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Implications of Israel's Targeting of the Houthi Government

FOREIGN STUDIES UNIT

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We are a research institution concerned with studying Yemeni affairs and the regional and international influences on it. Through interpreting history, analysing the present, and predicting the future, in the aim of positive participating for better future of Yemen

Introduction

On August 28, 2025, Israel carried out a series of intensive airstrikes on the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, which is under the control of the Houthi group. The strikes targeted a meeting of the unrecognized Houthi government, as well as military sites such as Attan mountain and locations near the presidential palace. These strikes, which Israel codenamed "Drop of Luck", resulted in the killing of the Houthi Prime Minister, Ahmad Ghalib al-Rahwi, along with several ministers and senior Houthi leaders, while others were injured. This marks the first time Israel has directly assassinated Houthi leadership figures.

This paper seeks to analyze the dimensions of this event, evaluate its political, military, and regional repercussions, and outline possible future scenarios.

General Context and Israeli Motives

This escalation comes in the broader context of reciprocal attacks between Israel and the Houthi group, which began after Houthi missile and drone strikes in the Red Sea, following Israel's aggression on the Gaza Strip. Israel responded with a series of strikes on Yemeni infrastructure starting in July 2024, targeting Hudaydah's ports, Sana'a Airport, power stations in Sana'a and Hudaydah, and several civilian facilities. By August 2025, Israel shifted its strategy toward directly targeting Houthi leaders, following the group's use of a "Palestine-2" warhead missile against Israel—believed to have been supplied by Iran.

In addition, the Israeli navy appears to have participated in these attacks for the second time, which signals a significant new development: Israel now has a direct and declared military presence in the Red Sea. Since its founding, Israel had not achieved such a presence. The confrontation with the Houthis provided a pretext for this presence, which poses a serious threat to Yemen and Arab national security.

This escalation also unfolds amid rising regional tensions, including:

- Direct Israeli strikes on Iran in June 2025.

- The ongoing Israeli assault on Gaza.

- Israeli threats of new strikes on Iran.

- Stalled U.S.–Iranian negotiations.

- U.S. pressure to disarm Hezbollah in Lebanon.

- And ongoing strikes in Syria.
Within this context, Israel aims through these attacks to achieve several objectives:

1. Strategic Deterrence
Israel seeks to establish deterrence following repeated Houthi claims of penetrating Israeli air defenses, culminating in their recent use of cluster warhead missiles against Israeli targets.

2. Weakening the So-Called "Axis of Resistance"
Israel views the Houthis as an active Iranian proxy, especially after having weakened Hezbollah in Lebanon and executing strategic strikes against Iran in June. Fearing the transfer of Iranian expertise and capabilities to the Houthis, Israel is pursuing a strategy of cutting off Iranian support to the group by repeatedly targeting ports, airports, and now leadership figures.

3. Responding to Domestic Pressure
Israel faces strong internal pressure to retaliate against Houthi attacks that threaten both maritime trade and its own territory. The government is therefore showcasing this strike as a high-profile achievement, using it to persuade its domestic audience of the value and necessity of continuing—and expanding—the war.

Effects of the Strike and Its Repercussions on the Houthis

The Israeli attack on the leadership of the Houthi government in Sana'a represents the first direct strike against senior officials. It appears that this attack had been planned for some time, as it involved 14 Israeli fighter jets, which launched nearly 40 missiles, according to a statement by the Israeli army.

the strikes resulted in the killing of the Houthi Prime Minister and several of his ministers, most notably:

No.	Name	Government Position
1	Ahmad al-Rahwi	Prime Minister of the Houthis
2	Jamal Amer	Houthi Foreign Minister
3	Hashim Ahmad Sharaf al-Din	Houthi Information Minister
4	Mujahid Ahmad Abdullah	Minister of Justice and Human Rights
5	Mu'in al-Mahqari	Minister of Economy ,Industry ,and Investment
6	Radwan al-Ruba'i	Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
7	Ali Saif Muhammad Hassan	Minister of Electricity and Energy
8	Muhammad Ali al-Mu'allad	Minister of Youth and Sports
9	Ali Qasim al-Yafi'i	Minister of Culture and Tourism
10	Samir Baj'ala	Minister of Social Affairs

Several senior Houthi leaders were also wounded in the strikes, in addition to the destruction of a number of buildings and facilities. From the first moments, the Houthis displayed signs of confusion—initially denying that senior leaders had been targeted, but later admitting the killing of Prime Minister al-Rahwi and other officials.

This strike had several repercussions for the Houthis, the most important of which are:

1. A Dangerous Escalation in the Conflict:
 The Israeli strike marks a serious development in the confrontation between Israel and the Houthis. The group had not anticipated the targeting of its ministers, as most of its security precautions focused on military and security leaders. Notably, ministers responsible for those files were absent from the cabinet meeting. Thus, the strike carries a political impact equal to—or greater than—its military and security effect. It also signals a possible shift in Israeli military policy toward the Houthis: moving from striking infrastructure to targeting leadership. This is a significant indicator of escalation.

2. Governmental Disruption within the Houthis:
The Houthis had spent more than a year preparing to announce this government, after extensive negotiations among their factions and allies. The sudden loss of most ministers will push the group into a new cycle of bargaining—both internally among its wings, and externally with allied political parties under its control in Sana'a, particularly the General People's Congress—to reach new agreements about the government. Alternatively, the Houthis may abandon such arrangements altogether and move to monopolize power. Signs of this direction are evident in the group's targeting of the Sana'a Conference Party and its appointment of Houthi leader Mohammed Muftah to run government affairs.

3. Pressure to Overhaul Security Protocols:
This Israeli escalation will require the Houthis to revise their security protocols, with increased focus on protecting both political and military/security leaders. This will impose additional financial, administrative, and security burdens—especially as Israeli intelligence penetration appears to have reached the upper echelons of the group, rather than being limited to external informants.

4. Shift of Focus Inward:

In recent months, the Houthis had operated with relative freedom, escalating at times in Marib, Taiz, and along the Saudi border. Now, they will be forced to allocate significant effort toward reorganizing their internal affairs. Meanwhile, repeated Israeli strikes on power stations, ports, and airports will worsen the crisis for the Yemeni population, intensify public resentment toward the Houthis, and deepen the group's political disarray.

Possible outcomes

Following Israel's direct escalation against the Houthis and the targeting of their leadership, the confrontation between the two parties has entered a new phase of conflict. The possible outcomes can be summarized through the following scenarios:

First Scenario: Stalemate

The Houthis may respond with limited missile or drone strikes against non-strategic Israeli targets to restore part of their prestige, without directly targeting human assets. This would keep the confrontation within its usual framework. This scenario is most likely if Iran intervenes to prevent a broader escalation that could draw it into a new confrontation with Israel.

Second Scenario: De-escalation

This scenario assumes a return to calm between the two parties. It would only be possible if broader regional disputes are resolved—such as reaching a ceasefire in Gaza, Hezbollah handing over its weapons to the Lebanese government, or Iran achieving understandings with the international community, particularly the United States. However, given the complexity of these files, this scenario currently seems unlikely.
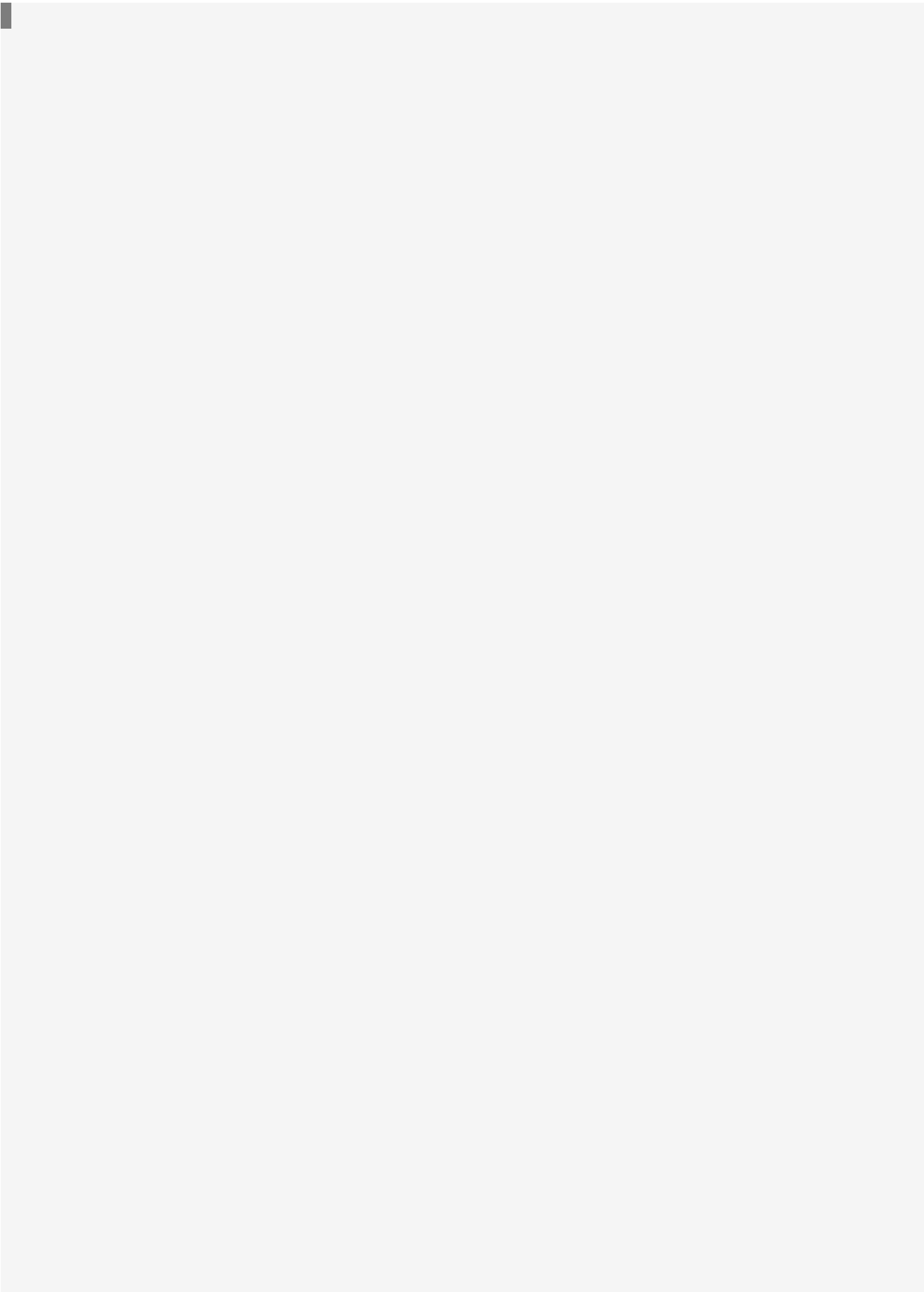
Third Scenario: Escalation

In this case, the Houthis would launch a direct retaliation, equal to or approaching the scale of Israel's strike, by targeting sensitive Israeli sites in order to recover their image as a regional actor. Such a response could prompt Israel to carry out more direct assassinations of Houthi leaders, especially since Israeli officials have repeatedly declared that they hold a broad "target bank" on the Houthis. This would heighten the conflict and push it toward open escalation.
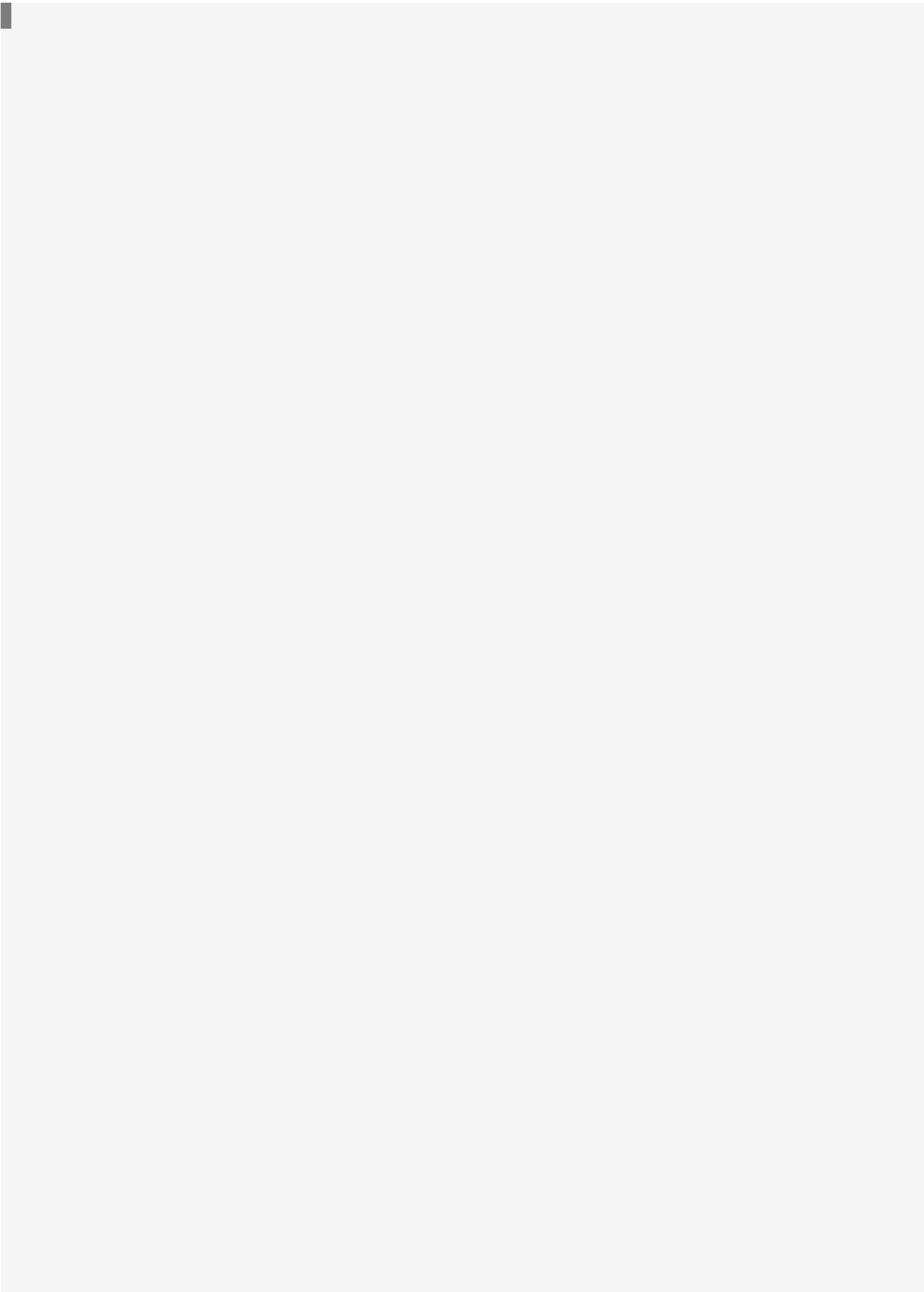
Conclusion

The Israeli airstrikes on the Houthi government on August 28 represent a strategic shift in the confrontation between the two sides—from targeting infrastructure to assassinating leaders. This escalation carries serious local and regional risks, particularly amid growing tensions between Israel and Iran. For this reason, it is likely that the Houthis will try to maintain the conflict within the limits of a stalemate scenario, avoiding a full-scale escalation that could spiral out of control.
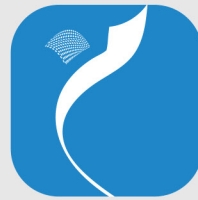
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