

**“IRAN BOMBS ABU DHABI: WHY THIS MATTERS”
WITH WALID PHARES**



SUMMARY OF A ‘MIDDLE EAST FORUM’ WEBINAR



4 FEBRUARY 2022



Walid Phares is a Middle East specialist and analyst for Fox News who has advised members of Congress and presidential candidates. His books include Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against America, (2005) and The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East (2010) and The Lost Spring (2014). A native of Beirut, he immigrated to the United States in 1990.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

The recent attacks on the UAE’s capital by the Houthis speculatively on behalf of Iran, has been a major game changer with potentially significant implications for the region.

Circles opposed to Iran in Washington believe that Tehran, backed by China and Russia, will use such attacks as a leverage to escalate hostilities against the allies of a U.S. administration focused on negotiating a new nuclear deal.

In a webinar sponsored by the MEF, Walid Phares a critique of the current Democratic administration and a former adviser to previous Republican administrations, delved into the potential consequences of these new developments that have now been extended to attacks on other UAE targets including Dubai.

SUMMARY OF KEY COMMENTS MADE BY WALID PHARES

- The unprojected development that took place with the Houthi ballistic missile on Abu Dhabi has changed the strategic landscape between Iran and its Arab neighbours in the Persian Gulf.
- These attacks have also been augmented by similar attacks on Gulf Arab targets carried out by Iranian backed militias positioned in the south of Iraq.
- These events are reflective of an Iranian coordinated campaign to destabilize the UAE and to force it out of an escalating crisis that has placed Iran and its allies pitted against the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt.
- These attacks are also part of a continuing campaign against Saudi Arabia and its leadership that began immediately after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

- During the Cold War, it had been difficult for Iran to focus simultaneously on China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, but after the 1990s, Iranian escalation against the Saudis truly began in earnest supported by a narrative that was both ideological and theological in nature with the explicit goal of bringing the monarchy down in that country.
- These activities were coordinated in line with the Iranian alliance that was forged with the Assad regime in the 1980s, and at the same time coupled with the creation of Hezbollah, leading ultimately to what is now called the 'Iranian Arc in the Middle East'.
- The American withdrawal also paved the way for Iran to close the gap vacated by the US and to extend its reach from Iraq, through Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean.
- These events were further exacerbated by the decision of the Obama Administration to withdraw American forces in Iraq in 2011 that was then followed up with the start of the Houthi uprisings in Northern Yemen that then seriously escalated by 2014, allowing Iran to enter the fray as part of its overall campaign against the Saudis and its Gulf allies (including the UAE).
- Unlike Obama, Donald Trump following his visit to Riyadh in May 2017 in which some 52 Arab Heads of state and other dignitaries were in attendance, encouraged the Arabs to form a united front against Iranian backed militias and promised US help where needed – something that the Arab Coalition took as a 'green light' for moving against terrorist organizations (something that was further fortified with the assassination of Soleimani in early 2021).
- However, with the accession of Joe Biden, the Iran nuclear deal became the focus of US attention and all other previous priorities were shoved aside and Iran was encouraged to once again escalate its campaign against the Saudis and its regional allies (especially by getting the Houthis to fire ballistic missiles deep into their territory).
- The UAE was also an indirect target of Iranian venom, given its part in supporting the war in Yemen and the aid it was providing to forces in south Yemen who have come to be known as the 'STC' (Southern Transitional Forces) and who have been able to succeed in pushing back the Houthis from south Yemen.
- Based on the points stated above, Walid Phares concluded the following:
 - One reason for Iran/Houthis attack on the UAE was to try and force the UAE to stop its support for the STC (also ending all its other operations in Yemen).
 - A second reason was to send a message that the UAE's (and Bahrain and others) signatories to the Abraham Accords with

Israel was perceived as a direct strategic and security threat to Iran

- Phares could not predict how far the current escalation would go but was adamant to point out and highlight the importance of giving equal priority to Iran's missile program which was much more of an imminent threat to its neighbours than its nuclear ambitions. He said he had previously written an article with the most apt title: *"It's the Missile Not the Fissile"*.
- For its part the UAE had responded by flying missions in conjunction with the Saudis for taking out the Houthis ramps from where the missiles against the UAE had been fired (though this has not deterred further such attacks from other locations).
- What is unclear at this time is how Iran is likely to proceed in this matter in the future and what exact measures to counter such Iranian threats the Biden administration is likely to take for supporting its allies (not forgetting its own US citizens who are being held hostage by Iran).

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