



Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators

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No Platform for Regional Threats: The Houthis, Iran's War and Yemen's Test of Deterrence

Monthly strategic assessment for decision-makers | Political, security, economic and humanitarian indicators

Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators

An early-warning report that reads the implications of developments, not only their chronology

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Methodology and Analytical Approach

Abaad Observatory for Early Warning and Strategic Indicators adopts a multi-stage monitoring and analysis methodology designed to transform raw materials, news items, reports and dispersed data into indicators that can be understood, measured and assessed. The aim is to help decision-makers, researchers and relevant stakeholders read developments in Yemen and anticipate possible trajectories.

The methodology begins with collecting monitored materials from media sources, official statements, local and international reports, organizational outputs and available field indicators. These materials are then classified into key tracks: political, economic, social, military, security, rights and humanitarian indicators.

After classification, the materials are analyzed across four main levels: event intensity, indicator direction, level of impact and early-warning significance. The Observatory does not treat news items as isolated incidents, but as signals that may reveal broader trends, rising risks or exploitable opportunities.

The Observatory also uses artificial intelligence tools to support the processing of raw information, sorting of materials, detection of recurring patterns, classification of indicators and generation of initial readings that help the analytical team produce faster and more structured situation assessments. Artificial intelligence is not used as a substitute for human judgment or editorial responsibility; it is an assisting tool within a research process supervised and reviewed by the Observatory's team.

Fixed Editorial Note

This report is not intended to provide a monthly news archive or to simply restate all developments in chronological order. Rather, it seeks to produce an analytical reading directed at decision-makers. Accordingly, issues are arranged according to their level of impact and strategic significance, not merely according to the date on which they occurred.

Some events that may appear limited in media volume may receive greater analytical weight if they are connected to the future of the state, the monopoly of force, unified security command, the settlement track, or the rights and humanitarian situation.

Executive Summary

March 2026 marked a shift in the Yemeni file from political warning to direct operational risk. The escalation of the regional war linked to Iran coincided with the Houthis' declared readiness - and then their announced military participation - alongside Tehran, making Yemen more vulnerable to being turned into a platform for threatening regional and international security.

The central headline of the month was the Yemeni government's assertion that it would not allow Yemeni territory to be used as a platform for threatening regional and international security. This was not an isolated political statement; it emerged within a set of interconnected military, security, economic and humanitarian indicators: threats to Bab al-Mandab, missiles launched from Yemen, the seizure of an Iranian smuggling vessel, raised military readiness, and UN concern over dragging Yemen into regional war.

Politically, the Yemeni government sought to build a diplomatic deterrence narrative around three messages: condemning Iranian attacks against countries in the region, rejecting the use of Yemen as a proxy platform, and urging the international community to treat the Houthis as an instrument of regional threat rather than merely a local party to an internal conflict.

Militarily and security-wise, the maritime front, borders, coasts, Marib, Saada, Shabwa and Hadramawt became elements of a single risk equation. The Houthis' declared participation alongside Iran, threats to Bab al-Mandab, assassination attempts and the government's readiness instructions indicate that March moved from a rhetoric of tension to field-level preparations with escalation potential.

Economically, Bab al-Mandab emerged as the most sensitive vulnerability in the trade and energy equation, not only for Yemen but also for Egypt, the Gulf region and international commerce. On the humanitarian and rights tracks, serious indicators accumulated: the killing of a journalist, continued detention of UN staff and humanitarian workers, stalled detainee negotiations, widening famine risk, and 2025 being recorded as the deadliest year for migrants on the Red Sea route.

General Risk Indicator

Overall risk level in March: Red / Critical.

The risk indicator rises to the critical level because the source of risk is no longer purely domestic. It is composed of three intertwined levels: a regional level linked to the war involving Iran and its repercussions; a maritime level linked to Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea; and a domestic level linked to the Yemeni government's ability to enforce deterrence and unify military and security readiness.

The most sensitive indicator is the Houthis' announcement of military participation alongside Iran. This transforms Yemen from a country affected by regional tension into a country being used in the confrontation. This shift raises the probability of external military responses and increases risks to civilians, navigation, trade and political efforts.

The second risk is Bab al-Mandab. Iran's threat to close the strait through the Houthis, and Operation Aspides' announcement that it had secured the passage of more than 1,660 commercial vessels, show that the Red Sea has become an international test of the ability of the international community and the Yemeni state to prevent the militarization of maritime corridors.

The third risk is internal. Assassination attempts in Marib and Shabwa, the raising of military readiness, and the continued absence of part of the leadership outside Yemen all reflect fragility in managing a critical moment and increase the need for a unified decision-making center.

Key Transformations in March

First, there was a political shift in the government's discourse from warning to a declaration of readiness to take measures. The government affirmed that it would not allow Yemen to be turned into a platform for threatening regional and international security, a significant move from condemnation to sovereign responsibility.

Second, a clear regional shift emerged as Iranian attacks against countries in the region escalated, Yemeni forces expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia and Arab states, and messages repeatedly linked the Houthis to the Iranian project. Yemen is therefore no longer read only through the internal settlement track, but also through the regional deterrence equation.

Third, the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab became a global economic and security file. Threatening the strait means more than disrupting navigation; it threatens trade, energy and supply chains, placing Yemen at the center of Egyptian, Gulf, European, American and Chinese calculations.

Fourth, direct military indicators increased: the Houthis' announced participation alongside Iran, the interception of a missile launched from Yemen toward Israel, the seizure of an Iranian smuggling vessel, readiness instructions, and movement along several fronts. These indicators reveal an environment capable of rapid escalation.

Fifth, the humanitarian and rights file remained in the danger zone, with continued detention of UN and humanitarian staff, a stalled prisoners and detainees file, the killing of a journalist, widening famine risk and a worsening migrant tragedy in the Red Sea.

What March's Indicators Mean for Decision-Makers

March's indicators mean that statements of condemnation are no longer sufficient. What is required is a political, security and maritime deterrence system that links the protection of Yemeni sovereignty, preventing the Houthis from using the country as an Iranian platform, and ensuring that the Red Sea is not left to international arrangements alone.

They also mean that the Yemeni government has an opportunity to redefine its international role: not merely as an authority requesting support, but as a necessary partner in protecting maritime corridors and preventing Yemen from becoming a source of regional threat. This opportunity, however, is conditional on having an institutional vision, maritime capabilities and a unified diplomatic narrative.

The indicators also show that any peace process with the Houthis will become more complicated if their military decision-making remains linked to Tehran. Peace cannot be built with a party that reserves the right to use Yemen in a regional war beyond the calculations of Yemenis.

Internally, assassination incidents, unpaid salaries on the frontlines, and weak continuity of leadership inside the country should not be separated from the regional battle, because external deterrence requires a more cohesive internal front.

Rising Risks

- First risk: Yemen being turned into a military platform in Iran's war through missile attacks, maritime operations or military mobilization serving Tehran's calculations.
- Second risk: closure or threatened closure of Bab al-Mandab, raising the cost of shipping and insurance and affecting Egypt, the Gulf economy and international trade.
- Third risk: broader international military responses against Houthi sites inside Yemen, which could worsen humanitarian conditions and expand the scope of war.
- Fourth risk: internal-front fragility, especially amid assassination attempts, unpaid salaries, multiple decision-making centers and the absence of some leaders from inside the country.
- Fifth risk: worsening humanitarian conditions, including widening famine risk, stalled detainee negotiations, and continued detention of UN staff and humanitarian workers.

Available Opportunities

- First opportunity: transforming international attention to the Red Sea into direct support for Yemeni state capacities in the Coast Guard, ports, maritime intelligence and anti-smuggling monitoring.
- Second opportunity: building an Arab and international diplomatic coalition around the principle that Yemen must not be used as a platform for threatening regional and international security.
- Third opportunity: using the seizure of the Iranian smuggling vessel to build a broader evidence file on arms and smuggling networks feeding the Houthis.
- Fourth opportunity: developing economic cooperation with China in energy and infrastructure, provided that it is linked to the stability of ports and trade corridors.
- Fifth opportunity: making the file of detainees, prisoners and humanitarian workers a humanitarian test for any future negotiation track, rather than leaving it hostage to military escalation.

Possible Scenarios

- Scenario One: Limited maritime escalation. Probability: Medium to High. The Houthis continue to threaten or conduct limited attacks in the Red Sea in support of Iran, without reaching a full closure of Bab al-Mandab. This raises shipping costs and international pressure.
- Scenario Two: Broader international deterrence. Probability: Medium. Houthi participation triggers wider military or intelligence responses against their capabilities, with risks to civilians, infrastructure and humanitarian aid.
- Scenario Three: Political-security containment. Probability: Medium. UN, regional and international pressure succeeds in keeping Yemen out of full escalation, while low-level tension continues intermittently on fronts and in the Red Sea.
- Scenario Four: Widening internal fragility. Probability: Medium. External pressures coincide with assassination incidents, weak salary payment and differences inside the anti-Houthi camp, reducing the government's ability to manage escalation efficiently.

Early-Warning Matrix

Indicator	Risk level	Trend	Meaning	Suggested response
Houthi participation alongside Iran	Red	Rising	Turns Yemen into a regional conflict platform	Documented political, security and maritime deterrence
Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea	Red	Rising	Threatens trade, energy and navigation	Yemeni Red Sea security cell
Seizure of Iranian smuggling vessel	Orange	Rising	Evidence of continuing Houthi supply networks	International arms-and-smuggling evidence file
Government military readiness	Orange	Rising	Required response but needs institutional continuity	Unified command and salary regularization
Detainees and humanitarian workers	Orange	Persistent	Rights and humanitarian pressure on any political track	Negotiation and rights priority
Famine and migration	Red	Rising	Escalating humanitarian effects of regional tension	Humanitarian funding and migration-route protection

Recommendations for Decision-Makers

- 1. Establish a high-level Yemeni cell for Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab security, bringing together the government, military, Coast Guard, intelligence, economic and diplomatic institutions.
- 2. Turn the principle of not allowing Yemen to be used as a threat platform into an operational plan that includes monitoring, deterrence, documentation and diplomatic action.
- 3. Build an international evidence file on the Houthi-Iran relationship, including smuggling, missiles, financing and maritime threats.
- 4. Strengthen the internal front through salary regularization, investigation of assassination attempts and unified military and security command inside the country.
- 5. Insist that international protection of the Red Sea be linked to building Yemeni state capacities, not to a separate international management of maritime corridors.
- 6. Prioritize the file of detainees, UN staff and humanitarian workers in negotiations, as it has become an indicator of Houthi behavior toward international law.
- 7. Link economic recovery plans to port and maritime-route security, and build realistic partnerships in energy and infrastructure with international partners.

Concluding Situation Assessment

March 2026 was the month in which Yemen moved from the risk of political exploitation to the risk of direct military use in the regional conflict. The Houthis declared, in varying degrees of rhetoric and practice, their entry into the war equation alongside Iran, while the Yemeni government sought to affirm its sovereign responsibility to prevent the country from being turned into a threat platform.

The bottom line for decision-makers is clear: unless Yemen builds institutional capacity to protect the Red Sea, unify internal readiness, dry up smuggling routes and convert international support into state capacities, the country will remain vulnerable to being used by the Houthis and Iran as a pressure tool, while the state and society bear the cost of escalation.