IRAN Enabling Houthi Attacks Across the Middle East

FEBRUARY 2024
This product provides a visual comparison of Iranian missiles and weaponized unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and those displayed and employed by Houthi forces in Yemen to attack civilian infrastructure across the region. Photographs of weapons displayed and fired by Iran and the Houthis, as well as those illegally smuggled aboard boats from Iran, strongly suggest their Iranian origin. Iranian aid has enabled the Houthis to initiate a campaign of missile and UAV attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea since November 2023.¹ As of mid-December 2023, several of the largest global shipping firms had suspended transit through the Red Sea, citing the risk.²

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Information cutoff date: 17 January 2024
Cover images: Houthis demonstrating and displaying weapons in Yemen
Image sources: Ansarollah.com, Saba,ye, Associated Press (AP)
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Timeline of the Houthi-Iran Relationship

Since 2015, the Houthi-Iran relationship has evolved and strengthened, enabling the Houthis to effectively threaten the Yemeni government and the broader Middle East. The two have built a relationship that is likely to endure, as Iran views the Houthis as an extension of its regional power and the Houthis look to Iran to enhance their military capabilities. Iranian leaders’ statements and Tehran’s weapons proliferation illustrate how Iran views the Houthis as integral to its own efforts to project power and destabilize the region.

April 2015: The UN Security Council imposes an arms embargo on the Houthis.

May 2016: The Houthis conduct a missile attack on a Turkish bulk carrier carrying a grain shipment; the same missile system was seized from an Iranian shipment.

August 2019: The Houthis announce their first use of the Iranian-designed Burkan-3 medium-range ballistic missile.

October 2023: A Houthi military spokesperson claims the Houthis have launched missiles and UAVs at Israel in support of Hamas.

April 2017: A senior Iranian cleric reveals Iran provides advanced weapons to the Houthis.

December 2023: Iran’s Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani warns the U.S.-led Red Sea maritime task force that "no one can make a move in a region where we have predominance."
Iranian Weapons Equip Houthis To Attack Regional Infrastructure, Global Commerce

Since 2014, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Oods Force (IRGC-OF) has provided the Houthis a growing arsenal of sophisticated weapons and training that they have used to attack commercial shipping in the Red Sea and civilian port and energy infrastructure across the region. Between 2015 and 2023, the United States and its partners have interdicted at least 18 Iranian smuggling vessels, seizing ballistic missile components, UAVs, antitank guided missiles, and thousands of assault rifles, rocket components, and other illicit weapons on their way to the Houthis.

Since 2014, the Houthis have developed their political, financial, and military partnership with Iran.

The Houthi spokesperson Muhammad Abd al-Salam (left) with Iranian Supreme Leader Ali-Hoseini Khamenei (right) in August 2019.

The Houthis use Iranian weaponry to conduct maritime attacks in the Red Sea that threaten international shipping lanes.

The Norwegian-flagged M/V Strinda (left) attacked by a Houthi cruise missile (right) in December 2023.

The Houthis use Iranian weapons to attack commercial and civilian infrastructure across the Middle East.

Iran smuggles weapons from Iran into Yemen.

A dhow carrying Iranian weapons destined for the Houthis interdicted in December 2021.

The Houthis assemble, repaint, and modify smuggled Iranian weapons and display them with Houthi names.


Houthi UAV Threat Growing With Iranian Support

Since 2017, Iran has proliferated advanced UAVs to global conflict zones. These UAVs combine an extended range, low cost, and explosive payload to allow conflict actors such as the Houthis, other Iran-aligned militias, and Russia to threaten territorial sovereignty, regional stability, and the global economy.
Sayad (Sammad) One-Way Attack UAV Comparison

*Houthi Claimed Maximum Range: 1,800km*\(^6\) | *Houthi Claimed Payload: 20-50kg*\(^6\)

The Houthis began using the Sammad—which shares elements consistent with the Iranian Sayad, also called the KAS-04—in 2018.\(^5\) Both UAVs have notable, nearly identical features including a **landing skid** (1) under the main airframe and a **V-style tail** (2). Additional shared features include a **pitot tube** (3) for air data collection extending from the nose cone, a **slender fuselage** (4), and **flight control surfaces** (5) on the end of the wings. These features are clearly visible in a recovered Sammad the Houthis used in a July 2018 attack against Saudi Arabia as well as a Sayad Iran displayed in March 2023.\(^5\) Slight differences such as the number of **antennas** (6) and their locations represent minor modifications for different functions while maintaining the overall design of the Iranian Sayad.
Shahed-136 (Waid 2) One-Way Attack UAV Comparison

**Estimated Range:** 2,500km⁵⁸ | **Estimated Payload:** 50kg⁶⁰

The Houthis first showcased the Waid 2 at a March 2021 exhibit in Sanaa (see bottom left photo).⁶⁷ The Waid 2 shares nearly identical features with the Iranian Shahed-136; the wing stabilizers (1), short nose cone (2), pitot tubes (3), and tube-like fuselage (4) are consistent across both systems.

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**HOUTHI SYSTEM**

A Waid 2 showcased during a Houthi military parade, September 2023

A Waid 2 on display at a Houthi military exhibit, March 2021

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**IRANIAN SYSTEM**

A Shahed-138 seen during an Iranian vehicle launch demonstration, November 2023

A Shahed-138 on display at an Iranian military exhibit, May 2023
Shahed-136 Wing Stabilizers Across Conflict Zones

The Waid 2 wing stabilizers displayed by the Houthis in Yemen are consistent with the size and shape of the winglets on the Shahed-136 displayed in Iran and debris from the Geran-2—the Russian name for the Shahed-136—recovered after Russian attacks in Ukraine.
Shahed-131 (Waid 1) One-Way Attack UAV Comparison

Estimated Range: 900km\textsuperscript{10} | Estimated Payload: 20kg\textsuperscript{n}

The Houthis’ Waid 1 shares features consistent with Iran’s Shahed-131. These include the systems’ unique wing stabilizers (1) above a distinctive delta-winged body. Both UAVs also feature a short nose cone (2), pitot tubes (3), and a tube-like fuselage (4) extending down the middle of the airframe.
Shahed-131 Wing Stabilizers Across Conflict Zones

The size, shape, and markings on the wing stabilizers from the Houthis’ Waid 1 are consistent with the wing stabilizers of the Shahed-131 and the Geran-1—the Russian name for the Shahed-131. The Iranian Shahed-131 wing stabilizer featured below was recovered after a publicly-claimed Iranian UAV and missile attack against the Kurds in northern Iraq on 28 September 2022.

A Waid 1 displayed during a Houthi military parade in Yemen, September 2023

Left: A Shahed-131 wing stabilizer recovered from an attack in Iraq that Iran claimed, September 2022
Right: A Geran-1 wing stabilizer recovered in Ukraine, fall 2022

Stabilizer shape (1)
Serial number (2)
Edge of delta wing (3)
Houthi Missile Capabilities Growing From Iranian Support

Since at least 2015, Iran has provided the Houthis a diverse arsenal of short- and medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, including antiship variants, enabling Houthi attacks against targets on land and at sea. Iranian ballistic and cruise missiles allow the Houthis to attack targets at different vectors.
Qiam/Rezvan (Burkan-3) Ballistic Missile Comparison

**Houthi Demonstrated Use Range:** 1,200km\(^2\) | **Payload:** 250kg\(^2\)

In 2019, the Houthis launched the Burkan-3 medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) for the first time, which they fired against Saudi Arabia. In 2021, the Houthis displayed an identical system with a new name—the Zulfiqar. The Houthi Burkan-3/Zulfiqar appears consistent with Iran's Qiam/Rezvan MRBM. The Burkan-3/Zulfiqar and Qiam/Rezvan missiles share nearly identical payload features (1) and small rear fins (2). Since 2019, the Houthis have launched the Burkan-3 missile against several countries in the region. Iran launched Qiam variants during its 2020 strike against Al Asad Airbase in Iraq.

**HOUGHTHI SYSTEM**

Source: Teleweb

Above: The Houthis launch a Burkan-3 toward Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia, 2019

Source: Youtube

Above: The Houthis display the Burkan-3 during a military parade in Sanaa, September 2022

Right: The Houthis launch a Burkan-3 toward Israel, fall 2023

**IRANIAN SYSTEM**

Source: Teleweb

Both images above: Iran displays the Qiam/Rezvan missile in Tehran, September 2022
Houthi Burkan Debris Consistent With Iranian Qiam Ballistic Missile

Burkan debris recovered following a 2017 Houthi strike in Saudi Arabia features markings and fuel ports that are consistent with an Iranian Qiam variant.

Comparison of markings and fuel ports on Houthi Burkan debris recovered in Saudi Arabia (left) and Iranian Qiam ballistic missile (right)

An Iranian Qiam variant ballistic missile displayed in Iran, May 2011
Shahab-3 (Toofan) Ballistic Missile Comparison

**Houthi Claimed Range:** 1,950 km | **Payload:** 800 kg

The Houthis first revealed their Toofan ballistic missile during a September 2023 military parade in Sanaa. The configuration of the Toofan, including the payload section (1) and rear fins (2), is consistent with Iran’s Shahab-3 MRBM. Neither Iran nor the Houthis are known to have operationally launched the system.
**Kheibar Shekan (Hatem) Ballistic Missile Comparison**

**Iran Claimed Range:** 1,450km⁷⁹  |  **Payload:** 500kg⁸⁰

In September 2022, the Houthis displayed the Hatem ballistic missile, which shares nearly identical features with the Iranian Kheibar Shekan MRBM. These features include the payload section (1) and the rear fins (2). Iran operationally launched Kheibar Shekan MRBMs against ISIS targets in Syria in January 2024, although the Houthis are not known to have operationally launched the Hatem.⁷⁸

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**HOUTHI SYSTEM**

![Image of the Houthi system with labeled features](Source: YouTube)

**IRANIAN SYSTEM**

![Image of the Iranian system with labeled features](Source: YouTube)

*The Houthis display the Hatem at a parade in Sanaa, September 2022*

*Iran’s IRGC unveils the Kheibar Shekan, February 2022*
**Fateh-110 (Karar) Ballistic Missile Comparison**

_Houthi Claimed Range:_ 300km  |  _Payload:_ 500kg

The Houthis displayed the Karar ballistic missile in 2022 and 2023. The missile shares nearly identical features with Iran’s Fateh-110 close- and short-range ballistic missile, such as the front fins (1) and rear fins (2). Iran used Fateh-110 variants against targets in Iraq in 2020 and 2022, although the Houthis are not known to have operationally launched these systems.

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**Houthis System**

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**Iranian System**

_Sourced: Serat News, Iranian Press*

*Iran displays the Fateh-110, March 2014*
**Khalij Fars (Asif) Antiship Ballistic Missile Comparison**

_Houthi Claimed Range: 400km[^1] | Payload: 500kg[^2]_

In 2022, the Houthis paraded the Asif antiship ballistic missile (ASBM), which shares nearly identical features with Iran’s Fateh-110 antiship variant, also known as the Khalij Fars. These features include the **front fins (1)** and **rear fins (2)**. Since late November, the Houthis have launched ASBMs at ships in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. Iran has not operationally launched the Khalij Fars.[^3] [^4]

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[^1]: Source: [Amernollahia.com](#)

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[^2]: Source: [Wikipedia](#)

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[^3]: The Houthis exhibit the Asif during a military parade in Sanaa, September 2022

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[^4]: Iran displays the Khalij Fars, September 2015
Zoheir (Tankeel) Ballistic Missile Comparison

**Houthi Claimed Range:** 500km

**Payload:** Unknown

In 2023, the Houthis paraded antiship and surface-to-surface variants of the Tankeel ballistic missile. Both variants of the Tankeel share nearly identical features with the Iranian Zoheir, including the front fins (1) and rear fins (2), which are unique to these systems. Neither the Houthis nor Iran has operationally launched these missiles.
Project 351/Paveh (Quds-4) Cruise Missile Comparison

Houthi Claimed Range: 2,000km
Payload: Unknown

The Houthis’ Quds-4 series land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) bear similar design features and components to the Iranian Project 351 series of LACMs. Iran’s recently unveiled Paveh LACM, pictured below, has design features similar to both the Project 351 and Quds-4 series of LACMs. These features include the engine (1), rear fins (2), and booster (3).

Since at least 2019, Iran has supplied components to the Houthis for producing the Quds-4 LACMs.90
**Houthi Quds Debris Consistent With Iranian LACMs**

Since 2019, LACM attacks targeting Saudi Arabia and Israel have left behind debris that matches components of Iranian LACMs. **Wings (1), engines (2), tail sections (3), rear fins (4), and rear fin mounting brackets (5)** from 2023 Quds debris associated with a Houthi attack against Israel match LACM debris recovered following a 2019 Iranian attack on Saudi Arabia and LACMs displayed by Iran.

**HOUTHI QUDS LACM**

**Iranian Project 351/Paveh**

Source: Tasnim News

Iran displays its Project 351-based Paveh LACM, September 2023

Debris from Quds LACMs fired by the Houthis toward Israel in late October 2023

Source: Forensics Exploitation Lab, USSCENTCOM

LACM debris recovered following Iran's 2019 attack on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia

Source: UN Report
358 (Saqr) Surface-to-Air Missile Comparison

**Houthi Claimed Range:** 100–150km<sup>101</sup>  |  **Payload:** High-explosive warhead<sup>102</sup>

The Houthis' Saqr surface-to-air missile (SAM) exhibits nearly identical features as the Iranian 358 SAM displayed for Russian officials in Tehran in September 2023. The Saqr and 358 both have distinctive features, which include *front-mounted fins* (1) and *rear mounted fins* (2) in an X-shaped orientation and the *engine* (3). The Houthis have used the Saqr to attack U.S. UAVs in Yemen.

In addition to the Houthis, Iran proliferated the 358 to partners and proxies in Iraq and Lebanon,<sup>95</sup> 96 97 98 99 100

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**Houthi System**

The Houthis display the Saqr during a military parade in Sanaa, September 2023

**Iranian System**

Top: An Iranian display of the 358 SAM to Russian officials in Tehran, September 2023
Right: An Iranian display of a 358 SAM in Tehran, September 2023

Source: YouTube
Source: Reuters
Source: U.S. Institute of Peace
Source: The Drive

*An Iranian missile interdicted from a dhow headed to Yemen, 2020*
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