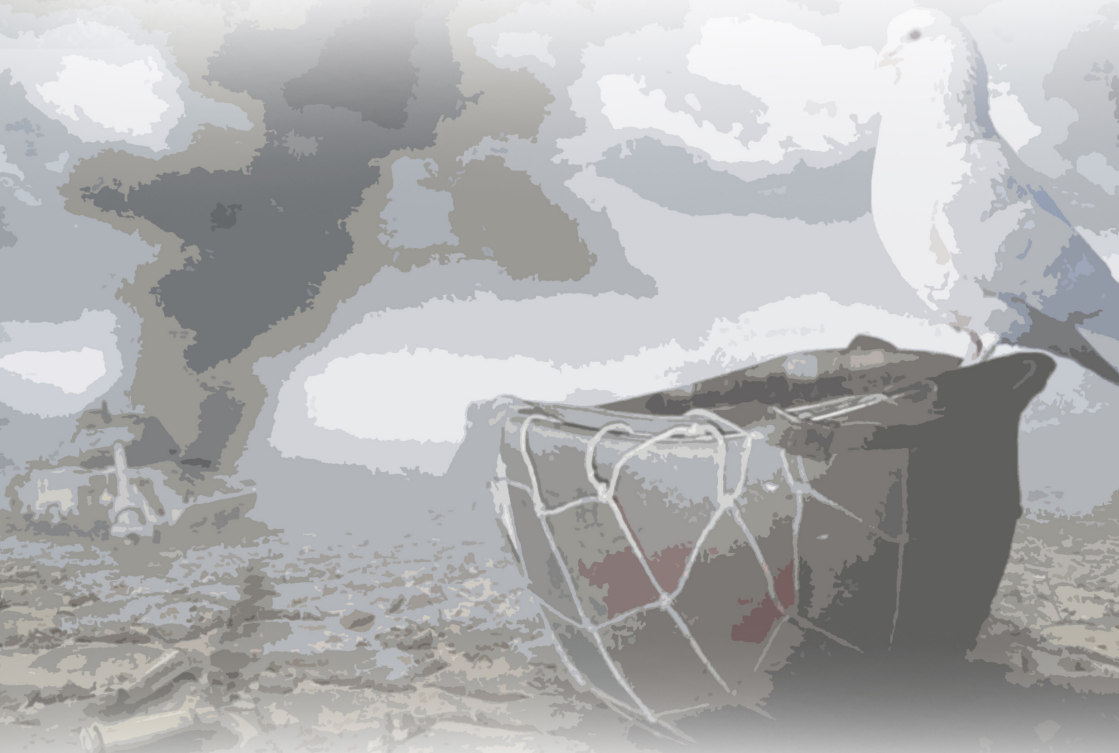




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The Future of Peace in Yemen

Ahmad Ali Al-Ahsab



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The Future of Peace in Yemen

Ahmad Ali Al-Ahsab

Since 2011, peace efforts in Yemen have been led by the United Nations in the form of international mediation. Until now, four representatives have been appointed to the position of “Special Envoy to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Yemen,” to help reach a political agreement to end the crisis and avoid a renewed breaking out of conflict.^[1]

These efforts aimed to provide a platform for all parties to be able to negotiate and reach a political agreement to end the war. They focused on reaching a ceasefire agreement and trust-building procedures, due to the resumption of the political process, and also searched for numerous partial procedures and palliatives, such as exchanging prisoners.

1. They are: the Moroccan Jamal bin Umar (2011-2015), the Mauritanian Ismail Wald Al-Sheikh Ahmad (2015-2018), the British Martin Griffiths (2018-2021), and the Swedish Hans Ghrundberg who began his position at the end of 2021.

The United Nations was able to hold four rounds of peace talks, the Geneva talks in June 2015, the second round of talks in Biel city, Switzerland, in December 2015, the Kuwait peace talks between April, and August 2016, and the Stockholm talks in December 2018. No Yemeni-Yemeni talks have taken place since the Stockholm talks, with the exception of partial meetings focused on exchanging prisoners.^[2]

In addition to the United Nation's support, there were some international efforts especially by super powers, and they also appointed some mediators at different stages, such as the Omani mediation. These powers also launched some initiatives, such as the initiative of the former US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2016, which was perhaps the bravest of the parallel international endeavors as it attempted to bypass the complexities of UN Decision (2216), and re-arrange international priorities.^[3]

2. In the first round of Geneva talks, despite the delegations arriving, they did not meet and discuss. It was decided to hold another round in Geneva in September 2018. This however did not take place, as the airplane for the "Houthi" delegation could not obtain permission from the alliance.

3. All of these initiatives and agreements were previously discussed in the book's first paper.

From the parties to the conflict themselves several initiatives, or more accurately suggestions, have been made. On September 21, 2019, the Houthi's Supreme Political Council in Sana'a launched an initiative which called on "all groups" to "seriously engage in real and serious negotiations to negotiate a comprehensive national reconciliation that does not leave out any of the parties." It announced the formation of a group for national reconciliation, and announced that it had ceased targeting Saudi Arabia as a signal of goodwill, while waiting for a similar step, as it said.

On April 8, 2020, the Houthi group announced that that they had submitted to the United Nations what they called "a document suggesting a comprehensive solution to end the war on the Republic of Yemen." On March 22, 2021, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Amir Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, announced the launching of a Saudi initiative for peace, including a cease-fire and the beginning of peace talks, an initiative which the Houthi did not see as presenting anything new.

These initiatives did not produce or culminate in any important advances, except for some occasional international meetings. It is also possible that the long years of conflict and mediation perhaps saw other undeclared initiatives.

The UN-led negotiations in Kuwait were the most comprehensive of all these negotiations, as they took place in the executive attempt, even if only partial, of Security Council Decision (2216) to return state power and institutions, with power-sharing with Houthi and their allies, ending with a draft agreement based on this decision. The main ideas of the Kuwait talks also formed the basis for the United Nation's later efforts.

With the exception of the Stockholm talks, which concluded with an agreement to stop the assault on the city of Hudeida, all of the rounds of talks failed to reach what appears to be the success of the Kuwait negotiations, and failed to result in an agreement that ended the war or made its end closer. In fact, these talks were not even able to gather all of the war's parties at the negotiating table another time. It can be said that even if the peace efforts have not yet reached an impasse, they are generally weaker today than how they began.

This failure ended in frustration for the United Nations, and diplomatic circles generally, which the International Representative to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, expressed in his briefing in front of the Security Council on June 15, 2021, saying “Over the course of the conflict, armed and political actors have multiplied and fragmented. Foreign interference has grown not diminished. What was possible in terms of conflict resolution years ago is not possible today. And what is possible today may not be possible in the future.”^[4]

Currently, there is an increasing international consensus that the current framework for peace endeavors adopted in the Kuwait negotiations has not remained effective given the political and battlefield developments, and has instead become an obstacle.

4. Briefing of the Special Representative of the General Secretary of the United Nations to Yemen- Martin Griffiths on 6/15/2021, <https://is.gd/EgwqNw>. Date of Access: 11/15/2021.

This is was also demanded by Special Representative Griffiths in his briefing in front of the Security Council in June 2021, when he said “I believe that possibly an international conversation of process may need to restate the realistic goals for a negotiation process.”^[5] The issue today for the United Nations and international policy makers is centered around the extent and nature of amendment necessary for the frameworks governing the peace process. Despite the new international representative to Yemen working to develop a new and more comprehensive outline, a clear strategy has still not been outlined.

5. Ibid.

Nonetheless, the dominant trend agrees on three issues as being essential:

- Transcending the framework set by the Gulf Initiative, the Conference on National Dialogue, and Security Council Decision (2216)
- Re-interpreting the Security Council Decision and Articles
- Adopting a multi-track approach, instead of the first format of negotiations, which focused on the primary actors, and the second format of negotiations, which were bilateral negotiations adopted by the United Nations over the last period.

Nonetheless, the problem with these peace initiatives is more than a problem of format or technicalities, as there are still other factors which aided in their failure. On the one hand, these peace efforts did not meet balanced international support, therefore lacking effectiveness and sufficient political resources. For example, the pressure on the conflict's parties was modest and not sufficient to secure a breakthrough.

On the other hand, there were also stances and policies from the conflict's actors, and the developments happening politically and, on the ground, that obstructed peace efforts as will be made clear in the following section.

There are also technical notes on the activities of international representatives, who did not possess adequate qualifications on the Yemeni issue. This showed in the work mechanisms of these representatives' offices, as well as other international organizations concerned with the Yemeni issue, who were rather qualified in technical issues related to the United Nations' concerned bodies. For example, some highly-qualified experts were perhaps not relied on or employed solely due to their unfamiliarity with gender issues, inability to satisfactorily answer how they will meet gender issues at the United Nations, lack of knowledge of a foreign language, or weak English. This has deprived international efforts of the many ideas and opportunities these experts could have provided.

Factors, Determinants and Trends

First: Actors' Stances: Trends and Problems

1- Local Actors: The Problem of Political Administration and Fear of Peace.

Seven years of war have ended with rule of the country being divided between four administrations: the government and its allies, the Houthi group, the Southern Transitional Council, and the “Joint Forces.” As much as these entities’ contexts and motivations differ, each of them have different political dynamics and different chains of command, and interests which intersect and contradict at different points. These differences reflected themselves on their vision for peace and the nature of their interaction with initiatives to end the war, and there is just as much that unites them around peace as separates their positions towards peace.

Not all of the Yemeni parties have expressed their desire for peace and announced their support for initiatives to end the war.

Rather, most have preferred a military resolution to the conflict, and saw participation in peace negotiations as closer to surrender, and mocked their opponents for believing in peace and its necessity. This stance is a reflection of their weak motivations for peace, chief of which is their fear of the consequences of peace, but there are still many differences between them. As for the Houthis' modest incentives, they are still dominated by their fear of the position of the government and its allies. As for the smaller local political groups, that is, those who oppose the Houthis but are not loyal to the government, they have a special position that could make them more resistant to peace, given that a longer period of conflict could grant them the opportunity to solidify their control and improve their position on the ground.

All of the local actors enjoy trans-national relations, which are relations which play a central role in formatting and directing their position towards peace, especially as they depend on their regional allies for funding and armament.

This dependency is a bitter one due to their lack of resources or sufficient experience. This reality increased the role of regional allies and put the local actors in a situation of dependency with their political decision hostage, whether clearly so, such as the case of the government, the Southern Transition Council, and the Shared Opposition, or slightly more implicitly, as in the case of the Houthi as their need for Iran and feelings of gratefulness end with their having congruent positions.

Despite these entities preferring a military resolution, due to this dependency, their influence in deciding the war and peace is steadily retreating. Considering the natural existence of differences between them, all of the above does not mean that they have completely ran out of options, as some of them still have a space of independence and margin of action that they are not utilizing due to the risks involved, rather than necessarily their following their ally's position.

Local actors also share weak political capacity. It should be noted, for example, that none of them have forwarded an independent peace initiative that was politically reasonable and took into account the different interests and motivations, in order to be interacted with and taken seriously by all sides. Their modest experience and lack of capacity also manifests itself in diplomatic weakness, which determined peace initiative's failure and prevented them from gaining momentum and positive debate.

This reality is related to these parties' relatively new experience, whether in politics or in power, as much as it is connected to the reality that Yemeni politics lack local models for peacemaking. Over the past fifty years, for example, Yemeni conflicts at their most pivotal points have ended in either military resolution or regional agreements, as in the case of the Monarchist-Republican war in the north. The dismantling of the "Riyadh Agreement" between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council reflects this problem and reflects both sides' preference for a military resolution.

This worked to weaken their capacity and experience, one of the most important outcomes was local actors' dependence on foreign actors.

There are other factors that connect most Yemeni actors, or at least, their policy-makers, in their disdain for peace. This is related to their investments in the conflict and benefiting from the war economy which guarantees them large incomes. It is also related to their weak feeling of responsibility, as they appear to only act within the limits of their own special considerations and interests, as the war's high costs have not yet affected their positions and pushed them to present important concessions.

The Government and its Allies: Controlling Fear of Peace

The government and its allies insist that any negotiations on a peace agreement must be based on the three references of the Gulf Initiative, the Conference on National Dialogue, and Security Council Decision (2216). Their insistence on these principles is not only based on these agreements guaranteeing the government the return of full control, which it views as its natural right, but also their fears that any agreement with Houthi not based on these principles will only legitimize their coup. They further have doubts in Houthi's intentions, and deep fears almost reaching certainty, that they will renege on any agreement made with them. Indeed, the government and its allies have accused them of renegeing on many agreements and contracts. These considerations and fears made the government and its allies prioritize the military and security aspects in past negotiations and understandings.

Returning to 2015, the government's position was relatively strong compared to Houthi, and their position was more one of refusal than of acceptance and bargaining. This situation began to change in approximately 2017, that is, with the Saudi-led coalition retreating interest in the war and their adoption of policies that weakened the government and its allies, and turned the war in Houthi's favor.

The position of the government and its allies is still growing increasingly weaker with time, and improving for their opponents Houthi who are gaining military supremacy, which has been reflected in many battles on the field. The government's realization of this makes it more opposed to negotiations that exceed the limits of the Kuwait talks, that is, any agreement based on the current battlefield and political realities. Negotiation in light of the existing realities is a dangerous bet. As such, it currently prefers to delay until it can change conditions in its favor. As such, it appears that the government is betting on the return of Saudi support, and the failure of any Saudi or international agreements or understandings with Houthi.

With this bet, the government is taking the risk of making its position even weaker and worse off, as there is no indication that this bet is paying off, at least until now. There may also not be time for it to achieve this bet, especially if the battlefield developments continue to develop in Houthi's favor, and they control Marib and the rest of the country.

Some argue that the government is rushing to agree to any agreement before things leave its control completely, especially with the growing possibility of Houthi gaining major concessions from the Saudi-led coalition and the international community, given that the battlefield position greatly leans in their favor. Today Saudi Arabia and the international community incline to presenting concessions and motivations to Houthi, without considering the government's position or giving it any motivations. There are also growing voices calling for absolving the previous principles of political settlement to take into account the changes that have happened on the ground, given their belief that the Yemeni president, Abdarabbuh Mansur Hadi and his government will ultimately not be able to stand against Saudi pressures.

From among the conflict's participants, the government and its allies take the most stringent and critical position. This is related to its modest experience and the demand put on them by their alliance with Saudi Arabia. However, even while recognizing its lack of ability to adopt a position on peace independent from Saudi Arabia, we should also not over-estimate its weakness, as it and its allies do not necessarily want to be involved in a humiliating peace process, and can still, at the least, create some obstacles for any peace plan or initiative.

The Houthi Group: Rushing towards Peace, followed by Retreat

Houthi and its allies at first viewed the peace talks as a victory, and were clearly eager for peace. They even declared their agreement with the Security Council decisions, including Decision (2216), and readiness for dialogue in an address they sent in October 2015 to the General Secretary of the United Nations, the Security Council and ambassadors of the G-10.

However, with time this eagerness soon turned into retreat, as they turned to instead improving their military and political position to raise the ceiling of their demands and expectations. Soon they became the ones placing the conditions for peace and the ones demanding an agreement confirming their increased gains of power. They insisted on negotiating and agreeing directly with the coalition and marginalizing the government. Houthi presented their vision on the end to the war in April 2020, when they released “A Suggestion for a Comprehensive Solution to End the War on the Yemeni Republic.” They stipulated a complete ceasefire, lifting the air and sea blockade, and entering in a transition phase during which Yemeni-Yemeni negotiations on the country’s future would be held, but did not present any additional details.

Their mannerisms, however, expressed that they had few motivations to enter into a serious process of peace. Given their feeling that time was passing in their favor, and that the Saudis were highly eager to exit the war and ready to present many concessions, they attempted to strengthen their negotiating position to gain more concessions by delaying efforts for peace and appearing hesitant, all the while continuing their military movements.

With the steady transformation in the balance of power in their favor, their belief in their ability to achieve a military resolution that would protect them from the consequences of peace and guarantee them everything became solidified. Houthi's leaders have often expressed that power is the path to true peace, or is what enforces peace, and they speak today like someone confident that things will resolve in their favor.

International diplomacy's realization of this reality was reflected by the American representative for Yemen, Tim Lenderking's accusation that Houthi "did not demonstrate a true commitment to the peace process," despite them sometimes constructively participating in talks.^[6]

Despite the alliance connecting the Houthis to Iran, what they usually term as "the axis of resistance," they enjoy a clear semi-independence which widens as they please. Nonetheless, their commitment to this relationship and its achievements remains deep. Furthermore, the longer the war continues, the deeper this relationship grows, as the war's continuation means a greater need for Iran and remaining inside the axis of resistance.

6. Lenderking: The Houthis have not demonstrated commitment to peace, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat on 11/5/2021:
<https://is.gd/TGQ4UG>

In conclusion, like the government and its allies, Houthi's position is not free from an element of risk. They may not realize that there is no guarantee that Saudi Arabia and the international community's position will continue, that is, that they will continue insisting that a solution be reached without putting military pressure on them.

The Southern Transitional Council:

The "Southern Transitional Council" announced its support for the efforts of the International Representative Griffiths. The council announced that the peace they want is one guarantees the independence of and prepares for a separate state in the south. As such, they have confirmed they will oppose any peace or political settlement that does not guarantee their separation, and the birth of a centralized powerful state. Furthermore, the war has still remained in their favor as it gives them more time to solidify their rule on the ground.

Nonetheless, there are factors that weaken the council's position, and place limits on what they can do. The council needs to speak in the name of the south, however, the reality is that it cannot guarantee this in light of the different polarized stances in the south towards separatism. This is what we can understand, at least, from the reactions of southern powers to the council's call to hold a southern-southern dialogue in August 2021. On the other hand, it is also likely that its position aligns with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which might make it free of any stances or obstacles opposing peace.

2-Regional Actors: Entanglements and Investments

Despite the general perception that the conflict began between Yemenis before Yemen turned into an arena for regional competition and influence, the regional factor was present even before the war and was related to its spread. The war today, as it was in the beginning, is an unbalanced combination of a civil war and a regional war and international interventions. As such, the future of peace in Yemen is not an issue that only affects local actors, or is only dependent on them.

The regional intervention and presence until now has been intense and has had a negative effect on peace efforts and opportunities, with the conflict in Yemen transforming into a bargaining card in the context of regional competition.

There are today three regional powers that determine Yemen's situation, and whose stances and desire determine many issues of the future: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE. It can be said that Saudi Arabia and Iran carry veto power in the Yemeni issue, which makes the future of peace rely on their two positions.

In addition to the three aforementioned powers, there are other regional parties that are interested in the Yemeni situation, and have a connection to its developments, such as the Sultanate of Oman, for example. However, its intervention and influence until now has been limited.

Saudi Arabia: In Need of Peace

Saudi Arabia's position is essential to the peace process in Yemen, given numerous well-known considerations. Its position since mid-2019 has transformed from demanding Houthi's surrender to appearing ready to arrive to a political settlement with them. Several factors and developments have contributed to this position, and make peace gain an increasing importance for them. Their fears of the results of the conflict's escalation have increased after a chain of attacks carried out, or claimed to be carried out, by Houthi on sensitive oil and civil facilities. These attacks have led to weakening confidence in their defense abilities and the American defense umbrella. Additionally, the Emirati decision to retreat and the American decision to conclusively cut off support for the coalition have weakened Saudi Arabia's position in the Yemeni sphere. Riyadh has found itself under great international pressure, and greatly needs to improve its image which has been harmed as a result of the war, which led to a humanitarian crisis and an increasing number of civilian victims.

The Saudi vision for peace revolves around security and influence, and most important issues and motivations for it are Houthi's weapons, their relationship with Iran, and their future role in power. The peace which Riyadh aims for is one which guarantees the security of its borders, stops the Houthi attacks on its soil, and at least distances them from Iran, if not making them closer to Saudi Arabia.

Despite their continual confirmation of their desire for peace and their support for the international representative's efforts among others, it appears that Saudi opinion makers at one point viewed direct communication with Houthi as more effective and as fulfilling two aims at the same time: firstly ending the war and secondly distancing Houthi from Iran. The Americans participated in helping them reach this conviction and also helped open a communication channel between the two sides that has been held since October, 2019 with intermittent talks and exchanging of military and political delegations.

According to some reports, Saudi officials have met with the highest level of Houthi's representatives.^[7] Nonetheless, after months of talks between the two sides in 2019 and the onset of 2020 this direct rapprochement ended in failure. Later, as we have pointed out, Riyadh offered a peace initiative, which was not welcomed by Houthi and their allies, who did not view it as presenting anything new.

Paradoxically, Riyadh's push towards peace sent negative signals to Houthi and their allies that harmed chances for peace, as Riyadh showed that reaction after being in a position of weakness. This gave the Houthis self-confidence and led them to insist on a military resolution.

Despite the clarity of their general aims, Riyadh's vision perhaps suffers from some ambiguity in its plans and details.

7. Lenderking: The Houthis have not demonstrated commitment to peace, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat on 11/5/2021:
<https://is.gd/TGQ4UG>

Whereas as the Saudis attributed the failure of direct talks to Houthi's stubbornness, the latter accused the Saudis of not being able to describe their desired settlement, and not demonstrating a commitment to executing the decisions they had taken throughout the talks, nor any desire to enter in separate negotiations on ending the war.

This diagnosis is also concurred by the ruling Yemeni officials and observers of the Yemeni conflict who view Saudi Arabia, for example, as not defining the accepted role for Houthi in the power structure, and insist on their cutting relations with Iran without presenting measurable criteria, by which it could be proven or disproven that the relationship had ended.

Riyadh today is in a position of dependency on the American role of pressuring Houthi to force them to negotiate, and secure the peace that protects Saudi Arabia's interests and fears. However, it will not be able to achieve its goals in full, and could be forced to present concessions in accordance with the concessions that the international community seems be on the way to presenting to Houthi.

Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia still has an opportunity to put pressure towards the peace it wants, as it is able to apply military pressure, either directly or indirectly by supporting forces opposing the Houthis. Undoubtedly, the best situation for it is that this military pressure occurs with the agreement or green light of Washington and the international community.

The UAE: From a Strategy of Power to Calling to Support Peace

The UAEs' position has a great importance in the context of efforts to bring peace, as it has political and security investments in Yemen. It also enjoys wide influence in Yemen exceeding its influence preceding its intervention beside Saudi Arabia, due to its relationship with the "Southern Transitional Council," and a number of Salafi and other militias, such as the "Republican Guards" led by the brother of the previous Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The UAE transformed from an initial strategy of power to then supporting peace in practice. It declared the end of its participation in the war and began to reduce its forces since the beginning of 2019.

However, it has nonetheless not withdrawn all of its forces, as it still retains some military presence in some of the country, which it claims remained for the aims of “fighting terrorism.”

In the context of its transformation towards peace, the UAE and Saudi Arabia share most of the same motivations, such as international pressure, and their need to improve their image in the international sphere after it was harmed by their participation in the war. Nevertheless, it especially fears the consequences of the conflict’s development, as contrary to Saudi Arabia it is unable to bear any attack from Houthi on its cities or facilities, given that that would threaten its place as a global hub for finance and trade. It is keen to avoid the conflict in Yemen breaking out into any conflict with Iran in which it would be caught in the crossfire.

As such, the UAE is adopting its position towards peace on the basis of its need to protect its national security. The peace preferred by the UAE is one which guarantees its influence and serves its geo-political interests as an important rising player on the regional and international levels.

Despite its fears of peace possibly leading to it losing influence, a political settlement could be at the expense of its allies, such as the Southern Transitional Council, and could end in dissolving wanted groups such as the Republican Guards. Peace could also mean that it would no longer have any excuses for its forces' continued presence in Yemen. However, it moved early to ensure that its support for peace does not end in the loss or threat to its gains, as it has secured the legitimacy of its principal ally the Transitional Council through the "Riyadh agreement," which grants the council local, regional and international semi-recognition. In parallel, to secure its influence in the north, it still presents support to individuals from the previous ruling family of Salih, through his son, and through his nephew Tariq who leads forces that Abu Dhabi worked to form. There are hints of connections and understandings with Houthi and Iran, including mutual non-aggression, which Houthi's head Muhammad Ali Al-Houthi, has previously hinted at.

In general, Abu Dhabi remains more flexible towards Iran and Houthi, and is not obstructing any peace that allows them to remain an important force in Yemen, especially as if their remaining strong means continuing to make the “Yemeni Congregation for Reform,” usually reformed to as Al-Islah, and the Muslim Brotherhood weaker. It remains keen to remain in a non-confrontational relationship with Iran for economic reasons related to Iranian activities and investments, the important trade relationship with the Eastern Gulf, and other security reasons.

Iran: Continued Opposition

As is the case with Saudi Arabia, Iran’s support remains essential to reaching any political settlement in Yemen, however it also has every reason at this time to oppose a political settlement. This is related to the conflict in Yemen representing an important card for it in more than one way. In the context of its competition with Saudi Arabia, this conflict and its continuation represents a low-cost opportunity to weaken and provoke Saudi Arabia, and prevents its forces from entering other areas, such as Syria for example.

Additionally, the war ruins Saudi Arabia's image and exposes it to criticisms from the international community. Iran realizes its opponent's desire and efforts to distance Houthi from it. The continuation of the conflict protects this relationship, and makes it more unlikely for Houthi to distance itself from Iran.

In the wider context, the conflict's continuation guarantees Iran a bargaining chip in other issues, such as economic sanctions and the nuclear issue. It is unlikely for Iran to get involved in talks on the Yemeni issue for the foreseeable future. The Iranian president, Emrahim Raisi, has previously announced that he will not negotiate on any regional issue. Tehran is unlikely to support peace in Yemen, except if it guarantees its gains in the context of wider settlements in issues concerning it. Observers have noticed that efforts for peace and diplomatic movement in the Yemeni issue have reached an impasse at the same time as the nuclear talks in Vienna. In the case that the intermittent Saudi-Iranian talks advance in rapprochement and solving the issues between them, a breakthrough in the Yemeni issue can also be expected.

As a whole, the Iranian vision of peace is congruent with that of its ally Houthi and their ambitions, that is, a peace which recognizes them as one of the principle powers ruling and representing Yemen. They do not appear to obstruct a peace that divides Yemen, if not necessary to guarantee the continuation of its allies' power and independence in the north. However, for them, a negotiated peace remains a final option, as in their opinion there is a chance to obtain allies and obtain everything, and avoid peace's consequences through military resolution. Therefore, Iran strongly supports Houthi's determined battle to take the Marib governorate. As such, despite the United States and Riyadh being ready for a peace agreement with Houthi to protect their interests, the Iranians make such a deal harder.

3-The International Community: Increasing Interest but...

The conflict in Yemen remained on the margins of the international community's interest for several years, and was more present in neighboring conflicts, such as the Syrian conflict. At the beginning of 2020, it appeared that things had changed as the international community began showing more interest in this forgotten conflict. There is a combination of ethical, humanitarian, security and economic motivations behind the increasing international interest in stopping the conflict in Yemen and bringing peace. These motivations are based on fears of the consequences of the conflict's continuation, and the need to reduce tensions in a region as sensitive as the Gulf. This conflict's connection and intervention with other regional crises and tensions (Iran/Saudi Arabia, Iran/Israel), makes it the spark that could set off a vast regional war threatening international security and peace, threatening the global economy (which is reliant on oil), and resulting in more waves of refugees, especially to Europe. There are also humanitarian and ethical motivations, and pressure on governments from the media, international NGOs, and international legal bodies.

This interest also comes in the context of new political orientations, such as increasing European interest in strengthening the European role on the global stage, and the new administration in America.

The international interest in stopping the war in Yemen has taken several forms. The Europeans have increased their diplomatic movements since the onset of 2020, and stopped some countries from increasing weapons sales. The Biden administration announced that it had stopped the previous support given to the coalition and had for the first time appointed a special representative to Yemen. Washington plays a central role in increasing this interest and building an international consensus around peace in Yemen. Furthermore, the international community's pressure on the conflict's parties has greatly increased in the form of institutional and diplomatic formal pressures. In February 2021, for example, the European Parliament called on the union's countries to enforce a ban on selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and send complaints of human rights violations to the International Criminal Court.

This international interest is organized under the umbrella of the United Nations in different forms. It has supported these efforts and there have not been any initiatives or plans from any of the international forces independent of the UN. With the onset of 2020, there was international coordination (Euro-American) with the United Nations and its special representative Griffiths to develop a comprehensive peace plan. At the time, Griffiths expressed his confidence that a comprehensive peace plan would be reached. Some media reports spoke about the possibility of forcing a peace plan through the Security Council, that this option has been present for some time, and stated that the United Kingdom in January 2020 in coordination with the European Union presented a decision obligating a ceasefire to the Security Council.

With the failure of international delegations' efforts amid others, and the failure of pressure, to achieve a breakthrough to a ceasefire in Yemen and holding peace negotiations, international diplomacy started to touch on the reasons to solve the conundrum. The dominant current today sees the necessity of changes in the framework and means of organizing these peace efforts, including revisiting the proposed political and

security arrangements, the make-up of the new government and its authorities, and widening participation on the basis that a greater degree of participation will be necessary to reach a permanent ceasefire and political agreement.

In a related context, America through its representative has begun to turn to a similar approach, by focusing on regional actors (Iran and Saudi Arabia). This issue appears to also be related to the special interest of the new representative, Hans Grundberg. The Americans also tried to encourage roles and mediators, as they did with Oman and Kuwait, which they saw as facilitating the end of the conflict in addition to opening back channels for communication with the Houthi.

The international community today is close to a conviction on the necessity of recognizing the reality on the ground, and that any political settlement must be done on the basis of actual gains in the field.

This transformation manifests, for example, in the statements of the British Ambassador to Yemen, Richard Oppenheim, that “there is a need for a new international decision reflecting the changes on the ground.”^[8]

In the path of obstacles to peace, it seems that the international community is combining a policy of pressure through sanctions and a policy of motivations, but until now is leaning towards the latter. On November 10, 2021, the Security Council unanimously enforced sanctions on three Houthi leaders, and Washington enforced sanctions targeting Houthi in May 2021 and June 2021. According to the American Representative to Yemen, Tim Lenderking, his country is still considering including Houthi individuals and entities on terrorist lists, if need be.^[9]

8. Lenderking: The Houthis have not demonstrated commitment to peace, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat on 11/5/2021:

<https://is.gd/TGQ4UG>

9. Lenderking: The Houthis have not demonstrated commitment to peace, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat on 11/5/2021:

<https://is.gd/TGQ4UG>

As an indication of the presence of the stimulus option, the American representative himself said on November 3, 2021, that he emphasized in his meeting with the Saudi ambassadors to Washington and Yemen, Rima Al Saud and Muhammad Al Jabir, the necessity of finding a permanent solution to importing fuel to the Hudeida ports, and organizing flights in the Sanaa airport, issues which are of importance to the Houthis.

Despite this interest, and the presence of a consensus to end the war and bring peace, the international community does not possess a clear vision of the peace it aims for, and was unsuccessful in developing an integrated plan for peace. Up until this moment, there is no indication that there is an orientation towards allocating greater political resources for peace efforts equivalent to the extent of challenges it faces.

The international community suffers from weak points reflecting on its approach to peace, and causing the failure of its efforts. It suffers from a lack of understanding Yemen's dynamics and complexities, which it tends to simplify.

This is a deficiency shared by nations, experts and thought centers. It also suffers from a deficiency in understanding the causes of conflict, which was reflected in its approach and diagnosis of problems, as they dedicated their focus to the issue of power and participation in government, while not realizing that there were other complicating factors beyond this issue. In its diagnosis of the reasons for its failed peace attempts, a focus on the procedural and technical aspects can be noticed, and it appears that it misses the international conditions necessary for its success. Nonetheless, there are also indications that this has perhaps started to change, as both the new international representative and the American representative demonstrate an increased interest in the conflict's regional dimensions and the role of regional actors.

On the other hand, this interest is not reflected in a complete international consensus, but instead reflects an essentially Western approach (Europe and the United States).

As for the rest of the major parties (that is Russia and China), their position is a combination of ambiguity and a lack of interest, perhaps even indifference. These two powers, even if they show caution to remain under the umbrella of the United Nations and support its efforts, do not necessarily hold a congruent position with the rest of the powers under this umbrella, and do not present anything recognizable or attention-worthy to support these peace efforts. Rather their ambiguous position could make them, under some conditions, and as a result of some calculations essentially related to their competition with the United States, closer to obstructing peace efforts and harming international consensus on it. In March 2021, both Moscow and Beijing objected to the attempts to pass a Security Council statement condemning the escalation in Marib, and demanding the end of the assault on the city.

As such, it is still not clear what the international community could do to enforce peace in case the military escalation continues and peace efforts reach an impasse, and the Security Council fails to pass a decision obligating a ceasefire.

Second: Military Position: An Imbalance of Power

After the balance of power was leaning in favor of the coalition returning to legitimacy, it soon however began to change, and today leans in favor of their opponents, Houthi. Regardless of the claims that this imbalance is fake as a deliberate policy by the coalition nations favoring stopping rather than continuing the war for different reasons, the reality on the ground confirms Houthi's superiority. It can be seen that such an imbalance works to resist peace, and this is clear in the change in Houthi's position themselves from eagerness for peace and their engagement with peace efforts in 2015 to their position being closer to intransigence. This is also confirmed by the conditions they put for accepting a return to the political process and entering into peace negotiations. This is after their own opponents are the ones who place the conditions. However, the problem in reality is an issue of improving their negotiating position as a result of this imbalance in power giving them the confidence in their ability to end the war through military resolution. Today, as previously mentioned, Houthi prefers the option of military "resolution" to entering in the peace process, or at least prefers it to a peace that does not meet their conditions.

What remains valid though is that this imbalance will remain working to oppose peace and obstruct its efforts.

Third: The Opportunities of the Political Path and its Challenges:

The Opportunities:

The opportunities for the political process are represented in the international consensus on the need to stop the war and outline efforts for peace. If the international community's fears of the results of the conflict's further development are at the head of its increasing interests, the increase in Iranian-Israeli tensions doubles these fears. This is also the case with the accumulating humanitarian crises which work to increase the interest of global public opinion with what is happening in Yemen, and also increase the pressure to stop the war.

As such, paradoxically, the increasing fears of conflict actually strengthen the chances of peace. Saudi Arabia and Iran's entering into bilateral talks is also a new change that increases the chances for peace, if they succeed in advancing.

1- Challenges

Peace efforts face a number of challenges of different natures and origins, the most important of which are:

The Opposition of the Conflict's Parties

The parties to the conflict oppose peace due to their fear of its consequences, as any political settlement may threaten their many gains, an important part of which are connected to the war economy. In addition to the lack of trust in peace, they also have fears from the rest of the parties. This shaky confidence is what lies behind their preference for a military resolution, as all the Yemeni sides active in the conflict prefer this option, which some of them believe they have the ability to accomplish, while others either demand them to do so or believe they should. Some parties believe that the conflict's continuation for a longer period of time is suitable for them to solidify their independence, and gives them the space to obtain additional gains on the ground, such as the Southern Transitional Council, or more space to gain resources or try it chances in the battlefield, such as is the case with the Houthi.

The Self-Financing of the War

The war and its parties do not only rely solely on external financing, as their sources of self-financing have increased. Each of the conflict's parties have divided control over resources and the economy in their own areas and directed them towards financing their military efforts. The expanding war economy also helps financing as well.

The Issue of Armament and its Complications

The issue of informal armament lies at the head of issues which obstruct peace efforts, and obstruct reaching a political settlement, as it is unrealistic to expect armed groups to accept relinquishing their arms, and it is difficult to ensure the power and conditions to force them to do so. Some suggest adopting a gradual approach and compromises to avoid the issue, in terms of these groups holding onto their weapon stores in the transition phase in exchange for their acceptance of restrictions and close observance of the sites of these stores and their use. However, such a solution leaves the door open for renewed conflict, as weapons remain in circulation, which they will take refuge to at the first difference in an environment as volatile and instable as the Yemeni situation.

The Fluidity of the Conflict and Politics

The international peace efforts today agree on the need for the participation of a wide range of actors, interest-holders and civil society. Nonetheless, such wide participation is also necessary for a ceasefire and to accept entering into negotiations, as the decision in these two regards remains held by the parties to the conflict and their regional allies. In the negotiating stage, despite wide participation being especially important in making the negotiations richer in terms of beneficial ideas and a wider representation of the perspective of elites, civil components and interest groups, it also represents a challenge in terms of complicating the process and lengthening the negotiations. Such a vast participation by its very nature takes longer, and thereby increases the chances of differences appearing, and forming a situation which weakens power and rule. It is still possible to get around such a challenge through widening participation in such a way that it does not fall into these risks, such as ensuring wider participation in a parallel track to the main negotiations.

The Imbalance of Power

The prevalent balance of power today is biased against peace. As previously mentioned, this imbalance encourages the war's continuation, and tempts them to victory.

The Conflict's Overlapping with Regional Crises

The overlapping between the regional and local conflict makes the success of peace efforts depend on the direction of foreign affairs, as the stumbling of talks on the Iranian nuclear issue, for example, will reflect itself in lessening or weakening the chances of reaching a peace agreement in Yemen.

International Rivalries

Despite the international consensus on the necessity of ending the war and bringing peace, there is an expected difference between international powers in evaluating the quality and necessity of steps which have been suggested or may be necessary to push towards peace. For example, a lack of consensus between the Security Council's five permanent members on passing a decision on a ceasefire can be expected.

2- The Future of Peace Efforts

The current situation today does not present reasons for optimism for peace efforts' success any time soon, which means the war will continue for the foreseeable future. Supposing that the peace efforts continue their success in moving the conflict's parties towards a settlement, this will take time and must overcome the existing challenges and reset their expectations. Naturally, this success relies in all of this on a strong and supporting international position. Even though the international community today appears more enthusiastic to stop the conflict and bring peace to Yemen than previously, it is unclear to what extent it is able to guarantee the conditions and demands for peace. Just as the future of peace relies on the international community, so too does it rely on the direction of regional and international developments, and the nature of battlefield developments.

In any case, the realities of the current situation today outline three scenarios as follows:

Continued Alteration of Power

The situation will remain as it is today, that is, conflict will continue and the parties' areas of control will expand and contract, but without any breakthrough victory or complete control. The peace efforts will also continue, but without achieving any advance. As for the conditions for this scenario, they are represented in the current realities continuing as they are, with the government and its allies' improving their position, to the extent that could grant them an impeding of the Houthis' advance without achieving a military gain.

Reaching a Peace Agreement

That is with the success of peace efforts, and reaching an agreement ending the war. The conditions for this are: disparate international pressure, and the return of a military balance of power. This could be aided by the success of the Iranian nuclear negotiations, and an advance in the Saudi-Iranian talks.

The Victor's Peace

If the Houthi are able to resolve the war in their favor and enforce a new reality, the region and international community will have no choice but to interact with it in the end, thereby enforcing the victor's peace. This scenario relies on the continuing of the current realities as they are, that is, the continuation of the present balance of power, including the military strategy of their opponents continuing as it is today, and the continuing weakness of international movements and pressure.

Or to the contrary, Saudi Arabia and the UAE review their strategies completely, and both unite towards a single aim of undoing this coup, while reneging on their support for military and political powers opposing the internationally-recognized Yemeni government, and putting pressure on them to deal with the latter, for things to end in the internationally-recognized government's victory and it enforcing its conditions for peace on Houthi.

Conclusion:

The efforts for peace until now have failed, partially aided by political, objective and technical reasons related to the nature of the frameworks and approaches, and their modest international enthusiasm and support. This is not to mention that the conflict's regional and local parties' opposition to peace lies at the head of these reasons.

Throughout the previous period, actors' stances towards the issue of peace have changed. The stances of local actors have either remained the same or witnessed retreat. After regional actors were as a whole biased against peace as a whole, this obstructionism has retreated with Saudi Arabia and the UAE's change of position towards peace. So too international fatigue has transformed into increased interest and enthusiasm over the recent period. Despite the international community today appearing more enthusiastic to stop the war and bring peace, it is not yet clear to what extent it will be able to reach this aim.

As a whole, the future of war or peace will remain subject to the will of regional powers and the international community.

The success of peace efforts today will remain dependent on one or both of the following two conditions: Firstly, the presence of a balance of powers that are not seduced by the continuation of war; and secondly, the international community putting pressure to the necessary extent on the conflict's parties to force them to make peace. These measures could also include intervention, and policies that get rid of the current imbalances in the balance of power.

Advice to the United Nations and International Community:

1. It is important for an intensification of peace efforts in Yemen, and developing a comprehensive plan in this regard that guarantees a number of motivations, guarantees, and pressures.

2. It is important to put more pressure, and develop smart ideas and approaches, and rational debate to break apart the obstructions and convictions of the conflict's parties, chief of which are the following:

- An agreement will not be able to guarantee a settlement which any side wants.
- Houthi will not give up their arms and power in Sanaa
- The Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia and their allies will not accept a central government and army controlled by Houthi.
- Iranian influence in Yemen will not fade overnight.

3. Preparing drafts for decisions necessitating an immediate ceasefire, or comprehensive settlement, to be suggested to the Security Council if the conflict's parties hold on to their positions.

4. Organizing regional mediators, as there are states which command deep respect by different Yemeni parties, such as Egypt, Kuwait and Oman.

5. It is important for there to be an increase in cooperation or seeking aid from local experts on the Yemeni issue.

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