

Forum: United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Issue: The Impact of Iran's Proxy Forces on Regional and International Stability

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is known for its geopolitical competition amongst states. Those states use and rely on non-state groups to influence and have power over other states and in some cases, even their own government. Out of all states, Iran has developed important connections with non-state groups across the Middle East. More specifically, Iran supports multiple armed groups by assisting them financially, by providing weapons and intelligence as well as by providing training for them. Their relationships are known as Iran's Axis of Resistance. Each group differs on the level of control and power they have. The groups with the most significance are Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), the Houthis, as well as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Palestinian territories.

Regionally, this network has destabilized several states at once. Hezbollah undermines Lebanon's authority over its own territory and keeps it tied to conflict with Israel, the PMF factions complicate Iraq's sovereignty and its relations with Gulf neighbors, the Houthis have entrenched Yemen's civil war, and Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad keep the Palestinian territories bound to the wider regional confrontation. This has raised interstate tensions, weakened trust in state constitutions, deepened humanitarian crises, and led to attacks on regional shipping.

Internationally, these same dynamics extend outward. Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping threaten global trade, Iraqi militia attacks on foreign forces raise the risk of direct confrontation between Iran and major powers, and the nuclear dimension of Iran's program has divided the Permanent Five, with Russia and China favoring negotiation while the United States and the E3 push for sanctions enforcement. This division has repeatedly limited the Security Council's ability to act, raising the possibility of further escalation.

Therefore, as proxy conflicts increasingly transcend national borders and have an effect on international peace and security, we are required to balance state sovereignty, regional stability, humanitarian concerns, and international law. We need to examine all possible approaches in order to reduce tensions, avoid escalation, and promote long-term regional and international stability.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Axis of Resistance

“The Axis of Resistance is a loose military network of militant groups and state-controlled forces in the Middle East, supported by Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It includes Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthi movement, and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (IRI). Their interests are regional in scope, opposing the influence of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States in the broader Middle East.”¹

E3 (UK, France, Germany)

“The E3 is an informal foreign and security cooperation arrangement between the UK, Germany and France.”²

Proxy war

“A proxy war is a military conflict where outside parties support combatants without engaging in significant direct fighting. These third parties, often major powers, aim to influence the conflict's outcome to advance their interests or undermine opponents, while avoiding direct confrontation. Support can be direct, such as military aid, training, or economic assistance, or indirect, through actions like sanctions and trade embargoes.”³

Sovereignty

“In political theory, sovereignty is a controversial concept related to the state, government, independence, and democracy. It refers to the ultimate authority in a state's decision-making and order maintenance.”⁴

Nonproliferation

“the prevention of an increase or spread of something, especially the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons: a nuclear nonproliferation treaty.”⁵

¹ Zeidan, Adam. ‘Axis of Resistance | Groups, Countries, Map, Leaders, Middle East, Iran, Hamas, Houthi, & Hezbollah’. Encyclopedia Britannica, 25 Oct. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Axis-of-Resistance>.

² Kwapińska, Kamila, and Richard Whitman. ‘The E3’. UK in a Changing Europe, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/explainers/the-e3/>.

³ Baugh, Sue. ‘Proxy War | Armed Conflict’. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/proxy-war>.

⁴ Britannica. ‘Sovereignty’. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2 June 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sovereignty>.

⁵ Oxford. ‘Nonproliferation’. Oxford Reference, 2026, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100237827?p=emailAW.ltUExy11GE&d=10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100237827>.

P5+1 (US, UK, France, Russia, China, Germany)

“The P5+1 countries are a group of nations working together on the Iran Nuclear Deal. The countries include the five permanent members of the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council, with the addition of Germany. The U.N. Security Council consists of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.”⁶

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Context

Overview of Iran's foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution

Before 1979, Iran under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was a close US ally and functioned as the de facto security guarantor of the Persian Gulf on Washington's behalf. The 1979 Islamic Revolution was not simply a change of government, but it installed a theocratic system that was built around the principle of velayat-e faqih or "guardianship of the jurist". Under this, an unelected Supreme Leader holds final authority over foreign policy, above the elected president. Across four decades and several presidents, Iran's core foreign policy, including its support for regional proxy forces, has remained under the ultimate control of the Supreme Leader, not the president. Therefore Iran's foreign policy has significantly changed over the years.

The first period, known as the Khomeini Era from 1979 until 1989 is driven by ideology. More specifically, two founding slogans defined this era: "Neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic" and "Export of the Revolution". The first one, signifies the rejection of alignment with either the United States or the Soviet Union. Practically, this translated into active hostility towards the United States given their foreign interference in Iranian affairs. The second one refers to the belief that Iran's Islamic Revolution should serve as a model to trigger similar uprisings across the muslim world. This is the ideological origin of Iran's proxy network. The central event of this period and the turning point that forced a policy shift was the eight year Iran-Iraq from 1980 until 1988. Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, and Western powers along with Gulf Arab states backed Saddam Hussein's government, both financially and through armed militias, leaving Iran internationally isolated. At the end of the war, Iran was exhausted in multiple aspects, militarily, economically and diplomatically. This situation led to the shift of the following decade.⁷

⁶ Hayes, Adam. 'P5+1 Countries'. Investopedia, 31 July 2022, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/p51.asp>.

⁷ Rakel, Eva Patricia. "Iranian Foreign Policy Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, vol. 6, nos. 1–3, 2007, pp. 159–87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156914907x207711>.

The second period, known as the Rafsanjani Era from 1989 until 1997 was the reconstruction that Iran needed. What restored Iran's strategic position were three developments. First of all the fact that the eight year war between Iran and Iraq came to an end, the fact that Khomeini died in 1989, marking the end of the first phase and lastly the fact that the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. President Rafsanjani needed foreign capital and technical expertise to rebuild a war-shattered economy, which required reintegrating Iran into the global economy rather than pursuing revolutionary export. These shifts included an outreach to Persian Gulf Arab states and particularly Saudi Arabia, communications established with the European Union, as well as new diplomatic and economic ties with the newly independent states of Central Asia and Caucasus after the Soviet Union's collapse. During this period, proxy support did not end, however it became a not so central organizing principle of foreign policy while remaining an important tool among several others in Iran's regional strategy.⁸

The third period, known as the Khatami Era from 1997 until 2005, included dialogue and communications without actual structural change. More specifically, president Khatami pursued a genuine policy of "dialogue among civilizations," while improving relations with the European Union and expressing willingness even toward the United States. While Khatami sought rapprochement, Supreme Leader Khamenei continued directing support to Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories throughout Khatami's presidency.⁹

Lastly, the fourth and final period, known as the The Ahmadinejad Era that started in 2005 and is ongoing, can be addressed as a hardline turn. Ahmadinejad's election in 2005 brought a previously marginalized hardline faction to power, with the backing of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Rhetoric turned sharply more hostile toward the United States and Israel. This period also saw the escalation of Iran's nuclear dossier to the UN Security Council in March 2006, marking a significant flashpoint in Iran's international relations.¹⁰

Development of the concept of the "Axis of Resistance"

The "Axis of Resistance" refers to the network of state and non-state actors that Iran has built, funded, and directed since the early 1980s to project influence across the Middle East while avoiding direct confrontation with stronger adversaries. The name itself only emerged in the early 2000s, in reaction to President George W. Bush's 2001 "Axis of Evil" speech, however the network it describes had already been under construction for two decades. The Iran-Iraq

⁸ Rakel, Eva Patricia. "Iranian Foreign Policy Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, vol. 6, nos. 1-3, 2007, pp. 159-87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156914907x207711>.

⁹ Rakel, Eva Patricia. "Iranian Foreign Policy Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, vol. 6, nos. 1-3, 2007, pp. 159-87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156914907x207711>.

¹⁰ Rakel, Eva Patricia. "Iranian Foreign Policy Since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006." Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, vol. 6, nos. 1-3, 2007, pp. 159-87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156914907x207711>.

war was its formatting period. More specifically it was Iran's foundational experience with proxy warfare. The conflict's devastation pushed Tehran toward a doctrine of "forward defense" supporting armed groups beyond its borders so that any future conflict would be fought away from Iranian territory, while maintaining plausible deniability of its involvement. During this period, Iran's external operations branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps began cultivating relationships with anti-Saddam Iraqi Kurdish factions and Iraqi Shi'a groups, laying the groundwork for later, more extensive involvement in Iraq. The Axis of Resistance was created in three main phases. Hizballah, formed after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and served as the network's founding template. Its perceived victories against Israel in 2000 and 2006 proved the value of Iran's proxy model and drove its expansion. Under Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani between 2003 and 2020, Iran turned this single relationship into a genuine transnational network, building or co-opting armed groups in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.

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¹¹ "The Axis of Resistance - Middle East Institute." Middle East Institute, 25 Feb. 2026, <https://mei.edu/backgrounder/axis-of-resistance/>.

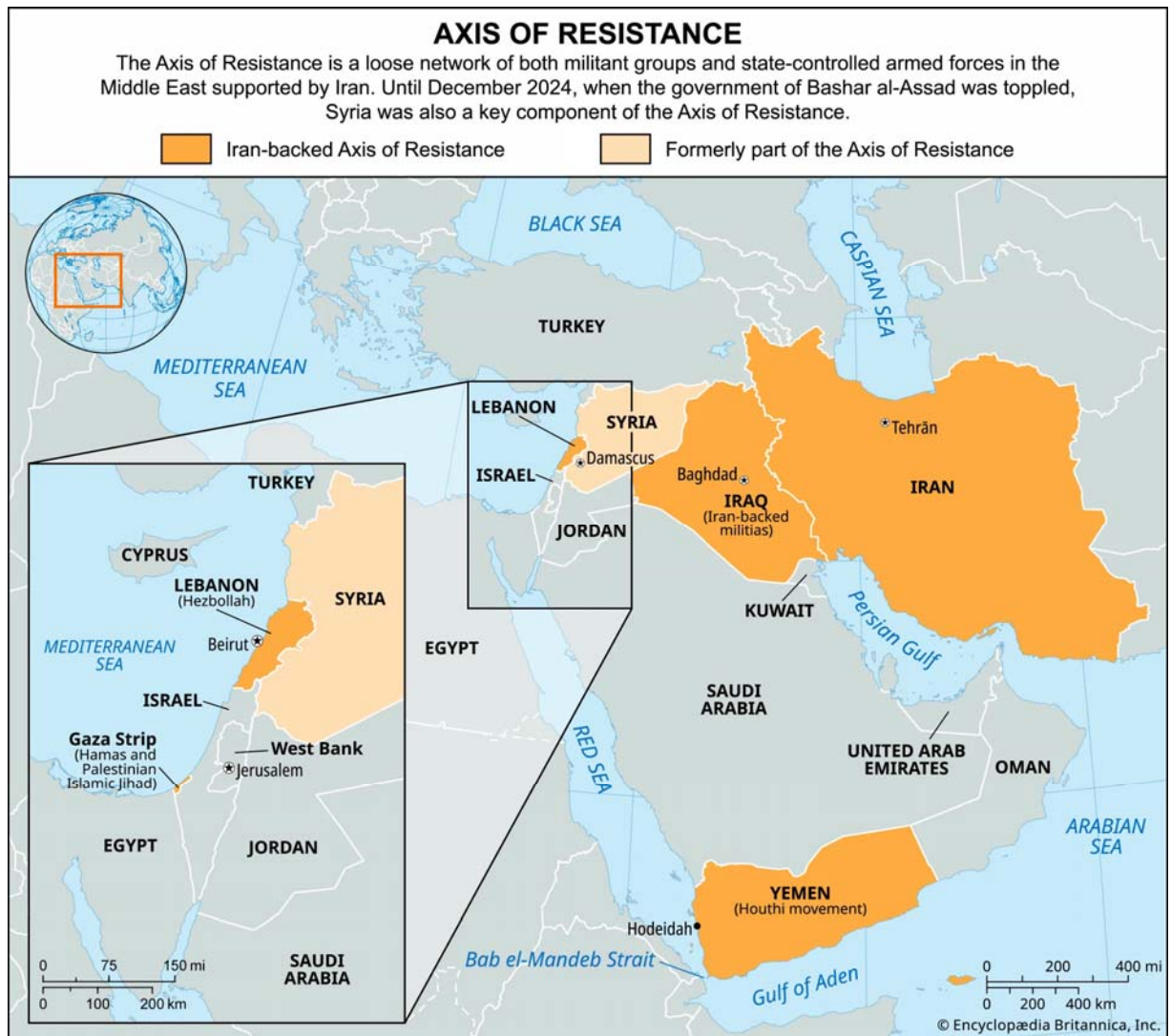


Figure 1: Map showing the Axis of Resistance¹²

Why proxy warfare became a central element of Iranian security policy

Several structural weaknesses pushed Iran toward proxies rather than conventional deterrence. Iran's regular military is deficient in several key areas, relying on outdated hardware and missiles or drones rather than a modern conventional force. At the same time, Iran is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world, and its economy remains under severe pressure, leaving Tehran unable to sustain a costly conventional arms buildup. Proxies offered

¹² Axis of Resistance. <https://cdn.britannica.com/76/263276-050-F4EAEA4F/iran-led-axis-of-resistance.jpg>.

a lower-cost workaround to all problems as they let Iran exert deterrence and influence abroad while exploiting plausible deniability to avoid being pulled into direct conflict.

Overview of Iran's Major Proxy Groups

Hezbollah was founded in the early 1980s, taking shape in the chaos of the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 until 1990 and Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. It functions as both a Shiite Muslim political party and militant group, and operates as a proxy of Iran. Hezbollah's relationship with Iran is ideological, not merely transactional. The group has been described as the strongest of the armed groups Tehran supports, with Iran providing most of its funding, training, weapons, and explosives, alongside political, diplomatic, and organizational aid. Its role in regional conflict has been extensive. It fought Israel to a standstill in 2000 and 2006, intervened heavily in the Syrian civil war, and joined the confrontations again after October 2023. Currently, Hezbollah remains significantly weakened following the loss of its senior leadership, and it faces domestic and international pressure to disarm, though it still holds a substantial bloc of seats in the Lebanese parliament.¹³

The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) emerged in 2014, when Iraqi Shi'a militias coalesced under an umbrella organization to fight the Islamic State after it overran large parts of northern and western Iraq. While the PMF nominally answers to the Iraqi prime minister, many of its component factions, including Kata'ib Hizballah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq, trace their roots to Iran-backed groups first cultivated during and after the Iran-Iraq war. Currently, the PMF is legally recognized as part of Iraq's security apparatus, and factions within it remain divided between protecting their commercial interests and deepening alignment with Iran.¹⁴

Unlike Iran's other regional partners, Syria under Bashar al-Assad was a state ally rather than a non-state proxy. When the 2011 uprising against Assad turned into a civil war, Iran organized foreign Shi'a fighters, including the Afghan Fatemiyoun and Pakistani Zainabiyoun brigades, alongside its own IRGC personnel and allied Iraqi and Lebanese militias, to prop up the regime. Syria's relationship with Iran was strategic rather than ideological. It served for decades as the physical corridor connecting Iran to Hezbollah and Palestinian militant groups in the Levant. This arrangement collapsed entirely in December 2024, when Sunni Islamist rebels overthrew Assad, cutting off Iran's supply routes and reportedly leaving Syria owing Iran more than \$30 billion in unpaid support. Currently, Iran has no meaningful foothold left in Syria, and Turkey and Israel have moved into the space it vacated.¹⁵

¹³ Robinson, Kali, et al. "What Is Hezbollah? | Council on Foreign Relations." Cfr.Org, 22 Jan. 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/what-hezbollah>.

¹⁴ Boot, Max. "Iran-Backed Militias in Iraq Poised to Expand Influence." Cfr.Org, Council on Foreign Relations, 13 Oct. 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/iran-backed-militias-iraq-poised-expand-influence>.

¹⁵ "The Axis of Resistance - Middle East Institute." Middle East Institute, 25 Feb. 2026, <https://mei.edu/backgrounder/axis-of-resistance/>.

The Houthi movement, a Zaydi Shi'a religious and political movement, formed in the 1980s and became militarily active against Yemen's government starting in 2004. Iranian military support is believed to have begun as early as 2009, and most experts agree the Houthis were receiving Iranian weapons by 2014, the year they captured the capital, Sana'a. Of all the groups in the network, the Houthi-Iran relationship is the least hierarchical as the two sides follow different schools of Shia Islam and many analysts describe the Houthis as a willing partner rather than a true proxy, since Iran has limited control over their decision-making. Their role in regional conflict has centered on the Yemeni civil war against a Saudi-led coalition and since 2023, attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and on Israel. Currently, the Houthis control roughly a third of Yemen's territory and two-thirds of its population.¹⁶

Regarding the Palestinian Territories, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), both groups' ties to Iran date to the late 1980s, when Israel deported hundreds of their members to Lebanon, where they came into contact with Hezbollah and the IRGC.¹⁷ Their relationship with Tehran is built on Iran's pursuit of regional influence and the Palestinian groups' need for outside sponsorship. The two groups differ from the rest of the network. They both are Sunni Islamist organizations, not Shi'a, and PIJ in particular is far more financially dependent on Iran than Hamas, which draws on multiple funding sources including Qatari aid. Their role in regional conflict culminated in the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which Iran denied directing but which involved militants trained in Iran beforehand. Currently, both groups have been severely weakened by the Gaza war. Specifically, Hamas has lost much of its pre-war leadership and fighting force, and its popular support has declined since 2023, though it retains a presence in Gaza.¹⁸

Regional Security Implications

Escalation of regional conflicts

The Axis of Resistance has repeatedly turned localized disputes into wider regional confrontations. In 2024, Israel and Iran exchanged direct attacks for the first time. Israel struck the Iranian embassy in Damascus in April, Iran launched large missile and drone attacks on Israel in April and October, and Israel retaliated against Iranian military and oil infrastructure later that year. This pattern continued until and onto 2026, when a full-scale war broke out after

¹⁶ Ferragamo, Mariel. "Iran's Support of the Houthis: What to Know | Council on Foreign Relations." Cfr.Org, 24 Mar. 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/irans-support-houthis-what-know>.

¹⁷ ———. "The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) | Council on Foreign Relations." Cfr.Org, 28 Sept. 2007, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/irans-revolutionary-guards>.

¹⁸ Skare, Erik. "Iran, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad: A Marriage of Convenience." European Council on Foreign Relations, 18 Dec. 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/iran-hamas-and-islamic-jihad-a-marriage-of-convenience/>.

coordinated Israeli and US airstrikes on Iran on February 28, 2026, drawing in Axis members across multiple fronts.¹⁹

Cross-border attacks and maritime security

Axis members have used cross-border strikes and maritime disruption as a core tool of Iranian strategy, particularly when direct retaliation against the US or Israel carries too much risk. Analysts note that Iran, escalates through its proxy networks and maritime disruption in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea instead.²⁰ The Houthi campaign is the clearest example as the group has threatened to blockade the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a key global shipping route, prompting UN warnings about escalation risks to maritime navigation.²¹

Impact on neighbouring states

Iran's proxy network directly destabilizes the states it operates within and the neighbors of those states. In Lebanon, Hizballah's parallel military structure has undercut the authority of the national army and government for decades. In Iraq, militias have penetrated state institutions to the point that the more these Iran-backed militias control the Iraqi state, the more Iraqi Sunnis may turn to extremist groups such as the Islamic State for protection. This destabilizes Iraq's neighboring states as well. Saudi Arabia and the broader Gulf have faced years of Houthi cross-border missile and drone attacks as a direct consequence of Iran's support for the movement.²²

Arms proliferation

Iran has systematically transferred drones, missiles, and small arms to its proxies, and several factions have developed independent production capabilities with Iranian assistance. The US government estimated Iran provided its proxies in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen with more than \$16 billion between 2012 and 2020. The Houthis illustrate the resulting proliferation risk clearly as Iranian-supplied ballistic and cruise missile technology has allowed a non-state actor to threaten shipping lanes and strike targets hundreds of miles from Yemeni territory.²³

¹⁹ "The Axis of Resistance - Middle East Institute." Middle East Institute, 25 Feb. 2026, <https://mei.edu/backgrounder/axis-of-resistance/>.

²⁰ "Middle East: UN Warns Against Wider Escalation After Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea." UN News, 24 July 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/07/1168016>.

²¹ Ryan, Jordan. "Iran War Unravels U.S. Strategy and Strengthens Russia–China Axis." Toda Peace Institute, 24 Mar. 2026, <https://toda.org/global-outlooks/iran-war-unravels-us-strategy-and-strengthens-russia-china-axis/>.

²² Boot, Max. "Iran-Backed Militias in Iraq Poised to Expand Influence." Cfr.Org, Council on Foreign Relations, 13 Oct. 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/iran-backed-militias-iraq-poised-expand-influence>.

²³ "The Axis of Resistance - Middle East Institute." Middle East Institute, 25 Feb. 2026, <https://mei.edu/backgrounder/axis-of-resistance/>.

International Implications

Effects on international shipping and trade

Houthi attacks since late 2023 have caused significant disruption to one of the world's most important trade routes. Before the attacks began, roughly 25,000 merchant ships passed through the Red Sea annually. That number came down to around 10,000, with about 75% of US and UK affiliated vessels rerouting around Africa. This trip averaged ten days longer and roughly \$1 million more in fuel costs per voyage. Experts note this fits a broader pattern of vulnerability in global shipping chokepoints, alongside incidents like the 2021 Suez Canal blockage.²⁴²⁵

²⁴ Schneider, Jacob. "President Trump Is Standing up to Terrorism and Protecting International Commerce." The White House, 15 Mar. 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2025/03/president-trump-is-standing-up-to-terrorism-and-protecting-international-commerce/>.

²⁵ Berman, Noah. "How Houthi Rebel Attacks in the Red Sea Threaten Global Shipping." PBS News, 11 Jan. 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/amp/world/how-houthi-rebel-attacks-in-the-red-sea-threaten-global-shipping>.

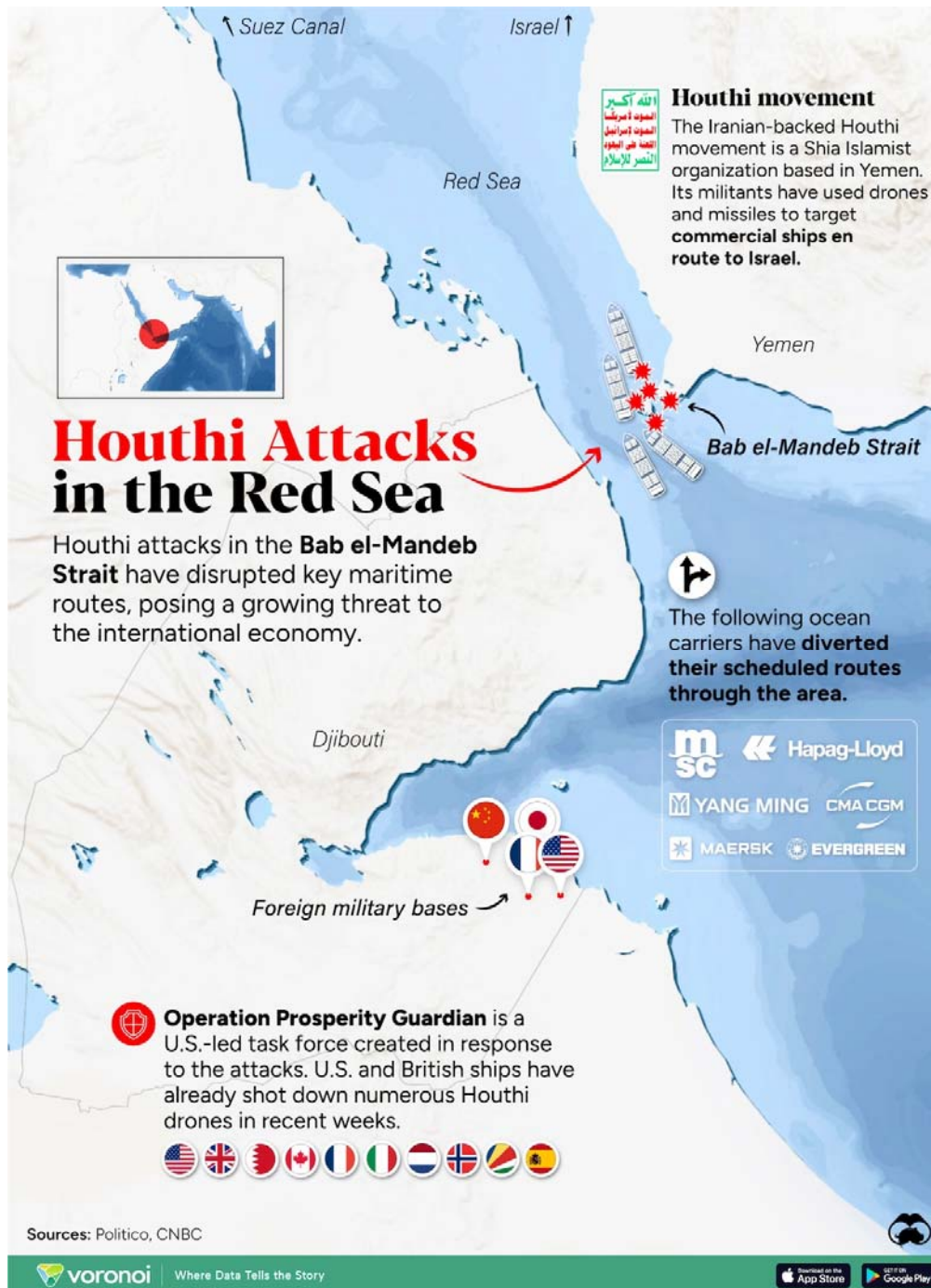


Figure 2: How Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea impact the Global Economy²⁶

Risks of regional conflicts escalating into international crises

Iran and the escalating events have increased tensions with the US and its allies, raising the odds that any single incident spirals into a wider international crisis. The clearest example is the killing of Qasem Soleimani. After Kata'ib Hizballah's missile attack killed a US contractor, and the US response killed 25 fighters, the PMF and supporters stormed the US Embassy in Baghdad, after which a US drone strike killed Soleimani. This chain of escalation brought Iran and the US to direct war. The February 2026 war shows the same dynamic at a larger scale, drawing in Hizballah, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias as fronts once Israel and the US struck Iran directly.²⁷

Great power involvement (United States, Russia, China, European states)

The 2026 war has made the Axis of Resistance a proxy battleground for broader great-power competition, not just a regional Iran-Israel-US issue. US officials say Russia has provided Iran with satellite imagery and intelligence on American warship and aircraft locations, while China has reportedly supplied advanced radar systems, deepening a technological partnership between the three states. China has also become the buyer of over 80% of Iran's oil, purchased at a heavily discounted rate, which helps Iran evade sanctions and sustain its regional activities and Chinese vessels have reportedly tracked US fleet movements in the region during the conflict. European states have taken the opposite approach, driving the sanctions-snapback process, while the US remains the principal military actor confronting Iran's proxies directly.²⁸

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Iran

Iran is the central actor of the topic, since it builds, funds, arms and directs the proxy network as part of its axis of resistance doctrine. Iran claims that its support towards the proxy forces is legitimate resistance to Israeli and US regional dominance, while rejecting the legality of the September 2025 snapback alongside Russia and China. Iran can be held accountable since it ordered Hezbollah's March 2026 intervention in support of Iran after Operation Epic Fury began. Iran suffered the loss of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the February 2026 strikes. It

²⁶ How Houthi Attacks in the Red Sea Impact Global Economy . https://www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/VORO_Red-Sea-Attacks_WEB.jpg.

²⁷ "The Axis of Resistance - Middle East Institute." Middle East Institute, 25 Feb. 2026, <https://mei.edu/backgrounder/axis-of-resistance/>.

²⁸ Brody, Jonah, and Rena Gabber. "The Axis Behind Iran: How China, Russia, and North Korea Sustain Tehran's Military Threat." JINSA, 25 Mar. 2025, <https://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/The-Axis-Behind-Iran-03.25.2026.pdf>.

has pursued détente with Saudi Arabia since 2023 while its regional position has weakened.²⁹ It is likely to keep pursuing partial regional rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, and cautiously with Syria in order to reduce isolation, while resisting any settlement that requires full proxy disarmament or permanent nuclear constraints it doesn't control.³⁰

Lebanon

Lebanon is the host state to Hezbollah, the most powerful Iranian proxy. President Joseph Aoun, who was elected during January 2025 has, unlike his predecessors, declined to endorse Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance and has committed to the state's arms monopoly.³¹ On the other hand, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam's government has moved more cautiously, and parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri, who is a Hezbollah ally, has at times blocked disarmament efforts. The Lebanese Army dismantled a significant percentage of Hezbollah's infrastructure south of the Litani River until April 2025. The government approved a five-stage state-arms-monopoly plan in late 2025, however the process froze after Hezbollah's March 2026 intervention in the Iran war and renewed Israeli strikes. Aoun is pushing for continued US-backed pressure and an Israeli withdrawal, with Lebanon's May 2026 parliamentary elections characterized as a test of whether disarmament remains politically viable.^{32,33}

Syria

Syria can be seen as a former "land bridge" for Iranian arms transfers to Hezbollah. More specifically, since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, an interim government has actively distanced itself from Iran. President Ahmed al-Sharaa has supported that Syria's problem was with the former regime's ally, not Iran itself, and has pursued closer ties with the West and Gulf states while urging negotiation to end the 2026 war rather than backing Iran militarily. Syria cut the Hezbollah resupply route after Assad's fall and then allowed Israeli and US aerial operations over Syrian territory during the 2025 and 2026 conflicts. Lastly Syria integrated Kurdish-led forces into the Syrian army during January 2026 to consolidate state

²⁹ Akbarzadeh, Shahram. 'The Saudi–Iranian Détente: A Strategic Imperative'. Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2026, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/the-saudi-iranian-detente-a-strategic-imperative/>.

³⁰ 'Fracturing the Axis: Degrading and Disrupting Iran's Proxy Network'. Israel Policy Forum, 17 Sept. 2025, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/fracturing-the-axis-degrading-and-disrupting-irans-proxy-network/>.

³¹ Brown, Chris. 'Why Disarming Hezbollah Is About Much More Than Guns and Rockets'. CBC, 7 May 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/lebanon-hezbollah-disarm-9.7189327>.

³² Rebeiz, Mireille. 'Disarming Hezbollah Is Key to Lebanon's Recovery – but the Task Is Complicated by Regional Shifts, Ceasefire Violations'. The Conversation, 15 May 2025, <https://theconversation.com/disarming-hezbollah-is-key-to-lebanons-recovery-but-the-task-is-complicated-by-regional-shifts-ceasefire-violations-255671>.

³³ Loft, Philip. 'Lebanon 2025: Plans to Disarm Hezbollah'. House of Commons Library, 29 Sept. 2025, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10347/>.

control.³⁴ Syria is expected to continue prioritizing reconstruction, sanctions relief, and Western reintegration, while trying to avoid becoming a battleground.³⁵

Israel

Israel is the primary target of Iran's proxy network under its "encirclement" strategy, and the one that can be held responsible for the 2024-2026 military degradation of that network. Israel seems to prioritize the prevention of the use of an Iranian nuclear weapon. It degraded Hezbollah's leadership and arsenal during 2024, it conducted strikes on Iranian nuclear and military sites during the June 2025 "Twelve-Day War" and, in collaboration with the US, in the February 2026 "Operation Epic Fury".³⁶ We can understand that Israel will continue pressuring for the full Hezbollah disarmament ahead of Lebanon's 2026 elections and an idea that it will sustain deterrence against Iranian reconstitution.³⁷

United States

The United States of America is Iran's principal adversary and Israel's main military and diplomatic ally. They withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and as a result they reshaped the entire trajectory. Their goal is to permanently cut Iran's nuclear, missile, and proxy-funding capabilities while maintaining regional freedom of navigation and stability. After 2018 they have implemented "Maximum pressure", they have entertained some joint strikes with Israel in June 2025 and February 2026, also known as Operation Epic Fury. Lastly, they have continuously attempted to guide the UNSC against Iran. We can understand that they are most likely to continue combining military deterrence with sanctions pressure, while pursuing "operational integration" with Israel and encouraging regional partners such as Syria, Lebanon, and other Gulf states to further isolate Iran's remaining proxy assets.³⁸

E3 (United Kingdom, France, Germany)

The three European co-signatories of the JCPOA, who have tried to preserve nuclear diplomacy since the 2018 US withdrawal, jointly triggered the snapback mechanism in 2025. Their stance focuses on maintaining the environment where Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. They have offered Iran a one-time snapback-extension deal in July 2025 under specific

³⁴ Todman, Will. 'The War With Iran Threatens Syria's Recovery'. Csis.Org, 2026, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-iran-threatens-syrias-recovery>.

³⁵ 'Syrian President Al-Sharaa on Iran War: "Syria Will Remain Outside This Conflict"'. Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, 27 Mar. 2026, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/04/syrian-president-al-sharaa-iran-war-syria-will-remain-outside-conflict>.

³⁶ 'Fracturing the Axis: Degrading and Disrupting Iran's Proxy Network'. Israel Policy Forum, 17 Sept. 2025, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/fracturing-the-axis-degrading-and-disrupting-irans-proxy-network/>.

³⁷ Khatib, Lina. 'The Degradation of Iran's Proxy Model'. The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 6 Apr. 2026, <https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/degradation-irans-proxy-model>.

³⁸ Yadlin, Amos, and Avner Golov. 'The Iran Imperative'. Foreign Affairs, 2 Apr. 2026, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/iran-imperative>.

conditions such as, resumed talks, IAEA cooperation, and addressing the enriched-uranium stockpile. However a snapback was triggered on August 28th during 2025, after Iran didn't meet those conditions. UN sanctions formally reimposed September 27, 2025. They are likely to keep pushing for a replacement framework to the JCPOA that also addresses missiles and regional proxy funding, while balancing this against Russia and China's objections to the snapback's legality.³⁹

Russia

Russia is a JCPOA co-signatory and Iran's arms and diplomatic partner. Russia has supplied Iran with missiles after the 2025 "Twelve-Day War" degraded its stockpile.⁴⁰ It considers the E3's 2025 snapback legally invalid, along with China and Iran. It also frames US and Israeli strikes as violations of international law and the UN Charter. Russia has voted to challenge the snapback's legitimacy at the UNSC, it also co-proposed, along with China a draft resolution to extend Resolution 2231 by six months during 2025, which failed, and it has abstained, instead of vetoing on Resolution 2817 during 2026, condemning Iran's attacks on neighbors.⁴¹ Lastly, Russia has supplied Iran with replacement missiles. It is likely to keep using its SC position to slow Western-led sanctions as well as enforcement efforts and preserve its own Syrian basing and Iran ties, without direct military entanglement.

China

China is also a JCPOA co-signatory, as well as Iran's largest oil customer, and a SC member using its position to blunt Western pressure on Tehran. It opposes the use of force in international relations and called the February 2026 strikes, including the killing of Khamenei, a violation of international law. Along with Russia, China disputes the legal validity of the 2025 snapback.⁴² It has Co-proposed the failed six-month extension of Resolution 2231 with Russia in 2025, it has convened, again along with Russia, an emergency UNSC session after the February 2026 strikes and it has abstained on Resolution 2817 during this year. China is likely

³⁹ Mills, Claire, and Philip Loft. 'The E3 Triggers Snapback Sanctions Against Iran 2025'. House of Commons Library, 26 Sept. 2025, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10330/>.

⁴⁰ Bisaccio, Derek, and Derek Bisaccio. 'Iran Turned to Russia, China for Missiles After 12-Day War - Defense Security Monitor'. Defense Security Monitor, 27 Feb. 2026, <https://dsm.forecastinternational.com/2026/02/27/iran-turned-to-russia-china-for-missiles-after-12-day-war/>.

⁴¹ 'Filter Page'. Securitycouncilreport.Org, 2025, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2025/09/iran-vote-on-a-draft-resolution-to-delay-the-snapback-of-un-sanctions.php>.

⁴² Rumley, Grant, and Shivane Anand. 'Tracking Chinese and Russian Statements on the Iran War'. The Washington Institute, 2026, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tracking-chinese-and-russian-statements-iran-war>.

to keep positioning itself as a stabilizer, while protecting its oil-trade relationship with Iran and resisting further sanctions escalation in the UNSC.⁴³

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1 February 1979	Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Iran after years in exile, marking the beginning of the Iranian Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, fundamentally reshaping Iran's foreign policy around revolutionary ideology.
11 February 1979	The Iranian Revolution officially succeeded with the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy. Iran adopted a theocratic political system based on the principle of <i>Velayat-e Faqih</i> (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), under which the Supreme Leader became the ultimate authority over foreign and security policy.
22 September 1980	Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, invaded Iran, beginning the Iran-Iraq War. The conflict isolated Iran internationally and laid the foundations for its later strategy of relying on proxy forces for deterrence and regional influence.

⁴³ 'Security Council Adopts Resolution 2817 (2026) Condemning Iran's "Egregious Attacks" Against Neighbours as Middle East Violence Rapidly Escalates | UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases'. Un.Org, 11 Mar. 2026, <https://press.un.org/en/2026/sc16315.doc.htm>.

1981	Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) was established in Gaza as a Sunni Islamist armed organization dedicated to armed resistance against Israel. It later developed close financial and military ties with Iran.
6 June 1982	Israel launched Operation Peace for Galilee, invading Lebanon. The conflict directly contributed to the formation of Hezbollah, which became Iran's most significant regional proxy.
1982	Hezbollah formally emerged in Lebanon with extensive support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), becoming the model for Iran's future proxy network.
20 August 1988	The Iran-Iraq War officially ended following the implementation of the UN-brokered ceasefire under Security Council Resolution 598. The war convinced Iran to pursue a strategy of "forward defence" through proxy groups rather than relying solely on conventional military power.
3 June 1989	Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died, ending the revolutionary era of Iranian foreign policy and beginning a period of reconstruction under President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.
26 December 1991	The Soviet Union officially dissolved, allowing Iran to expand diplomatic and economic relations with the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasus states during Rafsanjani's presidency.

1990s	The Houthi movement (Ansar Allah) emerged in northern Yemen as a Zaydi Shi'a religious and political movement before later becoming a major military actor in Yemen's civil war.
23 May 1997	Mohammad Khatami was elected President of Iran, initiating a period of dialogue with Western countries while Iran continued supporting Hezbollah and Palestinian armed groups under the direction of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.
24 May 2000	Israel completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon after an eighteen-year occupation. Hezbollah declared the withdrawal a victory, greatly increasing its regional prestige and demonstrating the effectiveness of Iran's proxy strategy.
29 January 2002	U.S. President George W. Bush delivered his "Axis of Evil" speech. Shortly afterwards, the term "Axis of Resistance" began to be widely used to describe Iran's regional alliance network.
20 March 2003	The United States invaded Iraq. Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani subsequently expanded Iran's influence by cultivating numerous Iraqi Shi'a militias, transforming Iran's proxy relationships into a transnational network.
18 June 2005	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected President of Iran, marking the beginning of a more hardline foreign policy and a renewed emphasis on confronting the United States and Israel.

2006	Iran's nuclear dossier was formally referred to the United Nations Security Council, significantly increasing international tensions surrounding Iran's nuclear programme.
12 July – 14 August 2006	The Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah demonstrated Hezbollah's military capabilities and reinforced Iran's confidence in its proxy strategy.
11 August 2006	The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1701, ending the 2006 Lebanon War, expanding UNIFIL, and calling for Hezbollah's disarmament, which was never fully implemented.
2011	Anti-government protests in Syria escalated into the Syrian Civil War. Iran intervened by deploying IRGC personnel and mobilising Hezbollah and foreign Shi'a militias to support President Bashar al-Assad.
2012–2020	According to U.S. estimates, Iran provided more than US\$16 billion in financial support to proxy groups operating in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.
10 June 2014	ISIS captured Mosul, prompting Iraqi Shi'a militias to unite under the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), many of whose largest factions maintained close ties with Iran.
21 September 2014	The Houthis captured Yemen's capital, Sana'a, dramatically increasing their influence in Yemen and strengthening Iran's regional position.

14 July 2015	Iran and the P5+1 signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), placing restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief. <i>(Referenced indirectly in the study guide through later events.)</i>
14 April 2015	The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2216, imposing an arms embargo on the Houthis and demanding their withdrawal from seized territory.
8 May 2018	The United States withdrew from the JCPOA and launched its "Maximum Pressure" sanctions campaign, after which Iran accelerated uranium enrichment and relied more heavily on proxy groups.
27 December 2019	Kata'ib Hezbollah launched a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base near Kirkuk, killing a U.S. civilian contractor and triggering a rapid escalation between the United States and Iran.
29 December 2019	The United States carried out airstrikes against Kata'ib Hezbollah positions in Iraq and Syria, killing approximately 25 militia fighters.
31 December 2019	Supporters of the Popular Mobilization Forces stormed the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad following the American airstrikes.
3 January 2020	A U.S. drone strike near Baghdad International Airport killed Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, bringing Iran and the United States to the brink of direct war.

2021–2023	Multiple rounds of indirect negotiations in Vienna attempted to revive the JCPOA but ultimately failed due to disagreements over sanctions relief and additional conditions.
7 October 2023	Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, triggering the Gaza War. Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iraqi militias, and other members of the Axis of Resistance subsequently intensified regional hostilities.
Late 2023	The Houthis began attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait, causing major disruptions to global maritime trade and shipping routes.
1 April 2024	Israel conducted an airstrike on the Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus, killing senior IRGC officials and triggering Iran's first direct attack on Israel.
13 April 2024	Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles directly at Israel in its first-ever direct military attack on Israeli territory.
1 October 2024	Iran carried out a second large-scale missile attack against Israel following escalating regional tensions.
December 2024	The Assad government in Syria was overthrown by Sunni Islamist rebels, eliminating Iran's principal land corridor to Hezbollah and significantly weakening the Axis of Resistance.

28 August 2025	France, Germany, and the United Kingdom triggered the snapback mechanism under UNSC Resolution 2231, citing Iran's significant non-compliance with its nuclear commitments.
27 September 2025	Previous UN sanctions on Iran were formally reimposed after the snapback mechanism took effect, restoring international restrictions suspended under the JCPOA.
28 February 2026	Coordinated Israeli and U.S. airstrikes against Iran marked the beginning of a large-scale regional war, drawing Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, and the Houthis into the conflict across multiple fronts.

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UNSC Resolution 1696 (July 2006)

The UNSC Resolution 1696 in July 2006, was the Council's first resolution on Iran's nuclear program, which demanded Iran suspend all uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities. It is deeply relevant to the issue as it established the precedent that Iran's nuclear file is a threat to international peace and security, under Chapter VII. Its effect can be characterized as negative or limited as Iran did not comply, and continued enrichment. The reason it failed was because there was no enforcement mechanism attached beyond the threat of further measures.⁴⁴

UNSC Resolution 1701 (August 2006)

The UNSC Resolution 1701 in August 2006 ended the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. More specifically it called for a full cessation of hostilities, along with the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, Hezbollah's withdrawal north of the Litani River, the disarmament of all non-state armed groups in Lebanon and lastly an expanded UNIFIL peacekeeping presence. Unfortunately, it had a negative effect on the main disarmament attempt as Hezbollah never

⁴⁴ Davenport, Kelsey. 'UN Security Council Resolutions on Iran | Arms Control Association'. Armscontrol.Org, 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/un-security-council-resolutions-iran>.

disarmed and instead became the most heavily armed non-state actor in the world. This happened because no enforcement mechanism was able to force compliance. Lebanon lacked the capacity to disarm a non-state actor that was armed and significantly more capable within its own borders.⁴⁵

UNSC Resolution 2216 (April 2015)

The UNSC Resolution 2216 in April 2015, imposed a targeted arms embargo on the Houthis Saleh-aligned forces in Yemen. It also demanded a Houthi withdrawal from seized territory and a return to the UN-facilitated political transition. Its purpose was to cut off the flow of all Iranian-origin weapons to the Houthis.⁴⁶ It also had a negative effect and the reason behind that was the weak member state enforcement of interdiction at sea and over land smuggling routes. The Houthis' consolidation of territorial and governing control in northern Yemen gave them the infrastructure to keep receiving and hiding weapons regardless of the embargo on paper.⁴⁷

US Withdrawal from the JCPOA (May 8, 2018)

The Trump administration's unilateral exit from the deal was followed by a "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign. It is relevant as it is the pivot point after which Iran began exceeding JCPOA limits and accelerated toward weapons-threshold capability.⁴⁸ It had a negative effect in terms of stability, as it did not produce a better deal addressing missiles or proxies which was the goal, and instead removed the only working constraint on the nuclear program while doing nothing to address proxy activity. "Maximum pressure" assumed Iran would return to the table on tougher terms. Instead, Iran hardened its position, expanded enrichment, and leaned more heavily on its proxy network as a lower-cost way to project power under sanctions.⁴⁹

E3-Triggered Snapback and UN Sanctions Reimposition (August–September 2025)

⁴⁵ Zeidan, Adam. 'United Nations Resolution 1701 | Lebanon, UN Security Council, Map, & Summary'. Encyclopedia Britannica, 15 Oct. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Resolution-1701>.

⁴⁶ 'Security Council Demands End to Yemen Violence, Adopting Resolution 2216 (2015), With Russian Federation Abstaining | UN Press'. Press.Un.Org, 14 Apr. 2015, <https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm>.

⁴⁷ Pine, CJ. 'UNSC Considers PoE Report Findings Ahead of Yemen Sanctions Vote'. Sana'a Center, 12 Nov. 2025, <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/perspectives-and-analyses/25831>.

⁴⁸ 'Iran's Nuclear Agreement'. Consilium, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/jcboa-iran-restrictive-measures/>.

⁴⁹ 'Iran Nuclear Agreement: Overview | EBSCO'. EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | Www.Ebsco.Com, 2015, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/iran-nuclear-agreement-overview>.

France, Germany, and the UK invoked Resolution 2231's snapback mechanism on August 28th during 2025, citing Iran's "significant non-performance". UN sanctions under the six pre-2015 resolutions were formally reimposed on September 27, 2025. It's the most recent legal escalation directly on-topic, as it restores the full arms-embargo and enrichment-suspension framework the UNSC had suspended in 2015, right as the broader region was already in active conflict.⁵⁰ Its effect can be evaluated by two results. Its supporters frame it as restoring leverage and international legal consensus while Russia and China, who opposed the move, argue it hardened Iran's position ahead of the February 2026 strikes. The outcome is disputed because the snapback was procedurally unilateral and more specifically, triggered by the E3 alone under a mechanism Russia and China argued had lapsed, so it deepened rather than resolved P5 division.⁵¹

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Unilateral US Sanctions on the IRGC and Proxies (1984–present)

The unilateral US Sanctions on the IRGC and Proxies that started during 1984 and are ongoing is a decades-long, separate reaction from the UN sanctions. The US designated Iran a state sponsor of terrorism during 1984 and has since layered on sanctions targeting the IRGC, Quds Force, Hezbollah, and Iraqi militias individually. It is really relevant as it can be characterized as the longest-running attempt on this topic, and a useful contrast case to the UN's multilateral approach. It projects perfectly what purely unilateral pressure can and can't achieve. Its effect, at least up to now, is limited, as it constrained Iran's access to the formal international financial system but did not stop proxy funding, which increasingly moved through informal channels, such as cash smuggling, oil-sanctions evasion, or even crypto.⁵²

Post-2018 Attempts to Revive the JCPOA (2021–2023 Vienna Talks)

These are indirect US-Iran negotiations, mediated by the EU, to restore JCPOA compliance after the 2018 US withdrawal, held across multiple rounds in Vienna. Unfortunately, they had a negative effect because talks repeatedly stalled and never produced a signed return to the deal. There were many domestic political constraints on both sides, as US reluctance to lift

⁵⁰ 'Completion of UN Sanctions Snapback on Iran - United States Department of State'. United States Department of State, 28 Sept. 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/completion-of-un-sanctions-snapback-on-iran>.

⁵¹ Note to Correspondents - Re-Application of Resolutions 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008) and 1929 (2010) Concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran. United Nations, 28 Sept. 2025, [https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/notes-correspondents/2025-09-28/note-correspondents-re-application-of-resolutions-1696-\(2006\)-1737-\(2006\)-1747-\(2007\)-1803-\(2008\)-1835-\(2008\)-and-1929-\(2010\)-concerning-the-islamic](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/notes-correspondents/2025-09-28/note-correspondents-re-application-of-resolutions-1696-(2006)-1737-(2006)-1747-(2007)-1803-(2008)-1835-(2008)-and-1929-(2010)-concerning-the-islamic).

⁵² Lane, Ashley. 'Iran's Islamist Proxies in the Middle East'. Wilson Center, 12 Sept. 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/irans-islamist-proxies>.

all sanctions without new missile concessions and Iranian reluctance to accept new conditions beyond the original 2015 terms, proved unresolvable, illustrating how difficult it is to restore a diplomatic bargain after a unilateral withdrawal.⁵³

Military Deterrence: Israeli Strikes on Iranian/Hezbollah Positions in Syria (2013–2024) and Direct Strikes on Iran (2025–2026)

This refers to Years of Israeli air campaigns against Iranian and Hezbollah military infrastructure in Syria, and their escalation to direct strikes on Iranian territory in the 2025 "Twelve-Day War" and February 2026's "Operation Epic Fury." It is the clearest test case of whether military deterrence alone, without a parallel political or diplomatic track, can durably reduce proxy-driven instability. It had a mixed to negative impact in terms of lasting stability.⁵⁴ More specifically, individual strikes degraded specific capabilities and killed senior commanders, including Soleimani during 2020, however the pattern shows proxies and Iran's program repeatedly reconstituting, and the 2026 strikes triggered wider regional retaliation rather than a clean resolution. The reason why deterrence alone hasn't produced lasting stability is because strikes address specific weapons, or personnel, or sites, without addressing the underlying political and ideological drivers that motivate proxy investment in the first place.⁵⁵

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

A Universal Non-State-Transfer Monitoring Mechanism

This solution closes the gap Iran has used to arm proxies without technically violating a state-level embargo. It could be implemented through a dedicated Panel of Experts, modeled on the one monitoring Yemen's arms embargo under Resolution 2216, tasked with tracking suspicious transfers across all four theaters, backed by expanded port and vessel inspection authority and mandatory member-state reporting. The main obstacles are verification difficulty, weak cooperation from transit states like Iraq, and near-certain resistance from Russia and China, who already oppose expanding coercive tools against Tehran.

⁵³ Gold, Philip. 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran Nuclear Deal) | EBSCO'. EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | Wwww.Ebsco.Com, 2015, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/diplomacy-and-international-relations/joint-comprehensive-plan-action-iran>.

⁵⁴ Veena Ali-Khan. 'Down but Not out: Reassessing the Axis of Resistance'. The Century Foundation, 19 Mar. 2025, <https://tcf.org/content/report/down-but-not-out-reassessing-the-axis-of-resistance/>.

⁵⁵ Khatib, Lina. 'The Degradation of Iran's Proxy Model'. The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 6 Apr. 2026, <https://www.belfercenter.org/research-analysis/degradation-irans-proxy-model>.

A Combined Nuclear-and-Proxy Negotiating Framework

Rather than treating Iran's nuclear program and its missile activity as separate tracks, this solution proposes a renewed multilateral framework that negotiates verifiable nuclear limits and proxy/missile de-escalation together. It could preserve the JCPOA's clear, IAEA-monitorable technical benchmarks while adding phased sanctions relief tied to verified reductions in proxy funding and arms transfers, with confidence-building back-channel talks preceding formal negotiations.

Council Support for Iraq's PMF Integration Process

Instead of imposing an external disarmament mandate, this solution has the Council formally endorse and support Iraq's own state-integration process for the Popular Mobilization Forces through a small UN support office offering technical DDR expertise, weapons-inventory verification systems and financial backing for reintegrating fighters, offered at Iraq's request and pace rather than an externally imposed deadline. This is proposed because Iraq's own experience shows domestic ownership is what has produced any real movement so far. A support role avoids the sovereignty backlash an imposed mandate would trigger, especially with PMF factions now electorally represented in parliament.

Coordinated Red Sea/Bab el-Mandeb Maritime Security

This solution formalizes and unifies the currently fragmented international naval response to Houthi attacks, bringing the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian and the EU's defensive-only Operation Aspidos under a single UN-endorsed coordination framework with clearer burden-sharing, shared threat information and active recruitment of Gulf-state participation. Some obstacles may include the EU's deliberate preference for strategic autonomy from the US-led coalition, Gulf states' reluctance to be seen choosing sides in the wider Iran conflict and the fact that maritime patrols can't manage the root cause.

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