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The "No War, No Peace" State of Yemen: Beneficiaries and Repercussions

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The “No War, No Peace” State of Yemen: Beneficiaries and Repercussions

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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

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Executive Summary:

Following the conclusion of a temporary truce in April 2022, a new truce was not agreed upon on October 2 of that same year. The Yemeni conflict entered a new phase characterized by a fragile state of calm, largely enforced by external pressures that compelled the conflicting parties to maintain the status quo. Although active fighting continues on some front lines, genuine peace remains elusive throughout the country.

This unsettled truce phase is commonly referred to as “no war, no peace.” It is marked by a complex interplay of political and military factors, driven by the balance of power and regional and international interests. It serves as a provisional period during which armed hostilities are paused while the involved parties pursue political or strategic objectives that align with their interests in the ongoing conflict.

The evolving regional dynamics and the improving Saudi-Iran relations have significantly influenced the Yemeni landscape, initiating negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi group, particularly given the challenges in reaching a military resolution. Notably, various key actors are capitalizing on this “no war, no peace” situation to further their own agendas. The Houthi group, for instance, seeks to consolidate its position as a semi-autonomous entity in northern Yemen, while the Southern Transitional Council strives to unite the south under its authority. However, power and resource competition still complicate the landscape.

As this situation persists, it is imperative for the international community to actively support humanitarian initiatives aimed at finding a sustainable resolution to the Yemeni crisis. This phase presents an opportunity to establish a lasting ceasefire and progress toward enduring peace, provided it is managed with prudence.

This paper delves into the dimensions of the “no war, no peace” situation in Yemen, identifies its beneficiaries and examines its consequences for local, regional and international stakeholders. It also considers potential impacts and likely scenarios in the near future.

Introduction:

Since April 2022, Yemen has entered a unique phase of conflict, characterized by a “no war, no peace” status. In this period, there has been no formal truce or ceasefire agreement, yet all parties implicitly accept the status quo. The front lines are no longer active battlefields, but there is no genuine peace.

The term “no war, no peace” dates back to the early 1970s when it was first used to describe the state of conflict between Arabs and Israel following Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser’s approval of the “Rogers Initiative”¹ in August 1970. This initiative aimed to halt hostilities between Egypt and Israel, resulting in a cessation of fighting without a formal peace agreement². As a result, life did not return to normal, and the political landscape remained fragmented. This situation mirrors the current state of affairs in Yemen, where everyday life has not fully resumed, political divisions persist, and the economic situation continues to deteriorate.

Opinions on the “no war, no peace” situation vary. Some see it as an opportunity to build lasting peace³, while others consider it a precarious state with worsening political, economic and social conditions, making it susceptible to a return to violence⁴ at any moment. Many regions worldwide have experienced similar situations, such as the Laayoune Desert conflict in Morocco, which has endured for 19 years, and the ongoing dispute on the island of Cyprus between the Turks and Greeks. There is a fear that Yemen’s situation might follow a similar path, with “no war, no peace” persisting without achieving genuine peace and the country’s much-needed security and stability.

The key question is: How did the Yemen war reach this state? In the following discussion, we will attempt to answer this question, uncover who benefits from this situation and explore its potential consequences.

“No war, no peace” and achieving peace:

The current “neither war nor peace” situation is a distinctive and well-recognized phenomenon in international politics. It is primarily governed by a blend of political and military factors, with the militarily stronger party holding a decisive influence over whether this state of affairs continues or comes to an end. In essence, “no war, no peace” does not represent genuine peace or overt conflict; instead, it signifies a transient phase where hostilities are temporarily halted while awaiting the balance of power to dictate its terms. The continuation of this situation remains contingent on the interests and capabilities of the stronger party or parties who can enforce their will and directions.

Halting the ongoing conflict in Yemen, even if only for a temporary period, is deemed advantageous for various Yemeni, regional and international stakeholders, particularly in light of escalating tensions in other global regions. However, it is essential to underscore that a ceasefire alone will not usher in lasting peace⁵. A durable peace necessitates genuine negotiations involving all relevant parties. Without such negotiations, the current situation is susceptible to a resurgence of conflict whenever it aligns with the interests of the active parties.

During this phase, the Arab Alliance faced setbacks in its efforts against the Houthi group, with the Southern Transitional Council actively working to consolidate its authority in southern Yemen. Groups like the Nation Shield Forces and the Hadrami National Councils emerged to counter these developments. Additionally, the Houthi group intensified its economic warfare against the Yemeni government, seeking to secure revenue sources for its administration in Sana'a.

In summary, despite the volatility of the situation, a window of hope for peace opportunities remains open. Regional developments, such as the thawing of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran — as evidenced by the tripartite statement issued in Beijing in March 2023 — have the potential to bring about significant indirect changes that may pave the way for peace in the Yemeni conflict.

Who gains from the current “no war, no peace” situation?

The prolongation of this status quo leads to heightened economic conflict and the preservation of the equilibrium of military and political power. Within this context, all Yemeni factions will persist in their efforts to bolster their grasp on resources or obstruct others from acquiring them. An atmosphere of intense competition will dominate economic control, while military forces will retain their sway in the regions under their control.

Who reaps the greatest benefits from this state of affairs?

Despite the Houthi group’s desire to reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia, their intention is to protract the negotiations as much as possible. They aim to employ the pretext of unresolved contentious issues to extract substantial concessions from Saudi Arabia, amass significant gains, and to bolster their status as a semi-autonomous entity and a formidable authority in the north of the country.

They seek to tighten the screws on the internationally recognized Yemeni government and undermine its standing to the fullest extent before any potential comprehensive negotiations in the future. Furthermore, the group aims to intensify the economic conflict against the Yemeni government by impeding oil exports and imposing import restrictions from Yemeni government-controlled areas, thereby subjecting the government to economic strangulation and fueling competition among the components of the Presidential Command Council for resources and revenue sources.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are actively seeking to reduce their financial commitments, as their substantial funding of the right-wing government and other factions have imposed a significant economic burden. Nevertheless, both countries remain steadfast in safeguarding their national security and strategic interests by way of their allies on the ground. However, their withdrawal from providing financial and material assistance to the government presents a hurdle to any advancements in unifying the armed forces or bolstering their military capabilities, potentially creating an opportunity for the Houthi group to extend its control over other regions if fighting fronts reignite.

In essence, the Houthi group aims to capitalize on the negotiation processes to secure its gains and augment its influence in the Yemeni arena. It recognizes that its persistence is yielding dividends and that time is on its side. Consequently, genuine peace remains elusive, especially given the group’s hardening positions and the realization that its territorial gains grant it greater leverage to impose its terms. As a result, it is unwilling to make substantial concessions or engage in comprehensive peace talks unless its demands are fully met.

On the western front of the country, the UAE has supported the opening of a new road connecting the cities of Taiz and Mokha, which is expected to alleviate the siege on Taiz Governorate. This shift will redirect tax revenues from Taiz authorities to the National Resistance forces led by Brigadier General Tariq Muhammad Saleh, thereby strengthening his position in the governorate. This development may also adversely affect the dominant forces in Taiz, potentially leading to increased tensions between local authorities and the security apparatus.

This, in turn, may pave the way for the National Resistance forces to expand their influence in Lahj and subsequently gain easier control over Taiz.

In the southern governorates, the STC, amidst the state of “no war, no peace,” has been working to unify southern factions under its banner in anticipation of becoming the sole representative of the south in possible future comprehensive negotiations. Their efforts included restructuring the council, introducing new southern leaders, convening the southern consultative meeting, and striving to expand their influence into Hadhramaut. However, the formation of the Hadhramaut National Council, supported by Saudi Arabia, has thwarted this expansion. Moreover, the rising incidents of political assassinations in the south could potentially escalate tensions among various southern parties.

From the perspective of the international community, the current situation in Yemen is gaining increased significance. This situation aligns with the interests of both regional and international stakeholders, including the United States and the European Union. They view it as a means to manage tensions in various global regions, such as the conflict in Ukraine and the escalation in the South China Sea, while confronting economic challenges in Europe and America. It is anticipated that the United States and the United Nations will exert pressure to uphold the ceasefire in Yemen to prevent any escalation that might disrupt global energy supplies. This provides an opportunity for the Arab Coalition countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to focus on domestic challenges without facing direct external threats.

Consequently, the state of uncertainty in Yemen is likely to persist for an extended period with regional and international support, until stability is achieved in other regions grappling with conflicts.

Repercussion of the current situation

The “no war, no peace” scenario has far-reaching consequences, benefiting various parties on local, regional and international levels, albeit to varying degrees. Notably, the internationally recognized government bears the brunt of political and economic strains in this situation. Indicators suggest that this status quo is likely to persist, possibly evolving into an official truce with partial solutions on issues, like airport, road and port access, plus the distribution of employee salaries. Complex, contentious matters may be deferred to subsequent negotiation rounds.

This approach underscores the gradual trust-building process among parties, acknowledging that not all thorny issues can be resolved simultaneously. This could lead to the establishment of a foundation for “negative peace,”⁶ a situation that does not lead to the creation of a fully institutional state but contributes to normalizing and consolidating military gains, reinforcing the authority of prevailing conflict parties. This could potentially facilitate a temporary understanding between influential entities, established through force of arms, while upholding an internationally recognized government until a tipping point is reached in favor of the strongest entity, both militarily and economically. This situation is reminiscent of the 1923 Lausanne Conference, which introduced the principle of imposing a *fait accompli* when altering state forms and agreements.

On a regional scale, Saudi Arabia is inclined to maintain the status quo while actively seeking a resolution to the Yemen conflict or the realization of negative peace. In contrast, the UAE supports the Southern Transitional Council in its quest for an independent southern state, aiming to safeguard the influence they have cultivated along the coast from Mukalla to Bab al-Mandab, boosting their standing in international trade and safeguarding their interests. Iran, on the other hand, maintains a stance of de-escalation and tranquility in accordance with its regional interests and evolving international relations.

Locally, the persistence of this situation will have a detrimental impact on the country's overall economy, resulting in price inflation, a further devaluation of the national currency and challenges in providing public government services. Consequently, citizens' suffering will endure, leading to increased rates of poverty and destitution unless decision-makers and influential parties take corrective actions.

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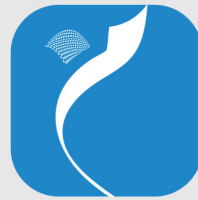
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