



YEMEN: SAUDI COALITION STRUGGLES TO RETAKE HODEIDAH PORT

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On July 21, 2018 the Yemeni government struggled to take back control of the Hodeidah port as the Saudi-led coalition had failed to occupy it through continuous military pressure against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.¹ Yemeni Prime Minister Obeid bin Daghr also expressed his trust in the Saudi-led coalition - which primarily comprises of Saudi Arabia and the UAE - to move forward with their campaign and bring back state control in the affected areas.²

The Yemen war has been claimed by the UN to be the “worst humanitarian crisis” and has left the country with an insufficient health care system and millions in dire need of international aid.³ In 2017, a UN Human Rights report called the Yemen crisis an “entirely man-made catastrophe.”⁴ The UN estimated 10.4 million people at risk from starvation supports this statement.⁵

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¹ “Enemies Failed in Military Aggression to Seize Yemen’s Hudaydah: Ansarullah,” *PressTV*, July 22, 2018. <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/07/22/568928/Enemies-unsuccessful-in-military-aggression-to-seize-Yemens-Hudaydah-Ansarullah-spx>.

² “Yemen PM: We Are Going to Regain Full Control of the State,” *Arab News*, July 6, 2018. <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1334156/middle-east>

³ “8.4 Million in Yemen Said Close to Famine after Regime Offensive against Houthi-held Hodeida Port,” *Japan Times*, July 24, 2018. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/07/24/world/social-issues-world/8-4-million-yemen-said-close-famine-regime-offensive-houthi-held-hodeida-port/#.W3JprS2B3BJ>

⁴ “OHCHR | Yemen: An “entirely Man-made Catastrophe – UN Human Rights Report Urges International Investigation,” *OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22025&LangID=E>

⁵ “More than 8 Million Yemenis ‘a Step Away from Famine’: UN,” *Reuters*, December 11, 2017.

The Saudi-led coalition started its intervention in 2015, supported by the United States. The sole purpose was to protect the civilians in Yemen from the Houthi militia and to prevent Yemen from becoming what Riyadh thought was going to be an Iranian subversion.⁶ In May 2018, the United States imposed sanctions against officials of Iran's Revolutionary Guard accusing them of providing ballistic missile-related expertise to armed Houthi rebels in Yemen.⁷ Iran denied these claims.⁸ Iran has been accused of supporting these rebels and destabilizing Yemen and because Saudi Arabia views the rebels as Iranian proxies, intervening and checking the rebel advance is of highest priority for the Saudis.

The present Saudi-led coalition Operation Golden Spear consists of a number of countries namely: Egypt, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, Kuwait and Jordan. Its aim is to take back the Red Sea port of Hodeidah from the Iran-backed (Zaydi Shiites) Houthi forces while the rebel group has already established itself in the capital Sana'a.⁹ Thirty fighter jets were deployed many of which are currently still active over Yemen. Currently, many countries continue to provide aid in the form of financial help as well as medical supplies to help the war-stricken region. Approximately, 20 million civilians are living in critical conditions still waiting for international assistance.¹⁰ To meet the growing demand of humanitarian aid and other supplies, calm needs to be restored in the Hodeidah Port.¹¹

In April 2018, Special UN envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths was assigned the task to constitute a peace process between the coalition and the rebels.¹² Initially, the purpose of the process was to prevent a Saudi-backed military offensive against Hodeidah because similar airstrikes have generated massive collateral damage to both civilians and the infrastructure.¹³ The process proposes

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-un/more-than-8-million-yemenis-a-step-away-from-famine-u-n-idUSKBN1E528X>

⁶ Saudi Arabia and the Yemen Conflict, *Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, April 2017.

https://saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/WhitePaper_Yemen_April2017_0.pdf

⁷ "US Hits Iran IRGC with Sanctions over Support of Yemen's Houthis," *Al Jazeera*, May 23, 2018.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/hits-iran-irgc-sanctions-support-yemen-houthis-180523053245629.html>

⁸ "Iran Denies Missile Supply to Yemen Houthi Militants," *Xinhua*, March 28, 2018.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/28/c_137072218.htm

⁹ "Yemen: The Worst Humanitarian Crisis in the World amid War, Famine and Cholera – The European Union's Support," *Sécurité Et Justice*, July 22, 2018.

<https://eulogos.blogactiv.eu/2018/07/23/yemen-the-worst-humanitarian-crisis-in-the-world-amid-war-famine-and-cholera-the-european-unions-support-2/>

¹⁰ "Yemeni Tribes Back Ansarullah Forces, Vow to Defeat Saudi, Allies in Hudaydah," *Farsnews*, July 16, 2018.

<http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13970425000876>

¹¹ "Yemen Humanitarian Update," *Reliefweb*, July 17, 2018.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180806_Humanitarian_Update_Final.pdf

¹² *Security Council Report*, July 31, 2018.

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2018-08/yemen_35.php

¹³ "Cluster Bombs Violate Laws of War but Saudi-Led Coalition Still Uses Them," *Al Bawaba*, July 15, 2018.

that Houthi militia should abandon control of the Red Sea port so that the UN can mobilize humanitarian aid effectively in Yemen. Under the same agreement, the UN is to transfer revenues to the Yemen Central Bank to help provide the public sector with salaries. On 21 June 2018, the Houthi group had accepted to hand over the occupied port to the UN for port management.¹⁴ This however, is at the cost of joint management of the port by both parties (UN and Houthi Militia).

Although the peace process will eventually demand Houthi militia to unconditionally leave Sana'a, UAE minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash emphasizes that the UN was given "48 hours to complete the peace process".¹⁵ The deadline expired, and the coalition assault continued. Houthi militia is now focusing on stabilizing themselves in terms of manpower by recruiting citizens and offering them salaries in their fight against the coalition.¹⁶ It is therefore critical to reach a political solution rather than a military one.

One of the possible solutions for the UN would be to establish communications with the Houthi Militia and induce a cease-fire as the civilians are heavily reliant on the aid through Hodeidah. If the cease-fire is non-existent then more effective military units by the UN need to be deployed. Ground support by the Coalition such as land military units (tanks, infantry military vehicles) are more effective in tackling and regaining areas since they have a lower probability of harming innocent civilians.

Countries participating in the Coalition force should abide by humanitarian laws as the eradication of Houthi rebels has equally affected Yemeni civilians. Consistently bombing the Red Sea Port will only further damage civilian infrastructure in the already war-torn country. Furthermore, peace terms should be discussed between the UN, the Coalition and the Houthi rebels to meet necessary demands for the Houthi forces to either surrender or move out of the port. A compromise by all parties is imperative.

The present situation stands thus: the UN is trapped in a cascade of choices deciding whether to save the civilians remaining within the area, stop the Saudi coalition from further destroying Hodeidah or to meet the demands of the Iran-backed forces.

<https://www.albawaba.com/news/cluster-bombs-violate-laws-war-saudi-led-coalition-still-uses-them-1159196>

¹⁴ Yemen at the UN – June 2018 Review, *SANA'A - Centre for Strategic Studies*, July 17, 2018. <http://sanaacenter.org/publications/yemen-at-the-un/6262>

¹⁵ "UAE's Gargash: Houthis Must Withdraw 'unconditionally' from Yemen's Hodeidah," *The National*, June 18, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/uae-s-gargash-houthis-must-withdraw-unconditionally-from-yemen-s-hodeidah-1.741430>

¹⁶ "On the Ground in Yemen: Q&A with Farea Al-Muslimi," *International Peace Institute*, July 23, 2018. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/07/on-the-ground-in-yemen-qa-with-farea-al-muslimi/>

Moreover, Special Envoy Martin Griffiths should further clarify the “peace” terms introduced by both the UN and the Houthi rebels. It is of the utmost importance that both sides find a political solution to the problem to avoid further escalation. Yemen has withstood this storm for a long time. It is not clear how much longer can it keep this up at the cost of the Yemeni civilians?