and political solidarity that transcends national borders and creates durable bonds of loyalty and commitment.

The interplay of these cultural-identity strategies with Iran's broader political and economic objectives creates a mutually reinforcing framework of strategic engagement. By cultivating a sense of shared religious identity and solidarity with Yemen's Shia population, Iran strengthens its ideological and political ties with key constituencies within Yemen, thereby enhancing its credibility and influence. At the same time, the economic and political strategies provide tangible benefits—humanitarian relief, economic cooperation, and diplomatic support—that translate ideological affinity into material advantage. This integrated approach, if sustained over time, offers Iran a robust and resilient framework for stabilizing and sustaining its influence in Yemen, even as the conflict evolves and regional dynamics shift. The political strategies provide the diplomatic infrastructure for engagement, the economic strategies create material interdependencies that bind interests together, and the cultural-identity strategies cultivate the ideological and affective foundations for long-term solidarity. Together, these three dimensions constitute a comprehensive grand strategy that addresses the political, material, and ideational dimensions of Iran's engagement in Yemen, positioning Tehran as both a protector of oppressed Muslim populations and a strategic actor with enduring interests in the future of the Arabian Peninsula. This multidimensional approach, grounded in Iran's revolutionary principles and adapted to the realities of the Yemeni context, represents a coherent and sustainable framework for stabilizing and sustaining Iranian influence in one of the most volatile theatres of regional competition.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Islamic Awakening and the onset of Yemen's revolutionary transformations in 2011, coinciding with Saudi Arabia's historical influence in the country and the parallel rise of the Ansarullah movement as a key actor in political developments, created the conditions for regional competition between Tehran and Riyadh within the Yemeni theatre. In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran's role in Yemen's resistance—manifested through its support for Ansarullah against the Saudi-led coalition's aerial campaign—should be understood as deriving inspiration from the intellectual and ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Indeed, the revolutionary ethos of Iranian popular resistance has served as an inspiring source for Yemen's Shia population, contributing to their identity formation and recovery, and ultimately leading to the emergence of resistance nuclei in the form of various Shia movements and groups.

Iran's support for liberation movements and popular uprisings has engendered a spirit of political-social risk-taking among Yemen's Shia, prompting them to pursue insurrection and establish politically mobilized social movements by adapting elements derived from the Islamic Revolution's ideological framework. This dynamic is particularly pronounced given that Zaydi jurisprudence, with its pragmatic dimensions, readily facilitates the integration of religious principles with political objectives, the outcome of which is the cultivation of a struggle-oriented thought and the establishment of resistance structures. From this perspective, Iran's assistance in preserving Yemen's unity and territorial integrity constitutes an effort to safeguard Iran's national and regional interests, as the preservation of Yemen is effectively a means of preserving Iran's strategic position in the region. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has concentrated its regional efforts on the geopolitics of the resistance axis—encompassing Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon—the effective management of emerging security challenges and the utilization of available opportunities necessitate an active and meaningful Iranian presence in regional transformations, including the Yemen crisis.

It is evident that the realization of a peaceful settlement scenario for the Yemen crisis and the consequent stabilization of power within the country would contribute to enhanced Iranian security, as the preservation of Yemen's unity and territorial integrity directly serves Iran's national and regional interests. In pursuit of this objective, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently sought to

provide the groundwork for its ideological support of the Ansarullah movement while simultaneously leveraging its capacities to secure Iran's national interests in Yemen and the broader region. Tehran has pursued policies aimed at preserving Yemen's territorial unity, ensuring the participation of all political groups and currents in governance, and ultimately ending the influence of foreign powers—particularly Saudi Arabia—in the country. Overall, the empowerment of Ansarullah signifies the expansion of the resistance axis into the Arabian Peninsula, which in practical terms equates to the expansion of Iranian influence.

Tehran's policy in Yemen is fundamentally oriented toward stabilizing Ansarullah's position of power. Iran aspires to the formation of a national Yemeni government aligned with its own objectives and interests; moreover, even if Ansarullah cannot achieve dominance over the entirety of Yemen, Iran envisions the establishment of a powerful group within Yemen's political system analogous to Hezbollah in Lebanon—provided that the resultant government is not opposed to or in contradiction with Iran's regional interests. Consequently, since the onset of the Yemen crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran has pursued a policy of self-restraint aimed at reducing tensions and preventing the creation of a regional competition arena in the country. This approach enables Iran to base its strategies on stabilizing and sustaining its presence and influence within Yemen's resistance axis, with a central focus on respecting the popular vote in Yemen and condemning any form of foreign intervention.

The present research was conducted under circumstances in which few scholarly sources addressing Iran's role in the Yemen crisis were available. This study thus represents an effort to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the crisis while simultaneously identifying the Islamic Republic of Iran's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in this context. Due to these constraints, there was limited opportunity for the comprehensive exploration of research topics or the detailed examination of crisis dynamics. In this regard, researchers with an interest in the Yemen crisis and the Islamic Republic of Iran's role therein are encouraged to consider the following topics for further investigation:

First, the historical roots of takfiri group formation in Yemen and a comparative study of these roots across regional countries of West Asia. Second, the Islamic Republic of Iran's strategies for confronting takfiri groups in the Republic of Yemen. Third, the futurology of extra-regional powers' intervention and the role of power-seeking regional actors in advancing their interests within the Yemen crisis.

Fourth, the political, military, and security status of Ansarullah and the development of future scenarios for the movement.

These topics represent current and significant issues that have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. The present research, likewise, did not permit comprehensive engagement with them. It is hoped that subsequent researchers, utilizing these thematic suggestions, will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the West Asian crisis and the dynamics of regional engagement, thereby addressing the existing gaps in the literature.

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