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Biden Can Broker an End to the War in Yemen

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Brief Analysis

Yemenis are eager for Biden to act on his campaign pledge to end the war in Yemen, using U.S. influence to bring all sides to negotiate an end to the conflict.

With the results of the recent presidential elections demonstrating the strength of the U.S. democratic system, the promise of a Biden presidency has been interpreted by many in the Middle East as restoring the world's trust in the people of the United States and their commitment to the principles of freedom and equality.

But our region—the Middle East—is in a state of chaos, and the United States has played a role. It began during President George W. Bush's administration, when then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice promoted the idea of a ['new Middle East'](#) built from what has been termed creative chaos, though chaos can never be constructive. During the Obama administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came with another equally ill-conceived plan to change Arab regimes from within. She built on the infrastructure Rice had created by relying on alliances with opposition groups to the region's regimes while ignoring political dynamics, heritage, the history of the Arab conflicts, and the impact these policies would have on the future of the Middle East.

Unfortunately, Yemen is no exception. U.S. policymakers ignored Yemen's realities, political forces, and hidden alliances. The United States did not pay adequate attention to the agendas of political entities involved in the conflict, whether Yemeni or foreign. The state of the Middle East today proves that the idea of change—whether through chaos or regime change—has not achieved its objective of creating a better future for the region. To the contrary, both policies have proved disastrous, especially when the allies entrusted to implement regime change have lacked popular support or the ability to govern.

A solution to the Yemeni crisis requires a fresh and new U.S. policy towards Yemen, different from the one developed after the 2000 terrorist attack on the USS *Cole* in Aden. This earlier policy focused on counterterrorism while ignoring the need to develop the wider strategic relationship Yemen had hoped for, especially after its unification a decade prior.

At that time, Yemeni officials believed that U.S. involvement could help the country become a model of a modern democratic state in the Arab region. Unfortunately, these hopes faded away with the second Gulf War in 1990, which turned Yemen into a foreign body on the Arabian Peninsula because of its democratic republican system and its adoption of the principles of freedom, human rights, and the peaceful transfer of power.

The declaration of the war on Yemen by the coalition began in March 2015, during the Obama administration. President Obama's decision to support this war was in response to a request from Saudi Arabia as an ally and strategic partner of the United States. It was also supported by the stance of the unified Gulf states and by several other Arab and European countries under the pretext of restoring the legitimate government of Yemen. Today—after six years of war and enormous cost and suffering—it is time for the United States to take the lead in ending the war it originally supported, relying again on its strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia that initially instigated U.S. support for the conflict.

The Biden administration's campaign pledge to end the war in Yemen and its plans to achieve it have raised great hopes among the Yemeni people on both sides of the conflict, who are paying the heavy price of war and are searching for a way to end it. It was also welcomed by many international organizations working to relieve the humanitarian catastrophe Yemenis face—including deteriorating living standards, education, and health—which will continue to worsen unless peace can be achieved.

To accomplish this objective, the United States will need to develop an initiative to end the war itself, along with the proxy wars and multi-faceted conflicts in the region. The United States can take advantage of the fact that both sides of the conflict in Yemen are ready for a settlement sponsored by an honest mediator and are in search of a face-saving solution.

Bringing an end to Yemen's war now requires the inclusion of all foreign players in the conflict, known and hidden. All involved parties must share the responsibility of ending the war and pressing the Yemeni parties they sponsor to the negotiating table to agree to reach a Yemeni-Yemeni solution.

These foreign actors must also commit to respecting Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity, providing guarantees for the country's security and stability, and committing to non-interference in internal Yemeni affairs. Actors must additionally cease all types of financial support to the warring parties. Ending financial incentives for the country's warlords will help pressure them to return to the negotiating table and end the conflict, as well as accept the necessity of building new relationships with neighboring countries.

The cessation of the war and the signing of a peace agreement between Yemenis will not be the end of Yemen's plight. There must also be comprehensive plan put in place to build sustainable peace supported by the coalition and the international community. In addition to guaranteeing the implementation of the comprehensive political agreement, this plan should also provide adequate resources for reconstruction, the return of the displaced, and compensation for the victims. State institutions, including security forces and the military, must also be allocated funds to rebuild, along with the necessary financial and economic reforms package to prevent the collapse of the peace accord.

The people of Yemen hope that its country will remain on the Biden administration's agenda during its first one hundred days, and that the solution for the Crisis of Yemen will not be lost sight of amongst the many priorities of the new administration. In the interim, Yemenis are wishing success and prosperity to the United States and the

incoming president during these very challenging times.



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