

Drawing on Past Lessons for Lasting Peace in Yemen

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Jul 13, 2018

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Brief Analysis

The Houthi militia's track record of betrayal and broken promises shows that it only calls for negotiations and is willing to discuss compromises when the group is at a disadvantage. These negotiations allow the group's fighters to catch their breath, reposition themselves, and launch a new round of violence. Thus, we ought to learn from the past and avoid repeating the same terrible mistakes that have hindered the Yemeni people's dream for a civil, democratic, and pluralistic country.

While [new talks \(https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-talks/yemeni-negotiators-to-meet-un-ahead-of-possible-talks-with-houthis-idUSKBN1K024V\)](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-talks/yemeni-negotiators-to-meet-un-ahead-of-possible-talks-with-houthis-idUSKBN1K024V) appear to be in the pipeline, in light of the Houthi militia's political ideology, which is based on their absolute faith in the sanctity of their leader and his divine right to rule, it is unlikely that they are truly willing to cooperate. The Houthi militia's ideology endorses the transformation of Yemen into a nation in which imams, rather law and order, are sacred, and shuns the democratic path that the Republic of Yemen has followed since its founding on May 22, 1990.

The United States and the international community have refrained from labeling the Houthi militia as a terrorist organization in the same way that they have the Islamic State. The reason for this appears to be the assumption that the group operates similarly to a political party, and thus could be a potential political partner under the right circumstances.

In reality, the Houthi militia is a doctrinal and ideologically driven combatant group that operates as an Iranian proxy, helping Teheran expand its influence in the region. This group strives to upset security in the Gulf and threaten international navigation in the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, one of the world's most important trade routes.

As such, it would be a mistake to engage in peace treaty negotiations without addressing Houthi disarmament. Such negotiations will not serve the interests of the Yemeni people, nor achieve their broader goal of ending the coup and mitigating its repercussions. Instead, any talk of peace that does not call for the Houthi militia to discard their means of violence and coercion will only prolong the conflict and delay our nation's ability to confront its hardships in a productive manner.

A History of Failed Compromises

Over the past several decades, the Houthi militia has been party to a variety of mediation efforts and accords, including the Qatar-mediated [June 2007 accord \(https://www.yemeress.com/lahjnews/7745\)](https://www.yemeress.com/lahjnews/7745) that ended the fourth round of war, and the February 2008 [Doha Agreement \(http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=5265&y=2008\)](http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=5265&y=2008), which required that the rebel leaders Abdulmalek al-Houthi and Abdullah al-Ruzami be transferred to Doha. These accords have both been violated, and so was the August 2010 deal with the government, which set forth a timeline for achieving twenty-two points agreed upon by both parties. That same year, the Houthi militia breached another agreement, failing to achieve a single one out of the six goals it was had committed to achieve under the agreement's terms.

Moreover, the Houthi militia has deliberately and continuously shirked its responsibilities as they were defined by several agreements signed between 2011 and 2014. In fact, the militia's expansion into 'Amran, its attack on civilians in Al-Jawf and the Kushar, 'Ahem, and Mustaba Districts in Hajjah Governorate, and its furious assault on Ar Radma district all occurred in tandem with their participation in the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference.

During this conference, the government attempted to figure out how to integrate the Houthi militia into public life, encourage them to engage in politics, and compel them to give up their arms. Nonetheless, on September 21, 2014, the day the Peace and Partnership Agreement was signed in the presence of the former UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Jamal Benomar, the Houthi militia invaded Sana'a, thus resuming the violence.

In the wake of President Abderbo Mansour Hadi's attempt to avoid a civil war, the Houthi militia was subsequently invited to participate in the National Partnership Government, with the international community's blessing. Six important government positions were thus filled by Houthi representatives, including that of an adviser to the President, a role that was given to Saleh al-Samad. However, these concessions did not stop the Houthi militia from turning against the President, and placing him and the government—in which I served as Minister of Tourism—under house arrest. This experience proved beyond a doubt that it is impossible to contain such a group.

While the UN's new Envoy, Martin Griffiths, tours the region, making several visits to Sana'a and meeting with the leader of the Houthi rebellion, one can recall several similar scenarios from recent political memory. In one such scenario, former Envoy to Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed conducted three rounds of consultations between the legitimate government and the rebels. The mid-2016 talks held in Kuwait were the longest to date and lasted months, with the Houthi militia backing away before reaching an understanding at the last minute. Ould Cheikh stated as much during his final briefing before the Security Council. The same issues arose when Ould Cheikh attempted to reach a partial deal to neutralize the port of Hodeidah. In that instance, he became target of accusations by militia leaders. The situation escalated to the point that his convoy in Sana'a came under fire.

Adjusting International Efforts

Thus, we stress that UN Envoy Martin Griffiths ought to seriously consider all of the previous phases and rounds of fruitless talks with the Houthi militia as he finds his way through the political minefield they have laid in order to obstruct the peace process. This process must be fair, comprehensive, and in line with international resolutions, especially Resolution 2216. The UN Envoy must also recognize that he is dealing with the armed group that killed its former ally, President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Aref Al-Zouka, its head delegate to the Kuwait negotiations.

Similar warnings must be given to the head of the EU Delegation to Yemen, Antonia Calvo Puerta. Just a few days ago, she hosted a workshop on comprehensive peacemaking efforts and political transition in Yemen, which several Houthi representatives attended. Unfortunately, despite Ambassador Calvo Puerta's efforts, it does not appear that her positive and good-natured approach aligns with the Houthi militia's political history: the militia has already criticized her in the media simply because she appeared unhappy with the assault on political leader Faeqa al-

Sayed. Al-Sayed was attacked during a mass gathering that the Ambassador herself had called in front of the house of the murdered former President Saleh. This episode once again shows that it is hard to predict how the Houthi militia will react. One cannot trust its intentions, nor expect it to uphold its commitments.

Yemen can only become stable once all concerned international parties realize that disarming the rebellion is the only way to achieve real, lasting peace. Therefore, the Yemeni government and many regional and international parties are fully convinced of the usefulness of the military solution as it is currently played out in the West Coast and many areas of Yemen. The legitimate government of Yemen announced that it is engaged in this war specifically in order to achieve peace and implement the international resolutions already in place, including the 2015 [UN Resolution 2216 \(https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm\)](https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11859.doc.htm); the other party is fighting for sectarian goals that will only prolong the war.

Under these circumstances, the international community needs to adopt tougher measures against the Houthi militia, work hard to cut their supply of weapons, and assert the legitimacy of Yemen's government and the GCC's efforts. Likewise, we must continue to pressure the Houthi militia into renouncing violence and withdrawing their forces from all the regions under their control, including Sana'a. International efforts must also be made to support the will of the region, which brought Yemen back from the brink of civil war in 2011 by implementing the Gulf Initiative and holding a national dialogue. This dialogue represents a unique and unprecedented national consensus in which the Houthi militia themselves have participated, and continues to best represent the socio-political components of Yemeni society, including women, youth, and civil society organizations. ❖

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