

Iran's grip weakens as Israel and the West weigh decisive sanctions

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 25.08.2025

"What the brave Yemeni people are doing today is the right step in confronting the crimes of the Zionist entity, which is now the most hated in the world. All routes of support for this entity must be cut off," Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said in a speech earlier this week.

Although Khamenei's comments referred mainly to the so-called naval blockade announced by the Houthis against Israel and the terrorism they are waging to prevent ships linked to Israel from crossing the Red Sea, his words also hinted at threats toward Western countries. He suggested Iran could impose restrictions on the passage of "hostile vessels" through the Strait of Hormuz if the West fails to reach understandings with Tehran.

Regardless, the latest wave of Israeli Air Force strikes over Sanaa, the Yemeni capital, has disrupted the momentum the Houthis had been drawing from Iran's backing.

As Israel continues preparing for a ground takeover of Gaza City, and as the ripple effects of the Shiite axis' defeat are felt in Syria and Lebanon, rocket and drone launches from Yemen persist. The Houthis' ongoing fire, and the Israeli retaliatory strikes, have created a daily rhythm of attacks and counterattacks that, without prior intention, have solidified into a "response equation."

Tehran traditionally claims that the Houthis act according to their own worldview and interests, and therefore Iran should not be held accountable for their actions. The same line is taken regarding other organizations that Israel and much of the international community see as Iranian proxy forces, extensions of the Islamic Republic's "octopus."

Even if there were some truth in these denials, Tehran's officials would struggle to hide Iran's role in arming the Houthis with the very ballistic missiles and drones they use to target Israel. Iran's missile industry, whose dangers were clearly demonstrated in recent years, remains a strategic threat not only to Israel but also beyond. Just in the past few days, Iran's new defense minister openly

declared that Tehran continues to produce weapons and missiles “even right now.”

Iran’s attempt to separate the Houthis’ campaign from its own role, just as it seeks to separate the nuclear issue from its ballistic missile program, serves its double aim: preserving the use of proxy warfare while avoiding restrictions on its missile production and proliferation.

Israel still has military options against the Houthis that it has not fully employed. These could significantly raise the cost of continued attacks, target wider economic interests, eliminate leaders, and increase their sense of vulnerability from more than just airstrikes. Yet it is important to remember that Yemen is a secondary arena, and its geographic distance gives Israel advantages as well. Excessive focus there could inadvertently serve Israel’s other enemies.

Alongside military operations to break the “response equation,” Israel must now focus directly on Iran as the critical timeframe approaches to reimpose sanctions lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal. That agreement included a unique “snapback” clause allowing the renewal of international sanctions with the support of a majority of the signatory states. This clause is set to expire on October 18, and to invoke it requires 30 days’ advance notice. The International Atomic Energy Agency has already declared that Iran is not honoring its commitments.

The E3 countries – Germany, France, and Britain – hold the ability to trigger the snapback. They have warned that if Iran does not shift its stance in the nuclear talks by the end of August, they will be forced to act. Such a move would reinstate a global arms embargo and restrictions on missile production and distribution. Talks on this issue are set to continue tomorrow in Vienna at the deputy foreign ministers’ level.

Israel must press the US administration to influence the E3 decisively. Iran’s conduct provides full justification for renewing sanctions. It would be a grave mistake to use this leverage merely as a negotiating tool to push Iran toward an agreement, after it has repeatedly violated past commitments.

Instead, it is time to bring the whip down directly on the regime. After the military setback it suffered in the recent 12-day war, and amid the severe domestic crises battering it, the reimposition of crippling sanctions could, if not immediately, then eventually, bring the most significant achievement in Israel’s

struggle with Iran: destabilizing the radical regime itself.

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