

# Doubts over Turkey's tactical move to extend olive branch to Egypt

Author:

Fri, 2021-03-05 22:58

ANKARA: With Turkey hinting at a potential deal with Egypt on exclusive maritime zones in the gas-rich Eastern Mediterranean, the impact of such an agreement on energy transit routes and the political concessions that Turkey might be obliged to make have come under the spotlight.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday said that the country wanted to sign a deal over maritime boundaries.

But this willingness is currently limited to declarations from the Turkish side, with no tangible reaction from the Egyptians.

Turkey's tactical move indicates a willingness to reduce escalatory policies in the region in order to bypass any criticism from Brussels and US President Joe Biden's administration.

Potential sanctions against Turkey's controversial exploratory activities in the Eastern Mediterranean would be discussed at the European Summit on March 25-26, pushing it to not make aggressive moves ahead of that meeting.

But experts regard such a deal to still be far-fetched, at least in the short-term, because Egypt has had an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) agreement with Greece since last year. This pact angered Turkey because it has had longstanding disagreements with Greece over the extent of their mutual continental shelves.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis had a phone call on Wednesday evening, after Cavusoglu's statement, on regional issues of common interest, with a special emphasis on energy and Eastern Mediterranean issues, another strong signal that Greece would do its best to not let a Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement happen.

Turkey said the deal between Greece and Egypt did not include a disputed zone to the south of the Greek island of Kastellorizo which Turkey claims under its own EEZ.

Relations with Egypt have been strained after the Turkish-backed Mohammed Mursi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was ousted by El-Sisi in 2013.

Last year, Egypt, Cyprus and Greece released a joint declaration accusing Turkey of carrying out "provocations" in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Egypt has been involved in the East Mediterranean Gas Forum since 2019 without involving Turkey.

Turkey and Egypt have also backed opposing sides in Libya's civil war.

"Turkey has tried to lure Egypt into signing an EEZ agreement with it by claiming it will receive a bigger share than it will from a bilateral agreement between Athens and Cairo," Gallia Lindenstrauss, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Israel, told Arab News. "In a similar manner, it has presented the claim that the EEZ agreement between Israel and Cyprus gives Israel less than what it would receive had it signed an agreement with Turkey."

While a relaxation in tensions between Turkey and Egypt was plausible, Lindenstrauss did not expect a serious rapprochement happening soon, so an EEZ agreement between the sides was not likely to materialize.

In late February, Egypt and Israel agreed on linking an Israeli offshore natural gas field to liquefied natural gas facilities in northern Egypt through an underwater pipeline to meet the increased demand for natural gas in Europe.

The pipeline will begin from Israel's Leviathan gas field and then head to Egypt by land before going to Crete through the Greek-Egyptian EEZ.

This route sidesteps Cyprus. In other words, the gas is not likely to be exported through disputed areas that might draw Turkish objections.

Emre Caliskan, a research fellow at the UK's Foreign Policy Centre, thought that Turkey's recent efforts to improve its relations with Israel and Egypt was motivated by a need to break the alliance between Greece, Israel, Cyprus and Egypt.

"These countries have been united against Turkey's increasing influence and gas searches in the Eastern Mediterranean," he told Arab News. "From the Turkish policymakers' strategic view, Greece and Cyprus interests are in contradiction with Turkey's ambitions in the region. Therefore, Turkey will try to distance Greece and Cyprus from Egypt and Israel."

These moves require a change in Turkey's support to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology that inspires Hamas in order to bring Egypt onside and end the bilateral dispute. Turkey hosts several of the organization's members and supporters since the group's activities were banned in Egypt.

Last month, the Israeli Defense Ministry announced seizing goods worth \$121,000 sent by Turkey-based Hamas members to individuals in the West Bank through two Turkish companies.

"We have recently heard claims that Turkey has been reassessing its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. It is too early to assess any policy change in relation to this. Any substantial reconciliation with Israel and Egypt will require Turkey to distance its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood," Caliskan said.

For Caliskan, Turkey's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood was based on ideology and also on a strategic partnership.

"Distancing Turkey's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood would impact

Turkey's influence in Libya for example. Turkey is likely to compartmentalize its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, reducing its support to their presence in Egypt and Palestine, but will continue supporting them in North Africa, especially in Libya and Tunisia."



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## [Lebanese president welcomes Pope Francis' Iraq arrival](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-03-05 22:57

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun welcomed the pope's arrival in Iraq on Friday, saying he hoped it would be a "push toward establishing the genuine peace" that people in the region needed.

Pope Francis is in Iraq from March 5-8. It is the first time a pope has visited the country, and the trip is one of the most complicated the Vatican has had to organize because of security concerns and the pandemic.

People in Lebanon followed the pope's arrival on local TV, and Lebanese journalists flew to Iraq to cover the event.

President Michel Aoun expressed his hope in a tweet that the visit would be a "push toward establishing the genuine peace that Iraqis, as well as all the other peoples of the region, need."

He tweeted: "Welcome Pope Francis to the land of the East, the land that has always brought together civilizations, religions, and cultures."

Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri described the visit as historic in all "spiritual, cultural, and human dimensions" and a message to the whole region about the importance of interfaith dialogue and the "protection of Muslim-Christian coexistence."

Hariri tweeted: "We look forward to receiving the pope in Lebanon."

Marada party leader Suleiman Frangieh said the papal visit was a message of peace and dialogue between religions and an establishment for Christians on their land on the basis of coexistence and common faith.

The Maronite Catholic Patriarch of Antioch Bechara Al-Rai was not at the papal reception in Iraq.

Walid Ghayad, a spokesman for the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate in Lebanon, said that Al-Rai had excused himself from participating.

"The patriarchate has no eparchies or parishes in Iraq, in addition to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic," the spokesman told Arab News. "As the pope will travel a lot inside Iraq, Patriarch Al-Rai does not want to cause any inconvenience to the measures taken for the visit. The Assembly of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops in Lebanon had invited Pope Francis to visit Lebanon some time ago, and the pope said he was eager to visit Lebanon, that Lebanon deserved a special visit, and that he would see when to visit."

Al-Rai called the pope's Iraq visit "great, historic, and the greatest evidence of reestablishing the value of Iraq, this historical land that has its religious, civilizational, and social role."

"The pope has his way to heal wounds," he added. "He wants to assure the Iraqi people that by praying with them and carrying their cause to the whole world, they will send together messages of peace and union, especially through the meeting that will take place in Najaf to emphasize the fraternal bond between humans."

Pope Benedict XVI visited Lebanon in July 2013 for three days, with his trip coinciding with developments in the Arab Spring.



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Pope Francis delivers impassioned plea for peace as historic Iraq visit gets underway  
Lebanese media outlet Sawt Beirut International launches English-language edition

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## [Palestine: Al-Qudwa says 'no turning back' from presidential campaign](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-03-05 22:49

AMMAN: Palestinian political figure Nasser Al-Qudwa has said that he has “crossed the river” and will not reverse his plans to run on a list outside his own Fatah movement in the country’s elections.

When Arab News asked whether he will continue his “Democratic Assembly” if imprisoned leader Marwan Barghouti does not support him, he said: “There is no turning back.”

Al-Qudwa added: “There is a natural meeting between this movement and that of the imprisoned leader Marwan Barghouti, including that he leads this movement.

"Sure, the results might be different if he doesn't support it, but we are moving in a direction that makes it difficult to retreat.

"We have crossed the river and there is no turning back."

In his first-ever press conference that was open to journalists, the former Palestine envoy to the UN and foreign minister warned of the difficulties facing Palestinians. He said that there are normal duties during a national liberation movement and a different set following the end of a conflict.

"We have a mix of both, while national liberation is our priority. We need to deal with day-to-day issues that are the needs of our people.

"We have to deal with issues such as health, education and good governance."

Al-Qudwa said that Israel's actions in the region represent greed and an unwillingness to compromise.

"They want everything. They are not even saying 'we just want the settlements or the Jordan valley.' They want everything."

Governments and international bodies retracting their support for Palestinian statehood is another cause for concern, he added.

"Initially, they were saying we support the two-state solution. Now Europe and others are saying we support a negotiated two-state solution."

Al-Qudwa said that negotiations should be restricted to dealings between the occupied Palestinian state and Israel, and not on whether there should be a Palestinian state.

He also rejected out of hand the idea of a single state, warning that it represents a dangerous notion of "Greater Israel."

Al-Qudwa said that he has not taken any positions in the Palestinian government for 15 years, and that he has no plans to take any money from outside Palestinian circles.

"What we can raise from ordinary people and those who are well-to-do is enough, especially if there is no one stealing the money," he said.

Despite taking a different track, Al-Qudwa has been careful to avoid burning bridges with other longtime Palestinian political figures.

"I am still a member of Fatah," he said.

He also refused to address rumors that he was threatened several times during his last meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

"It was a closed meeting and what happens in closed meetings stays in those meetings."

However, he did say that the position of the president was "not very democratic."



While Al-Qudwa is counting on the support of fellow Fatah central committee member Marwan Barghouti, he rejected any cooperation with the UAE-based renegade Fatah leader Mohammed Dahlan.

“It is difficult to be with Dahlan, because the Palestinian people have rejected the position of the UAE,” he said in reference to the recent normalization pact that the UAE signed with Israel.

Palestinian legislative elections are due to take place on May 22, followed two months later by presidential elections, and then the convening of the PLO’s National Council at the end of summer.



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# for peace as historic Iraq visit gets underway

Author:

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1614967392419388200

Fri, 2021-03-05 21:05

ROME/BAGHDAD: Pope Francis on Friday called for an end to extremism, violence and corruption as his historic visit to Iraq got underway.

He began the first-ever papal trip to the country by meeting government officials in Baghdad, before traveling to a church where Christians were massacred by militants in 2010.

He was greeted at Baghdad's International Airport by Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi and treated to a display of traditional dancing.

He then met President Barham Salih at the Presidential Palace, where he delivered a strongly worded speech highlighting the problems that continued to blight the country.



Pope Francis speaks at the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation (Saydat al-Najat) in Baghdad at the start of the first ever papal visit to Iraq on March 5, 2021. (AFP)

“May the clash of arms be silenced,” he said. “Enough of violence, extremism, factions, intolerance. Iraq has suffered the disastrous effects of



wars, the scourge of terrorism and sectarian conflicts often grounded in a fundamentalism incapable of accepting the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups.”

The pope, referring to the outside influences often blamed for destabilizing Iraq, said the international community must provide help “without imposing ideologies” and urged Iraqi officials to “combat the scourge of corruption, misuse of power and disregard for law.”



Pope Francis speaks at the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation (Sayidat al-Najat) in Baghdad at the start of the first ever papal visit to Iraq on March 5, 2021. (AFP)

His visit comes as Iraq attempts to claw its way to stability after years of sectarian conflict, the Daesh occupation, chronic corruption, and widespread anger at government officials for failing to provide basic services. Iraq’s Christian population has also dwindled, with many fleeing overseas to build new lives.

But the pope hailed Iraq as a “cradle of civilization,” despite its many problems, and believed that all the crises it faced could be overcome by building a society based on fraternity, solidarity and concord.

He said that Iraq, with its varied religions, culture and ethnicities, could show that diversity should lead to harmony within society rather than conflict.

## Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

He drew attention to the Yazidi sect, many of whom were murdered by Daesh in 2014, and called them “innocent victims of senseless and brutal atrocities, persecuted and killed for their religion, and whose very identity and survival was put at risk.”

He said room should be made for all those who wanted to build up Iraq in a way that included the participation of all political, social and religious groups.

The Catholic Church in Iraq, he added, wanted to cooperate constructively with other religions in serving the cause of peace.



A handout picture released by the Vatican media shows Pope Francis speaking at the presidential palace in Baghdad's Green Zone, on March 5, 2021. (AFP)

He traveled across the city in an armored black BMWi750 rather than the popemobile normally used for foreign visits. The motorcade included dozens of police on motorcycles.

Iraq's security situation was the greatest threat as to whether the visit would go ahead, along with the challenges brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. But concerns over Daesh sleeper cells and recent rocket attacks on US bases by Iran-backed militants failed to deter him.

At Our Lady of Salvation church, he paid tribute to the 58 people who were killed in an extremist attack in 2010, one of the deadliest targeting Christians.

“We are gathered in this Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation, hallowed by the blood of our brothers and sisters who here paid the ultimate price of their fidelity to the Lord and his Church,” he said.

On Saturday the pope will meet Iraq's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali



Al-Sistani in Najaf, and visit the birthplace of Prophet Abraham in Ur.

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AS IT HAPPENED: Pope Francis arrives in Iraq  
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## [The hatred and hostility underpinning Yemeni Houthis' political ideology](#)

Fri, 2021-03-05 20:54

CAIRO: Hussein Badreddin Al-Houthi, the eponymous founder of Yemen's Houthi militia, gave a sermon on Jan. 17, 2002, in which he coined the slogan "God is greater, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam." It is a slogan that the Houthis, known formally as Ansar Allah, say should not be taken literally, yet has gained currency among the militia's members since Hussein Badreddin's death.

Abdul-Malik Badreddin Al-Houthi, who became Ansar Allah's leader following his brother's death in 2004, is known to be the mastermind behind the group's



bloody insurgency and the 2015 capture of Sanaa. He has long espoused Hussein Badreddin's toxic opinions, including his antipathy towards America, Israel and the Arab states he viewed as collaborators of the West.

And yet, despite the obvious extremist overtones of the slogan, echoing the venomous rhetoric of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Joe Biden's new US administration has chosen to scrap the Houthis' label as a foreign terrorist organization – a designation it was given just days before the Trump administration left office.



A speech by Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi is screened at a football stadium in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on December 23, 2015. (AFP/File Photo)

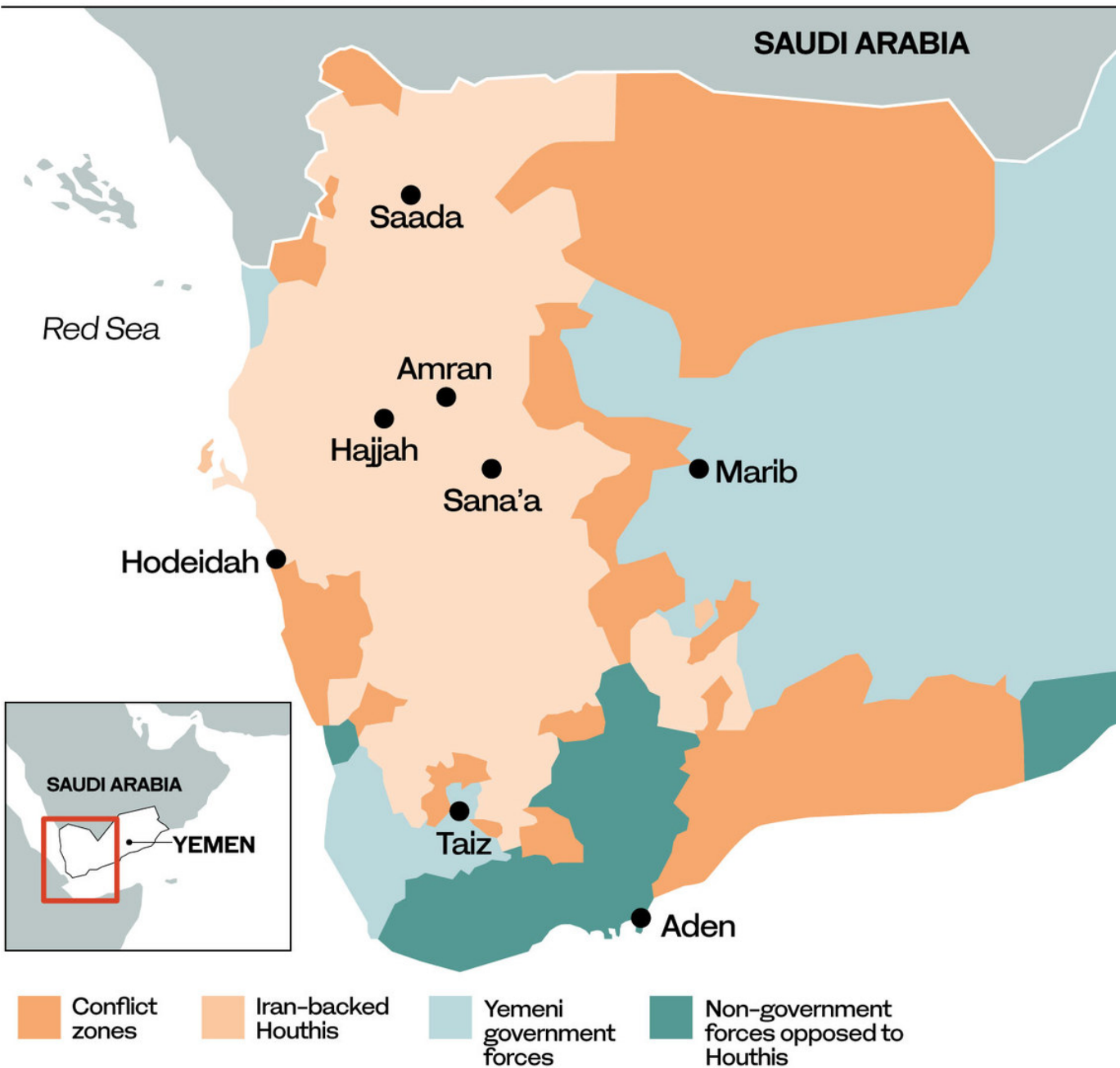
This week it emerged that the Biden administration has gone a step further, sending negotiators to meet with Houthi representatives in Oman. The stated objective was to open avenues towards peace between the Iran-backed occupiers of Sanaa and the UN-recognized Yemeni government in Aden.

According to Reuters, Timothy Lenderking, the lead US envoy on the Yemen crisis, met with Houthi chief negotiator Mohammed Abdul-Salam in Muscat on Feb. 26.

With much of northwest Yemen on the brink of famine, and renewed US engagement with Tehran firmly on the cards, the new administration has made no secret of its desire to reach a non-military solution to the grinding conflict.



# HOUTHİ TERROR TERRİTORY



**SOURCE:** SANA'A CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, BBC

**ARAB NEWS**

These talks are going ahead in spite of the fact that Houthi thoughts and actions reflect the very definition of a global terrorist entity – from its unapologetically open attacks on civilians to its ideological fanaticism, well documented in its leaders' sermons and writings.

As far back as March 8, 2002, Hussein Badreddin gave a sermon in Yemen's northern Saada province calling for acts of terrorism against non-Muslims. In a pamphlet, titled "Terrorism and Peace," he falsely claimed: "Muslims, this is what the Holy Quran states. Believers, you must do everything you can to terrorize the enemies of God.

"This is legitimate terrorism. But instead of talking about legitimate terrorism, we are the ones listening to the media and leaders, and allowing



the word (terrorism) to echo in its American meaning and not in its Quranic meaning.”

In the same inflammatory sermon, Hussein Badreddin identified non-Muslims as the root of all evil and America as a terrorist entity.



Yemeni supporters of the Houthi movement lit anti-US and anti-Israeli placards during a rally commemorating the death of Shiite Imam Zaid bin Ali in the capital Sanaa, on September 14, 2020. (AFP/File Photo)

“We must always talk about the Jews and the Christians just as God spoke about them in the Holy Quran, that they are the sources of evil, and those who have them are the sources of corruption, and that they are the ones who seek corruption on Earth,” he falsely claimed, arguing it is necessary “to firmly establish in the minds of Muslims that the US is a terrorist, that the US is evil, that Jews and Christians are evil so that they will not precede us.”

Hussein Badreddin also voiced virulently anti-Semitic views about Israel and displayed a puritanical attitude toward women’s education, viewing the latter as a Zionist conspiracy against Muslims.

In another of his sermons, published in a December 2001 pamphlet titled “Who are we and who are they,” he sounded the false warning that educated women “will eventually learn how to become a woman that is far from giving birth to a true Muslim Arab, far from giving birth to and raising Muslim heroes. She will rather raise Zionist soldiers and give birth to a society and generations who will become their servants.”



In a December 2001 sermon, titled "Loyalty and hostility," Hussein Badreddin made the baseless claim that confrontation with the West was a religious duty, because Jewish and Christian culture corrupted young Muslims: "When a person becomes corrupt, lets their children become corrupt, or corrupts others, they are considered recruiters for the service of the US and Israel, and the service of Jews and Christians. This proves their keenness to get what they want, and for their corruption to reach every house and every person, just as the devil wants. This is the devil's plan."



A security member loyal to the Houthi movement lifts his firearm during a demonstration in front of the closed US Embassy in the capital Sanaa, on January 18, 2021. (AFP/File Photo)

In many of his sermons and writings, Hussein Badreddin spoke highly of Iran's Shiite theocracy and the Lebanese Hezbollah, which he once called "the most important masters of jihad in this world."

Abdul-Malik, the current leader, is cut from the same cloth. Like his late brother, he has accused Gulf Arab states of aligning with the US and Israel. During a Sept. 20, 2020, sermon, he described the Abraham Accords, under which the UAE and Bahrain established formal diplomatic relations with Israel, as "an allegiance with the enemies of Islam."

In another sermon a month earlier, Abdul-Malik recycled his brother's false belief that jihad against the US and its allies is a sacred duty. To tell it in his own words: "Our stance in confronting the brutal American, Saudi, Emirati, Zionist aggression against our country is a principled stance on the

grounds of our faith and religious affiliation. By virtue of our faith's identity, it is a sacred jihad, a religious, human and patriotic duty, and whoever disregards this duty, or betrays this stance, they are then betraying and misusing their faith's identity."

On Jan. 3, 2020, then-US President Donald Trump authorized the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)'s extraterritorial Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, chief of Iraqi's Shiite paramilitia group Kataib Hezbollah. The two men were killed in a US drone strike as their convoy left Baghdad airport.



Houthi supporters gesture as they chant slogans during a demonstration against the outgoing US administration's decision to designate the Iran-backed rebels as terrorists, in the capital Sanaa on January 20, 2021. (AFP/File Photo)

Tehran and its Iraqi proxies have since hit back with rockets and ballistic missiles on US-led coalition targets in Iraq, killing several Western military personnel and civilian contractors and further destabilizing the country.

In a sermon delivered on Aug. 20, 2020, Abdul-Malik was unstinting in his approval of the indiscriminate attacks, saying: "We commend the escalation of the resistance operations against the American presence in Iraq.

"At this late stage, the Americans wanted to return to Iraq, to establish their colonizer status again, and to take charge once more. Matters have escalated after their heinous and dreadful crime of assassinating the two



martyrs Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in Iraq.”

Unsurprisingly, the Houthi slogan, “God is greater, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam,” has the same violent ring today as it did when Hussein Badreddin coined it in January 2002 – just four months after Al-Qaeda’s 9/11 attacks on the US.



A child holds a banner showing the Houthi leader Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi during a demonstration of his supporters to mark the fourth anniversary of the “Friday of Dignity” attack on March 18, 2015 in Sanaa. (AFP/File Photo)

Marking the anniversary of the slogan’s first public utterance, Abdul-Malik reminded the Houthis that it was his late brother’s contention that hostility towards Jews and Christians was a religious imperative.

“The Holy Quran provided us with an accurate, precise, real, and certain assessment of our enemies represented by the team of evil, treacherous, deceptive, hateful and hostile people of the book (Jews and Christians),” Abdul-Malk said, trying to justify the havoc Iran-backed militias have caused on religious grounds.

“Their plans, stances, provisions, and methods, will be based on the premise that they do not wish us – the Muslim community – well.”

As the US re-examines its stance on Iran and its radical Shiite proxies throughout the Middle East, the idea that sanctions relief, negotiations or alternative designations can get the Houthi leadership to change its spots seems dangerously naive at best.





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