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Bridges of Covert Power: Iran's Proxy Portfolio and its Global Implications

### *Introduction with background*

With a staggering population of around 84 million residents, the Islamic Republic of Iran claims the title of the second-largest nation in the Middle East. Iran is marked by several crises over the years, not least the Islamic revolution of 1979 that led to the exile of the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This came to create a new era of clergy and Ayatollahs who have ruled the country for 45 years. In recent years, Iran and the region have experienced ongoing activity marked by conflicts, battles, and disputes. Iran's aspirations transcend national political goals and interests, extending to the global arena through its support for various groups.

### *Proxies in Lebanon, Yemen & Palestine*

#### *Houthis in Yemen*

The world is deeply in the loop when it comes to Iran's support to a variety of groups in the Middle East region. The Houthi rebels have received a lot of media coverage recently, regarding the attacks on vessels in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This is an auction that will continue until the war in Gaza ends, according to the Houthis. They have garnered support from Iran on other occasions, such as against the Saudi American coalition that has been trying to topple the Iran-backed rebel group since late 2014 by supporting their rival within Yemeni borders. Today, January 26th, Iranian sources suggest that Beijing has likely urged Iran to intervene and halt the Houthi rebels' naval attacks (W. Demred, 2024). As Beijing has said, if the attacks result in harming its interests, it will affect the relationship between Tehran & Beijing. It remains to be seen how Iran will react to this threat. If their trade deal with China weighs more heavily, or allowing the rebels in Yemen to continue their struggle, as they fight for Palestine, is more important. I find it hard to see that Iran would bend to stand up for Palestine, and thereby, indirectly, benefit the Israelis with various ships going in that direction.

### *Hamas in Palestine*

Since October 7, when Hamas carried out the *terrorist attack* in Israel, Hamas has been in the forefront in the media worldwide. Iran has consistently provided support to Hamas, as they have contributed with weapons, funds and training over the years (Washington Post, 2023). For example, Iran sent 35 million euros to the Palestinian government in 2006, who was ruled by Hamas, because the U.S. and EU halted their aid to the Palestinian government. This occurred because Palestine rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state and could not refrain from acting with violence (SR, 2006). And according to a 2020 State Department report from the U.S., there is an annual of 100 million dollars that Iran provides to the Palestinian militant groups, which includes Hamas.

### *Hezbollah in Lebanon*

In Lebanese society with its close ties to Iran, there is the deeply entrenched Shiite Islamist Hezbollah. The group was formed as a movement against Israel, and they exist in the military, as representatives in the decision-making assemblies of the country, as well as in the civil-life. The United States has designated the entire organization as a terrorist group, while the European Union has specifically labeled its military branch as terrorists. Of the branches and organizations that Iran supports, Hezbollah is the militarily strongest organization. This may be because Hezbollah and Iran share the same outlook regarding political views (Hulterström, 2024) which can differ from Iran's relationship with Hamas and the Houthis in Yemen. In Yemen the conflict may be due to a nearby conflict, which has been Iran's arch-enemy, Saudi Arabia for supporting the other side of the conflict in Yemen, and regarding Hamas, their stance on Israel is shared, indicating a common policy between the two.

### *Conclusion, Iran's Role in Global Affairs*

"Iran-backed Hamas", "Iran-backed Hezbollah" and "Iran-backed Houthi Rebels". It is what media constantly are reporting worldwide, conflicts that take over headline after headline. When it was thought that the war in Gaza, with Iran's indirect influence was enough, it was a short time until their allies in Yemen decided to attack various vessels, as a help tool of Hamas, against Israel. In one way or another, Iran is involved in and affects the constant conflicts, they have on the other hand been in bad weather with Belgium, where a prisoner exchange has occurred. They have arrested several Swedish citizens, one of whom is the EU

official, Johan Floderus, who yesterday 28th of January, had his last appear in Iranian court, where the prosecutor sought the death penalty for Mr. Floderus, for conspiring with Israel against Iran. This has been criticized by EU leaders and the Swedish Foreign Ministry for being utterly erroneous, and his immediate release is imperative. I find it improbable that Iran would carry out such a sentence, executing a citizen of another country, when it is evident to the international community that it is merely a political maneuver, as Sweden recently gave an Iranian citizen, Hamid Noury, a life sentence for having been involved in executions in Iran in 1988. Despite various sanctions against Iran, Iran has instead chosen to see other directions regarding economic and trade agreements with China and Russia.

The elites in Tehran live as before, despite the demonstrations that have been going on for the past year, with a tough revolutionary guard, the population clearly has difficulties. It would take a large scale revolution like 1979, or *another type* of religious leader for Iran to change politically. The outlook may lack optimism, with regards to an Expert Council of 86 religious and legal scholars who appoint the Supreme Leader, and to be appointed to the Expert Council, you must be approved by the 12-member Guardian Council, where there are six conservative jurists, and six mullahs, who the Supreme leader appoints. From my perspective, altering the course of politics and, indeed, the theocratic system in Iran is an insurmountable challenge, which is an impossible task to complete. There will not be a change in Iran, either in leadership, domestic policy or for that matter, foreign policy with the support of various political groups and branches internationally. This status quo is expected to persist for the foreseeable future, marking the conclusive analysis from my standpoint.

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