

# Endless Arms Smuggling to the Houthis : Is Iran Seeking a New Nuclear Deal amid Yemen's Chaos?

**Fouad Muss'id**  
Situation Assessment  
Political Analysis Unit  
October 2025



صاروخ برق 2

صنع في  
اليمن



البحر

abaadstudies  
www.abaadstudies.org

## Abstract

In recent weeks, new signs have pointed to growing instability linked to arms smuggling and Iran's rising threats. Tehran continues to send weapons to its proxies in Yemen. Several shipments have been intercepted, the most recent one in early October

The seizure of a major weapons shipment in the Red Sea by the National Resistance Forces—followed by another in the port of Aden—provides compelling evidence that Iran and its allied armed groups are actively seeking to expand the scope of the conflict and heighten regional tensions. The scale of the intercepted arms was notable: more than 700 tons in the first shipment and 2,500 tons in the third. These consignments reportedly included advanced weaponry, missile and drone components, and surveillance and intelligence-gathering equipment, underscoring the sophisticated nature of the smuggling network

focusing ,smuggling arms through escalation of strategy s'Iran examines analysis This these situates It .implications broader their and shipments seized the of contents the on long-decade s'Yemen of dynamics regional and local the both within developments renewed s'Tehran of dimensions geopolitical and strategic the highlighting ,conflict behind motivations and signals potential the explores further analysis The .activity a as instability s'Yemen leveraging is Tehran whether particularly—actions s'Iran with framework negotiation nuclear new a secure to efforts its in tool bargaining powers global.

## Iran's Proxies' Weapons in Yemen:

At the beginning of October, a joint security campaign in the Al-Sabaiha districts of Lahj Governorate in southern Yemen announced the interception of a maritime vessel transporting materials and equipment used to manufacture and operate unmanned .aerial systems (UAS) for the Houthi group

In its statement, the Joint Force reported that the operation followed a precise intelligence tip-off from the security campaign to the naval forces regarding a suspicious boat several miles off the coast. The vessel was subsequently intercepted and seized, and three individuals on board were apprehended.

The statement further indicated that a significant shipment of sensitive drone-related equipment was discovered during the search. The seized items reportedly included high-resolution cameras designed for reconnaissance high-resolution cameras for aerial reconnaissance, specialized wireless communications, and remote-control units with specific operating frequencies. Furthermore, according to the statement, the shipment contained GPS trackers and global positioning system cards, electronic flight controllers, integrated navigation systems for drones, along with high-capacity power batteries and precision electrical converters.

The statement added that the shipment included electronic components and mechanical parts integral to drone operating and guidance systems, in addition to unidentified materials concealed within white bags. These will be subjected to technical analysis by the relevant authorities to determine their nature and purpose.

Last week, security authorities in the interim capital, Aden, disclosed details of a major weapons shipment seized at Aden port in early August. The shipment contained drones, espionage devices, aircraft control units, weapon spare parts, and various components. The authorities confirmed the discovery was made during a routine inspection by the Aden Port Free Zone security administration. The components had been concealed inside shipping containers; although the containers entered the port through official channels, their documentation was forged in an attempt to bypass routine inspection.

The security agencies reported that the shipment consisted of 58 commercial containers, weighing over 2,500 tons. It was loaded with military equipment, factories for drone production, espionage and jamming devices, and electronic chips for drone control systems. The cargo ship was originally sailing from Djibouti to the port of Hodeida. However, it changed course to Aden because of restrictions on ships bound for Hodeida. According to the statement, the shipment included raw materials for constructing drone airframes, such as carbon fiber, insulating materials, and raw plastic, along with plastic injection molding machines. It also contained aluminum alloys, presses, cutting and measuring machines, welding tools, oxygen cylinders, and protective gear for the engineers and technicians working in manufacturing workshops.

Additionally, the shipment included iron plates, centrifugal fans, industrial cranes, and both automated and manual lathes intended for weapon manufacturing. It also contained thermal imaging and military surveillance equipment capable of detecting the movements of individuals, vehicles, and ships, as well as adhesive chips, advanced control devices for monitoring and tracking, portable thermal cameras, dual-band frequency detectors, static magnetic detectors, and jamming devices.

## Red Sea Shipment: Advanced Missiles, Suicide Drones, and Espionage Devices

In late June, Yemen's *National Resistance Forces* intercepted a shipment of Iranian weapons being smuggled through the Red Sea, in what officials described as clear evidence of Tehran's ongoing military support for the Houthi movement.

According to senior figures in the National Resistance, which has controlled parts of Yemen's western coast since 2018, the seized cargo originated from Iran and was en route to Houthi-held areas. They said the cache "reflects the advanced level of military assistance Iran continues to provide to the Houthis."

In a press conference held in Mocha following the incident, the National Resistance detailed that the shipment contained advanced Iranian weaponry, including components for naval missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, and air defense systems, in addition to anti-tank weapons. Specific items identified were warheads and parts of the *Qadr-380* anti-ship missile with a range of up to 1,000 kilometers, as well as components of another missile known as *Tayir-3*, referred to by the Houthis as *Barq-3*, which has an estimated range of 100–200 kilometers.

The cache also included *Kheibar Shekan* missiles—rebranded by the Houthis as *Palestine-2*—and Iranian *Ya Ali* cruise missiles, which the Houthis call *Sijil*. Other discoveries included components of the *Ghadir* missile (known to the Houthis as *Mandeb-2*, with a 300 km range), parts of the *Saqr-358* surface-to-air missile (*Saqr-2* in Houthi terminology), *Strela-2* short-range air defense systems, *Soumar-10* missile engines (dubbed *Quds* by the Houthis), and components for the "Hajj Qassem" surface-to-surface missile and the "Dahlaweyah" anti-tank missile, which has a range of 5 km. Missile guidance equipment was also part of the haul.



In addition to missiles ,the shipment reportedly carried several types of Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicles) UAVs .(These included *Meraj*532- loitering munitions—suicide drones with a range of about 500 kilometers—and *FPT* reconnaissance drones. The cache also featured drone engines of various capacities, thermal and laser imaging cameras for drone detection, chemical testing devices, B-10 anti-armor guns, parts of AM-50 sniper rifles, optical scopes, and equipment used for military simulation training, along with assorted calibers of ammunition.

Notably, the seizure also uncovered Israeli-made espionage devices from the company *Cellebrite*, an Israeli firm specializing in digital forensic analysis and data extraction tools. Among the items was a “Turbo Link” device, a connectivity unit used as part of the company’s other tools for mobile device forensics. It acts as an intermediary between a target device (such as a locked phone) and other *Cellebrite* software. Its primary function is to decrypt encrypted software packages downloaded from the company’s servers, preparing them to exploit vulnerabilities in the target device for the purpose of hacking it and subsequently extracting data.

The revelation raised additional concerns about the widespread use of surveillance technologies in regional conflicts .Amnesty International had previously accused Serbian authorities of spying on journalists and activists using spyware .In a report released in December ,the organization said technology supplied by the Israeli company *Cellebrite* had been used to access mobile phones prior to cyberattacks against their owners .

## Contents of the Two Weapons Shipments Seized in the Red Sea (June 2025) and Aden Port (August 2025)

No.	Items seized — Red Sea shipment (June 2025)	Items seized — Aden port shipment (August 2025)
1	Modern Iranian weapon systems	Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and launch platforms
2	Components for naval missiles	Production plants and workshop equipment for UAVs and weapons
3	Surface-to-surface missile systems	Lathes, presses and industrial machines for manufacturing UAVs and weapons
4	Air-defense systems	Jet/rocket engines for missiles
5	Anti-tank weapons	spare parts for various light and medium weapons
6	Warheads and parts for the Qadr-380 anti-ship missile	Wireless communications devices
7	Parts for an Iranian missile referred to as “Tayir-3”	Manufacturing equipment and tooling for UAV/weapon workshops
8	Kheibar-Shekan ballistic missiles	Surveillance, espionage and jamming equipment
9	Iranian winged cruise missiles (so-called “Ya Ali”)	Electronic control chips for UAV flight systems
10	Parts for the Iranian “Ghadir” missile	Raw materials for UAV airframes (carbon fiber, insulating materials, raw plastics)
11	Components of the Saqr-358 surface-to-air system	Plastic injection molding machine
12	Short-range “Strela-2” air defense missiles	Aluminum alloys, presses, cutting and measuring machines
13	Engines for Soumar-10 missiles	Protective clothing for engineers and technicians
14	Components and devices for the “Hajj Qasim” ground-to-ground system	Various sizes of steel sheets
15	Dehlavieh anti-tank missile (range ~5 km)	Centrifugal fans and industrial cranes

16	Missile guidance and targeting equipment	Automated and manual lathes used in weapons production
17	Iranian Meraj-532 loitering munitions (suicide drones, range $\approx$ 500 km)	Thermal imaging sensors and military surveillance equipment for monitoring people, vehicles and vessels
18	FPT reconnaissance drones	Adhesive circuit boards / adhesive sheets
19	Multi-power drone engines	Handheld thermal cameras
20	Thermal and laser cameras specialized for drone detection	Static magnetic detectors
21	Chemical test kits	Electronic jamming devices
22	B-10 anti-tank guns	Advanced monitoring and tracking control units
23	Parts of AM-50 heavy sniper rifle	Non-linear junction detectors
24	Optics and equipment used for military simulation training	Dual-band frequency detectors
25	Israeli-made digital forensics / spying devices (products of Cellebrite)	Welding tools and oxygen cylinders

## Reduction in Houthi Arms Smuggling

The recently intercepted arms shipments mark a significant shift in tracking the smuggling routes used by the Houthi group across the Red Sea. Although several arms shipments have been intercepted in past years, none were comparable to the recent ones—neither in quantity nor in the sophistication of the weapons and accompanying equipment, which included drone manufacturing components and advanced surveillance devices. This escalation reflects an apparent intensification of support for the Houthis, especially amid the region's rapid developments—most notably, the unprecedented direct military confrontation between Israel and Iran. This has unfolded during a fragile and uncertain truce that could collapse at any time, potentially reigniting conflict either directly, as seen in June, or indirectly through Iranian use of its regional proxies such as the Houthis.



Arms smuggling to the Houthis has persisted for years via both land and maritime routes, particularly across the Red Sea, where the group controls key ports and strategic maritime passages. Reports from the UN Panel of Experts have consistently confirmed that weapons smuggling operations continue to be coordinated between the Houthis and their Iranian allies. While some of these smuggling attempts have been intercepted and several vessels seized, large quantities of arms have nonetheless reached Houthi forces. These weapons are subsequently employed in their ongoing conflict against Yemen's internationally recognized government and in attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

According to analysts and military observers, the seizure of such large quantities of advanced weapons and manufacturing equipment—including drone assembly and launch systems—represents a crucial turning point in Yemen's decade-long war. It also constitutes a severe strategic loss for the Houthis, who have long relied on smuggled weapons. The discovery of manufacturing equipment is particularly significant, as it suggests the Houthis were preparing to transition from consumers to domestic producers of weapons—leveraging the technical training their operatives have received from Iranian and Hezbollah experts in recent years.

For Yemen's legitimate government, these successful interceptions present an opportunity to strengthen its political, military, and security standing—if effectively managed and publicly framed as the result of its own security apparatus's efforts. However, this potential gain could be undermined if internal rivalries within the government's various factions lead to competing claims of credit for each seizure, rather than a unified presentation of national achievement.

## Implications and Indicators of Escalation

The recent interception of arms shipments in the Red Sea and at the Port of Aden comes amid an increasingly complex domestic and regional environment. Externally, the war in Gaza continues to generate ripple effects across the region, while internally, tensions within Houthi-controlled areas have intensified significantly.

On the regional level, escalation in the Red Sea remains ongoing and is expected to intensify in the coming months—particularly if negotiations between Iran, the United States, and European powers fail to reach a new understanding over Tehran's nuclear program. Although Iran appears reluctant to engage in another direct confrontation with Israel, it may instead choose to mobilize its regional proxies, especially the Houthis, to wage a proxy war on its behalf. The intercepted shipments of advanced weaponry appear to be part of this strategy.



In a related context, in July, the American *Wall Street Journal* published a report indicating that Iran has resumed efforts to rearm its allies in the region, particularly the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The report cited multiple intercepted shipments of Iranian weapons bound for these groups, including what was described as the “largest arms shipment” seized in the Red Sea. According to Yemen’s internationally recognized government, many of these shipments transit through Djibouti, located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea opposite Yemen. The report also noted that several seized documents, written in Persian, confirmed Iran as the source of the weapons and included “guidance system cameras used for anti-aircraft missiles” as well as a “certificate of quality” attached to a missile fin manufactured by an Iranian company.

This resurgence in arms smuggling coincides with renewed Houthi military escalation in the Red Sea under the pretext of supporting Gaza and confronting Israel. This stance implies the Houthis’ need for more advanced weaponry to serve their primary objective: threatening shipping in the Red Sea with missiles and drones targeting commercial vessels. This campaign is accompanied by tracking, monitoring, and surveillance operations conducted by the Houthis themselves or in conjunction with other actors possessing the advanced technology necessary to achieve this goal.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, Houthi internal repression has deepened. Last month, a Houthi-run military court sentenced Ahmed Ali Saleh, the eldest son of the late former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, to death on charges of “treason and collaboration with the enemy.” Simultaneously, Houthi authorities have intensified their campaign of arrests, detaining dozens of activists and academics across several governorates, including Sana’a, Ibb, and Al-Bayda. Armed clashes have also erupted between Houthi forces and tribal fighters in multiple areas, signaling growing public discontent and widening opposition—even among segments that were once supporters of the group.

## **Notable Economic Improvement amid UN Concerns over Escalation**

Since late July, the internationally recognized government of Yemen has undertaken a series of financial and economic reforms aimed at stabilizing the national economy. These measures included supporting the Central Bank’s plan to regulate the exchange and money transfer sectors, resulting in a marked improvement in the value of the Yemeni rial against foreign currencies. After the exchange rate had previously deteriorated to 3,000 rials per U.S. dollar, the Central Bank’s interventions helped it recover and stabilize at around 1,620 rials per dollar. This improvement was followed by a decline in the prices of basic goods and services.

The UN Special Envoy to Yemen welcomed “the recent steps taken by the Central Bank and the government to stabilize the exchange rate and the prices of essential commodities.” However, in his latest briefing, he cautioned that “regional instability continues to undermine prospects for peace and stability,” noting that ongoing escalation and economic fragmentation are “exhausting the Yemeni people and constraining the private sector.” He emphasized the importance of adopting pragmatic and preventive measures that could pave the way for peace across the country.

## Possible Scenarios

### Scenario One: Houthi Escalation Backed by Iran

This scenario appears increasingly likely given the recent seizures of large weapons shipments, both in scale and technical advancement, destined for Houthi forces. These developments coincide with growing internal unrest in Houthi-controlled areas such as Sanaa, Ibb, and Al-Bayda, where deteriorating economic conditions, worsening living standards, and intensified repression—including coercive arrests and daily crackdowns—have heightened tensions.

### Scenario Two: Continuation of De-escalation

While this scenario could represent a continuation of the current state of relative calm supported by external mediation efforts, it still serves the interests of many domestic and international actors. However, its sustainability remains uncertain. Any renewed escalation by the Houthis—whether internally against the legitimate government or externally through threats to regional stability and maritime navigation—could easily unravel the fragile balance.



## Fouad Muss'id

Researcher at Abaad Center for Studies and Research, specializing in geopolitical and demographic transformations in Yemen and broader Horn of Africa region.

## References

- 1-[Second Weapons Shipment Bound for the Houthis Seized in Less Than a Week,” Baran Press, October 5, 2025. Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2c264mkl>](#)
- 2-Ibid
- 3-[Spokesperson for the National Resistance Reveals Details of Iran's Floating Weapons Depot,” 2 December, accessed on July 27, 2025. <https://2dec.net/news75226.html>](#)
- 4-Ibid
- 5-[Fahmi al-Bahith, digital security expert, posts on personal Facebook page, accessed on July 28, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2cd86wxw>](#)
- 6-[Amnesty International: Serbian Surveillance Technology Based on Israeli Systems,” An-Nahar \(Lebanon\), December 16, 2024. Accessed on July 27, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2dhqc8rw>](#)
- 7-[Weapons Shipments Continue to Yemen and Lebanon: Iran Strengthens Houthi Capabilities and Rebuilds Hezbollah's Arsenal,” Euronews Arabic, July 18, 2025. Accessed on August 25, 2025. <https://arabic.euronews.com/2025/07/18/iran-continue-to-rearm-houthis-hezbollah-amid-tension-israel-sharara-syria-yemen>](#)
- 8-[Military Court Sentences Ahmad Ali to Death,” Saba News Agency \(Houthi-affiliated\) , July 31, 2025. Accessed on August 3, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/279bs8au>](#)





مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث

Abaad Studies & Research Center



0 0 9 6 7 7 3 7 8 8 7 7 7 8



0 0 9 6 7 7 3 7 8 8 7 7 7 8



a b a a d s t u d i e s



a b a a d s t u d i e s



Abaad Studies & Research Center



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث

abaadstudies@gmail.com

info@abaadstudies.org

www.abaadstudies.org

مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث منظمة مجتمع مدني غير ربحي مرخص ، من وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية اليمنية رقم (436) في 18 أكتوبر 2010م ، يهتم بالقضايا السياسية والفكرية والاعلامية كقضايا الديمقراطية والانتخابات والأحزاب وقضايا الأمن والإرهاب ونشاطات الجماعات الابدولوجية والحريات السياسية والفكرية والصحفية إلى جانب القضايا الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والإنسانية ذات الارتباط بالمتغيرات السياسية.