



The Limits of Iran's Regional Ambitions

Policy Brief by J. Dana Stuster
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Over the past four years, the Arab Spring and ensuing threats to Tehran's allies have compelled it to scale back its attempts to expand its regional power and instead focus on defending its existing sphere of influence. To this end, it has invested military, financial, and political resources in maintaining its long-standing partners. These efforts have allowed Iran to consolidate its control of some of its allies, most notably Damascus, but the power of these allies has declined and Tehran's sectarian response to recent crises has undermined its long-term strategic goal of increasing its influence throughout the Middle East.

These facts stand in stark contrast to the current political narrative. Many analysts, both in the United States and among U.S. allies abroad, have described Iran's role in the Middle East as ascendant. In their eyes, Iran is "on the march" and toppling capitals throughout the region. Such rhetoric, repeatedly invoked by members of the U.S. Congress, is an alarmist mischaracterization of Iran's role in the geopolitics of the Middle East. This brief is intended as a corrective to this narrative, providing necessary historical context and a clear-eyed assessment of its regional policy.

Iran's role in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere continues to conflict with U.S. interests in the Middle East, and Tehran's defensive foreign policy should not discount the most destructive elements of its foreign policy, including enabling the Assad regime's massacre of civilians and supporting designated terrorist groups. But placed in context, it is clear that Iran has not made marked gains since the Arab Spring. Despite the shifting to focus on its most critical partners, Tehran is today seeing its influence in the region recede and its allies' power and sovereignty diminished. Sound U.S. policies can

check Iran's destabilizing influence while engaging Tehran on shared interests, such as containing the threat from the Islamic State and implementing a mutually beneficial nuclear agreement.

A few short years ago, Iran was focusing on expanding its role in the Middle East, including among Sunnis, capitalizing on its mantle as the leader of the self-proclaimed anti-Israel "Axis of Resistance."¹ Though Tehran still aspires to regional preeminence, challenges to its allies have forced it to deemphasize its resistance to Israel: Its ties to Hamas have been largely usurped by Turkey and Qatar, and Hezbollah, a cornerstone of Iran's resistance axis, is focused almost entirely on Syria and likely incapable of sustaining a fight against Israel. Iran and its allies are today deeply embroiled in sectarian civil wars it had no interest in fighting.

These challenges have strained not only Iran's partners, but its domestic politics as well. Iran's economy has been suffering under international sanctions – its GDP today is one-fifth smaller than projections made in 2011 – exacerbating the financial strain of its efforts to bolster its allies.² Its expensive foreign entanglements come even as Iran is in need of at least \$500 billion worth of domestic investment, which will not be immediately forthcoming as nuclear sanctions are lifted.³ It is no wonder then that Iran's leadership has struggled to build popular support for its policies – one poll found that only 37% of the Iranian public approves of their government's military intervention in support of the Assad regime.⁴

Syria

Syria has been the keystone in Iran's sphere of influence since the 1980s, when the two countries were bound in a partnership based on a shared interest of empowering proxies in Lebanon and a shared distrust of the government of Saddam Hussein. The relationship has ebbed at times, but Tehran moved to reinvigorate ties a decade ago following the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁵ Recognizing Damascus' role in Iran's regional policies – Martin Indyk called it "a strategic linchpin for dealing with Iran and the Palestinian issue" – the United States made some effort at rapprochement before the start of the Syrian civil war.⁶ Even at that time, though, diplomats were doubtful that it would do much to break Syria free of Iran's orbit.⁷

Syria's civil war has only deepened this existing alliance, but at great cost to Iran. Despite sanctions that have devastated Iran's economy, it is still spending billions of

dollars each year – possibly \$6 billion annually according to the United Nations' special envoy, or as much as \$15 billion according to independent estimates – to support the regime.⁸ Additionally, it is shipping millions of barrels of oil to Syria, worth an estimated \$600 million over the last six months alone, rather than selling it in its sanctions-limited oil market.⁹ Iran has also sent thousands of troops, including its foremost strategist Gen. Qasem Soleimani and units from its elite Qods Force, even surging 7,000 soldiers to the Damascus area in recent months.¹⁰ In addition to these regular forces, Iran has invested significant funds and effort in training and equipping a network of Shia militia proxies.¹¹

Five years ago, the Assad regime had uncontested control of its territory and could provide Iran overland access to its partners in Lebanon.¹² This is no longer the case, and Iran is spending blood and treasure at an unsustainable rate to preserve the Assad regime's diminished control of Syria's west.

Iraq

Iran's assertion of influence in Iraq was apparent from the earliest stages of the U.S. invasion in 2003. Within a month of U.S. troops entering the country, Iran had assumed control of a network of Shia proxies and in the ensuing years has cemented its role through the provision of funds, weapons, and political patronage.¹³ In late 2010, capitalizing on its ascendant influence with both the government in Baghdad and informal Shia networks, Iran issued an ultimatum to Iraq's leadership to accept Tehran's guidance, and the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his allies complied.¹⁴

Iran feels genuinely threatened by two forces in Iraq today: the Sunni disquiet to its west, most apparent in the armies of the Islamic State, and the renewed diplomatic and military influence of the United States. Iran's efforts in Iraq since the fall of Mosul have been calculated to walk a line between making compromises to ensure the continuity of a friendly government in Baghdad while hedging against the United States, which a conspiratorially-minded faction in Tehran falsely believes is manipulating the Islamic State to provide an opening to reassert influence in Iraq.¹⁵ Last year, Iran backed efforts supported by the United States to force its ally Maliki to step aside, but it has focused on other ways to ensure its continued influence.¹⁶ Iran has sold \$10 billion in new weapons to Iraq in the past year, including missiles, with shipments of supplies often

arriving twice a day.¹⁷ It has also doubled down on its support for Shia militias and deployed an unknown number of troops; many of these have been described as advisors, though there are anecdotal accounts of them participating in frontline combat.¹⁸

Iran's role in Iraq today is more overt, but not new. For the first time, Tehran is having to provide material support to back up the influence it has done little to earn in Iraq.¹⁹ The government it supports cannot exert sovereign control over more than a third of the country, and Iran's efforts to mobilize its proxies have exacerbated sectarian tensions and proven indecisive at strategic points in the conflict.²⁰ Rather than tightening its hold on Iraq, Iran is now facing the most serious challenge to its influence there in years, both from the country's population of discontented Sunnis in Anbar and U.S. diplomats in Baghdad.

Lebanon

Over the last 33 years, starting when Iran sent a contingent of Republican Guard Corps trainers to the Bekaa Valley to form a new Shia militia, Tehran has built its proxy Hezbollah into the decisive political and military force in Lebanon.²¹ Hezbollah has always justified its existence as a paramilitary organization with its resistance against the state of Israel, but particularly as Syrian influence diminished after the Cedar Revolution in 2005, Hezbollah has played a much more active role in Lebanese politics. This influence, Hezbollah's force of arms, and its popular support are all underwritten by Iran.²²

The Syrian civil war has placed new strains on Hezbollah. The organization has shifted its attention from Israel to Syria, sending its best fighters and strategists to support the Assad regime in what Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has characterized as an existential battle. This departure from its principle of resistance against Israel has damaged its credibility in Lebanon, especially outside of its primary base of support among Lebanon's Shia population.²³ Its supply lines are also increasingly threatened: The civil war (and its diplomatic effects) has cut off overland access to Iran, and Syria's efforts to deliver advanced weapons to Lebanon have been repeatedly interdicted by Israeli airstrikes. Perhaps most important, the war has taken a toll on Hezbollah's fighters. In 2013, Israeli intelligence estimated that Hezbollah had deployed 4,000 to 5,000 troops to Syria; that figure is believed to have increased since, further straining

Hezbollah's forces, which as a whole are believed to consist of 5,000 fighters and 15,000 reservists.²⁴ Discipline is reportedly breaking after suffering hundreds, and possibly thousands, of casualties.²⁵ The long, grueling pace of the war is also taking a toll on Hezbollah's relationship with Iran; Tehran is rumored to be dissatisfied with Nasrallah's leadership (or lack thereof) and investigating the embezzlement of Iranian funds.²⁶ It is unclear whether or not Hezbollah could sustain a war with Israel should one occur – and in fact, Hezbollah seems to be actively avoiding escalation along its southern border.²⁷

Gaza

Iran forged its relationship with Hamas in the early 1990s in an effort to gain credibility with the Arab public and disrupt the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.²⁸ "In the long-term, Iran sees the Palestinians as essential for regional acceptance of Iran's Middle East presence," then-Charge d'Affaires Stephen Seche noted in a 2006 cable from the U.S. embassy in Damascus.²⁹ Before the Arab Spring, Iran was sending more than \$100 million annually to Hamas, as well as Iranian-made missiles.³⁰ But threats to Iran's immediate sphere of influence have complicated its relations with the group and forced Tehran to deemphasize long-term efforts to build support in the broader (mostly Sunni) Arab world.

The Syrian civil war has strained the Iran-Hamas alliance, both politically and financially. As the Assad regime's merciless campaign against its own people escalated, Hamas found it increasingly difficult to maintain its credibility with its majority Sunni constituency while relying on largesse from Iran and Syria. In February 2012, Hamas decamped from its headquarters in Damascus – possibly abandoning significant financial assets in the process. Tehran responded by slashing its aid to the group.³¹ As Iran has abandoned its efforts to make inroads with the broader Arab public and turned inwards to focus on protecting its partners in Iraq and Syria, the utility of supporting Hamas has decreased. Though Iran is believed to still provide some support to Hamas, it has allowed its influence and patronage to be supplanted by Qatar and Turkey, which have aligned themselves with Sunni political Islamist movements around the region and are competing against Iran's interests in Syria.

Yemen

Rumors that Iran has been providing low-level support to Yemen's Houthi movement have circulated since the Saada wars, a series of conflicts from 2004 to 2010 between the Yemeni government and the Houthis that at times included Saudi intervention. This support, which may have included bags of cash and small arms, was always kept at a low level, providing Tehran what was essentially plausible deniability.³² As the Houthis' fortunes have risen since the Arab Spring, Iran's support has been more visible, including prominent coverage on Iranian news stations.

However, Iran's actual influence with the Houthis has been dramatically overstated. Though the Houthis are often characterized as being supported by Iran – true only in a technical sense – the decisive factor in the Houthis' efforts to assert control over the country has been their alliance of convenience with ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who retains support among large swaths of the Yemeni military. The Houthis are perceived by many Yemenis as militant tribes or dissident Shia fundamentalists and lack a wide base of political and military support in the country. Iranian support cannot change that, while Saleh's band of loyalists can. Iran, for its part, actually advised the Houthi leadership against trying to seize the capital of Sanaa in September 2014, likely recognizing that it would over-extend the Houthis and provoke a war in which Tehran did not want to be trapped.³³ The Houthis, with the support of Saleh's forces, proceeded in spite of Tehran's advice – prompting a civil war and Saudi intervention on behalf of the displaced Sanaa government. Iran now finds itself bound to an unreliable ally in a civil war it tried to avoid.

Conclusion

The reach of Iran's foreign policy has exceeded its grasp. For all its efforts to maintain its sphere of influence and expand its power in the Middle East, it has gained little from its interventions. Tehran has consolidated its control over the leadership in Damascus and South Beirut, but these allies are stretched thin and seeing their power and influence recede. Meanwhile, Iran is increasingly challenged in Iraq by the Islamic State and resurgent U.S. diplomacy. In Gaza, Tehran has ceded its influence with Hamas to the same governments supplying its opponents in Syria. Far from an ascendant actor in the region, Iran is currently fighting the greatest challenge to its power since its sphere of influence coalesced in the 1980s. The discourse in the United States should take this

into account and refrain from inflating the threat of Iran's policies. Such alarmism risks an American overreaction. Instead, U.S. policy must take into account not just Iran's ambitions for preeminence in the region, but also the limited effectiveness of its recent strategy.

Notes

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¹ See "Military Power of Iran," U.S. Department of Defense, April 2010, Available at: http://www.politico.com/static/PPM145_link_042010.html

² Jacob Lew, "Full text of US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's remarks at the Jpost Annual Conference," *Jerusalem Post*, June 7, 2015, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Annual-Conference/Full-text-of-US-Treasury-Secretary-Jacob-Lews-remarks-at-the-Jpost-Annual-Conference-405309>

³ "Iran's domestic investment needs are estimated to be at least half a trillion dollars, which far exceeds the benefit of sanctions relief. Iran's priority – as expressed with the election of President Rouhani – is to address those domestic needs first: fixing its budget, paying for infrastructure upgrades, increasing imports, and shoring up the rial. Reserves that would be released are far less than what Iran requires to address all of these needs." Jacob Lew, "Full text of US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's remarks at the Jpost Annual Conference." For more on the challenges for Iran reaping the benefits of diminished sanctions, see Elizabeth Rosenberg and Sara Vakhshouri, "Iran's Economic Reintegration: Sanctions Relief, Energy, and Economic Growth Under a Nuclear Agreement with Iran," Center for a New American Security, June 23, 2015, Available at: http://www.cnas.org/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/CNAS%20Report_Iran%20Sanctions_062215_final.pdf

⁴ Benedetta Berti and Jonathan Paris, "Beyond Sectarianism: Geopolitics, Fragmentation, and the Syrian Civil War," and the Syrian Civil War," *Strategic Assessment*, 16, no. 4, January 2014, Available at: <http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/Beyond%20Sectarianism.pdf>

⁵ Perhaps recognizing that the ousting of Hussein lessened Syria's strategic interest in its partnership with the Islamic Republic, Tehran moved quickly to shore up its alliance. In 2005, Iran and Syria signed a new mutual defense pact and soon after, Iran named Mohammed Hassan Akhtari as its new ambassador in Damascus. Akhtari was previously the ambassador from 1986 to 1998 and pioneered the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis. "Iranian Architect of Syria-Iran-Hizballah Relationship Returns to Damascus," 06DAMASCUS21_a, January 2, 2006, Available at: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS21_a.html

⁶ "I'd love to be a fly on the wall when Bashar goes to Tehran and explains to the Supreme Leader that he wants to mediate a bilateral relationship with the United States," one anonymous U.S. official told Seymour Hersh in 2009. Seymour M. Hersh, "Syria Calling," *The New Yorker*, April 6, 2009, Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/04/06/syria-calling>

⁷ Stephen Seche, then U.S. charge d'affaires in Damascus, cabled: "Our contacts, for example, seemed to recognize that for the foreseeable future, the die is cast. The regime has calculated, and made public with the Ahmadinejad visit, that there is no possibility – given SARG [Syria Arab Republic government] perceptions of its interests – of making the concessions that could lead to an improvement in ties with the U.S." Stephen A. Seche, "Syria's Iran Gambit: Consummating a Marriage of Convenience," 06DAMASCUS287_a, January 26, 2006, Available at:

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06DAMASCUS287_a.html

⁸ Eli Lake, "Iran Spends Billions to Prop Up Assad," *Bloomberg View*, June 9, 2015, Available at:

<http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-06-09/iran-spends-billions-to-prop-up-assad>

⁹ Matthew Philips and Julian Lee, "How Iranian Oil Tankers Keep Syria's War Machine Alive," *Bloomberg Business*, June 24, 2015, Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-24/how-iranian-oil-tankers-keep-syria-s-war-machine-alive>

¹⁰ Iran has been cagey about how many troops it has deployed to Syria, but estimates in early 2014 suggested approximately 10,000 Iranian forces were active in Syria. That number is believed to have grown since, and after advances by Syrian rebels this spring, sources in the Assad regime claimed that Iran had deployed an additional 7,000 troops to defend Damascus and bolster defenses in Syria's northwest. Ruth Sherlock, "Iran boosts support to Syria," *The Telegraph*, February 21, 2014, Available at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/10654144/Iran-boosts-support-to-Syria.html>;

Scott Lucas, "Syria Feature: Is Iran Really Preparing to Send 50,000 Troops to Save Assad?" EA Worldview, June 3, 2015, Available at: <http://eaworldview.com/2015/06/iran-daily-is-tehran-really-preparing-to-send-50000-troops-to-syria/>

¹¹ Phillip Smyth, "The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2, 2015, Available at:

https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus138_Smyth-2.pdf

¹² Jeremy M. Sharp, "Syria: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, May 1, 2008, Available at: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/105180.pdf>

¹³ U.S. Marine Corps, "Who Will Govern the Iraqi Shia: The fight for Najaf," Briefing for Multi-Coalition Force-Iraq, April 2003, Available at: <https://file.wikileaks.org/file/us-iraqi-shia-2003.pdf>

¹⁴ As former U.S. diplomat Ali Khedary wrote, in late 2010, Gen. Soleimani "summoned Iraq's leaders to Tehran. Beholden to him after decades of receiving Iran's cash and support, the Iraqis recognized that U.S. influence in Iraq was waning as Iranian influence was surging. The Americans will leave you one day, but we will always remain your neighbors, Soleimani said, according to a former Iraqi official briefed on the meeting. After admonishing the feuding Iraqis to work together, Soleimani dictated the outcome on behalf of Iran's supreme leader: Maliki would remain premier; Jalal Talabani, a legendary Kurdish guerilla with decades-long ties to Iran, would remain president; and, most important, the American military would be made to leave at the end of 2011. Those Iraqi leaders who cooperated, Soleimani said, would continue to benefit from Iran's political cover and cash payments, but those who defied the will of the Islamic Republic would suffer the most dire of consequences." Ali Khedery, "Why we stuck with Maliki – and lost Iraq," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2014, Available at:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-we-stuck-with-maliki--and-lost-iraq/2014/07/03/0dd6a8a4-f7ec-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html

¹⁵ Alex Vatanka, "Iran's Moment of Truth with Maliki," Middle East Institute, June 24, 2014, Available at:

<http://www.mei.edu/content/article/iran%E2%80%99s-moment-truth-maliki>

¹⁶ Julian Borger, Saeed Kamali Dehghan, Martin Chulov, and John Hooper, "Iran puts support behind Maliki's successor as Iraqi prime minister," *The Guardian*, August 12, 2014, Available at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/12/iran-supports-successor-nouri-al-maliki-iraq>

¹⁷ Eric Schmitt, "Iran Sent Arms to Iraq to Fight ISIS, U.S. Says," *New York Times*, March 16, 2015, Available at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/17/world/middleeast/iran-sent-arms-to-iraq-to-fight-isis-us-says.html?_r=0

¹⁸ For example, Gen. Soleimani was reportedly observed discussing coordinates with an Iranian soldier in an Abrams tank. Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iran eclipses US as Iraq's ally in fight against militants," Associated Press, January 12, 2015, Available at: <http://news.yahoo.com/iran-eclipses-us-iraqs-ally-fight-against-militants-071942725.html>; for more on Iran's support for Shia militias, see Phillip Smyth, "The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects."

¹⁹ The *New York Times* reported in March “that the deployment builds on a pattern of assistance that Iran and its proxies have provided Iraq since 2004, and most recently accelerated in an effort to blunt the Islamic State’s momentum.” Eric Schmitt, “Iran Sent Arms to Iraq to Fight ISIS, U.S. Says.”

²⁰ For example, the Iraqi government requested U.S. support – angering many Shia militia leaders – after Iraqi troops and Shia militias were halted by a grinding three-week-long siege at Tikrit. Rod Nordland and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Airstrikes on ISIS in Tikrit Prompt Boycott by Shiite Fighters,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2015, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/27/world/middleeast/iraq-us-air-raids-islamic-state-isis.html>

²¹ See Thanassis Cambanis, “A Privilege to Die: Inside Hezbollah’s Legions and Their Endless War Against Israel,” Simon and Schuster, September 2010, pp. 104-105.

²² Iran – through Hezbollah – paid for the reconstruction of Lebanon after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, including new roads, hospitals, and homes. “Iranian money is the crucial means by which Hezbollah militants have cemented support in the Shiite community,” Dexter Filkins wrote of the reconstruction. Dexter Filkins, “After Syria,” *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2013, Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/02/25/after-syria>. A 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Defense concluded that Iran was providing \$100-200 million to Hezbollah annually. It is unclear if this included funds for reconstruction and infrastructure. “Military Power of Iran,” U.S. Department of Defense, April 2010, Available at: http://www.politico.com/static/PPM145_link_042010.html

²³ Rania Abouzeid, “Hezbollah, Israel, and a Fragmenting Middle East,” *The New Yorker*, January 29, 2015, Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/hezbollah-israel-fragmenting-middle-east>

²⁴ Marisa Sullivan, “Hezbollah in Syria,” Institute for the Study of War, April 2014, Available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf

²⁵ “Hezbollah’s estimated casualties in the battles in Syria range from a few hundred to some 3,000 killed and 4,000 wounded.” Zvi Bar’el, “Hezbollah’s war of survival,” *Haaretz*, May 29, 2015, Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.658642>. More than 200 Hezbollah fighters were killed in May-June 2013, during the assault on al-Qusayr. Marisa Sullivan, “Hezbollah in Syria.”

²⁶ Zvi Bar’el, “Hezbollah’s war of survival.”

²⁷ This was particularly apparent after a presumed Israeli airstrike in Syria killed Jihad Mughniya, a Hezbollah official and son of the organization’s infamous former military commander. Hezbollah retaliated with an attack on an Israeli patrol in the contested Shebaa Farms territory but did not pursue ongoing attacks. An Iranian general was also killed in the initial Israeli strike. Diaa Hadid and Zeina Karam, “Deadly Israeli strike deals painful blow to Hezbollah, Iran,” Associated Press, January 19, 2015, Available at: <http://news.yahoo.com/hezbollah-gears-funeral-iran-condemns-israel-strike-103625543.html>; see also Rania Abouzeid, “Hezbollah, Israel, and a Fragmenting Middle East.” Hezbollah’s apparent weakness if a second front is opened also discussed in Randa Slim, “Hezbollah’s plunge into the Syrian abyss,” *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2013, Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/28/hezbollahs-plunge-into-the-syrian-abyss/>

²⁸ Kenneth Katzmann, “Iran’s Foreign Policy,” Congressional Research Service, May 5, 2015, Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44017.pdf>

²⁹ Stephen A. Seche, “Syria’s Iran Gambit: Consummating a Marriage of Convenience”

³⁰ Jonathan Schanzer, “ Hamas’s Benefactors: A Network of Terror,” Testimony for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 9, 2014, Available at: <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/schanzer-jonathan-hamas-benefactors-a-network-of-terror1/>

³¹ Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah reportedly met with Hamas’ Khaled Meshal in Damascus shortly before the falling out and “reminded Meshal of their obligation to the Iranian government and pressed him to back Assad.” Dexter Filkins, “After Syria.” For more on Hamas’ departure from Damascus, see Jonathan Schanzer, “How Hamas Lost the Arab Spring,” *The Atlantic*, June 21, 2013, Available at:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/how-hamas-lost-the-arab-spring/277102/>

³² Brian Whitaker, “Yemen and Iran: What’s really going on?” *Al-Bab*, March 30, 2015, Available at: <http://www.al-bab.com/blog/2015/march/yemen-iran.htm#sthash.IHOseNjQ.dpbs>

³³ Ali Watkins, Ryan Grim, and Akbar Shahid Ahmed, “Iran Warned Houthis Against Yemen Takeover,” *Huffington Post*, April 20, 2015, Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/20/iran-houthis-yemen_n_7101456.html