

The New UN Envoy for Yemen...

Challenges and Opportunities

Case Analysis

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Index

Preface.....	3
New Vision for Solution.....	4
Challenges and Opportunities.....	8
Summary.....	22
References.....	26

Preface:

In September 2014, the Houthis advanced from the strongholds of their wars in the northern province of Saada, on the Saudi border, and took control of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. They expelled the government and put their hands on most of the other governorates of the country. Since then, about 25,000 Yemenis have been killed, and the country witnesses the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

A Saudi-led coalition intervened to support the legitimate government to deter the Iranian-backed Houthis - Riyadh's regional rival - in March 2015, but it was not able to resolve the battle or to push the Houthis to surrender. Rather, multiple attempts to encourage them to engage in a peace process with the Yemeni parties away from Iran's hegemony failed.

Although the coalition expelled the Houthis from several southern governorates, they daily control pieces of the land that is under the control of the legitimate government until they finally reached the vicinity of Marib, which is the government's most important stronghold and a safe haven for millions of Yemenis fleeing the hell of war from everywhere.

In September 2021, the new envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, Hans Grundberg^[1] gave his first briefing at the Security Council, and said the peace process in Yemen has been stalled for a long time, there have been no peace consultations since 2016. It is time for the parties to the conflict to engage in dialogue in order to achieve Peace. Grundberg is not new to hold the Yemeni file. He was the European Union ambassador to Yemen before his appointment as a UN envoy, and he was involved in efforts to bridge the gap between the Houthis and the legitimate government, and he had a role in conducting the Stockholm Agreement in 2018.

During the past seven years of the war, the United Nations, through at least two of its envoys, made several initiatives, but so far it has failed to make much progress in ending the war, which is increasingly complicated by the multiplicity of local parties, and their regional and international backers.

This report discusses opportunities of the UN envoy Grundberg and the main parties to the conflict (the legitimate government and the Houthis) to reach a peace agreement, and the approach through which Grundberg can find a way to bring the parties together and conduct negotiations on a peace agreement that ends the war, keeps Yemen united and preserves its social and political structure.

New Vision for Solution:

During 2021, the United Nations, the United States, and Saudi Arabia, according to their statements, presented initiatives of four points:

Ceasefire: It means a ceasefire on all fighting fronts, including the cessation of air raids against the Houthis, and the cessation of Houthi military operations against Marib.

The reopening of Sana'a International Airport: to be open for specific destinations, excluding Iran and Lebanon.

Allowing oil derivatives access through the port of Hodeidah: to ensure compliance with what was stated in the Stockholm Agreement regarding the depositing of oil and customs revenues in a special account at the Central Bank in Hodeidah to pay salaries of the government's employees.

The start of consultations to reach a peace agreement: consultations without preconditions between the internationally recognized legitimate government and the Houthi group.

The Houthis rejected this initiative and demanded a different arrangement that begins with the reopening of Sana'a airport and Hodeidah port, and then preparing for a ceasefire that begins with the cessation of air raids and then the cessation of attacks across the Saudi border, to be followed by a cease-fire on all internal fronts.

The Houthis' position was like a maneuver to save time needed to take control of Marib and to avoid the coalition's air raids that prevent them from rapidly advancing toward the city.

It seems that Grundberg^[2] believes that partial solutions increase the complexity of the conflict - not sufficient to end the war- so he will seek to include that initiative or part of it within a comprehensive vision to end the war, but this path comes late as his predecessor Martin Griffith, continued to present partial solutions throughout his tenure (2018-2021).

The first briefing of the UN official presents the pattern through which the United Nations will be presenting a new initiative, as follows:

A comprehensive solution to the conflict in Yemen:

Grundberg referred to the Hudaydah Agreement (2018) and the efforts of the United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) to bring the parties together for consultations to implement it. He pointed out that "the peace process consultations have been stalled since 2016" and that the hotbeds of military confrontations in the country have changed for seven years. He said that every detail of the daily life in Yemen is linked in one way or another to multifaceted political issues that require a comprehensive solution, and the resumption of a peaceful, orderly and inclusive political transition.

The comprehensive and chronic vision presented by Ismail Ould Cheikh in the 2016 in Kuwait Consultations was the best progress made by the United Nations in the path to ending the war in the country. The Houthis and their ally, Ali Abdullah Saleh, rejected the vision. Other efforts led by Martin Griffiths were more focused on the fact that partial solutions and confidence-building measures are able to reach a peace agreement at the end, and the failure to implement the "Stockholm Agreement" represented an obstruction to efforts of the United Nations to conduct consultations between the two parties.

However, unlike the political, military, humanitarian, and social situation in 2016 during the term of Old Cheikh, the current situation in Yemen is more complicated amid the multiplicity of aspects and parties to the conflict, and the increasing division and societal separation due to the conflict prolong. Therefore, presenting a comprehensive initiative will need a perfect plan that satisfies all parties with greater and broader guarantees. It is a long and complex process that also bears within it the seeds of decay based on internal and external military and political transformations.

The Battle of Marib:

It seems that stopping the battle of Marib is not among Grundberg's priorities, unlike the US envoy Tim Lenderking, who sees the continuation of this battle as a "stumbling block" in front of negotiations.

Referring to the battle, Grundberg said, "Since early 2020, the focus has been on the ongoing attack by the Houthi group on Marib, (...) The United Nations and the international community have been clear in their message in this regard. This attack must stop, and the fighting must stop, and there must be an end to the violence."

Grundberg wants a complete cessation of the fighting in Yemen, without partial solutions and bargaining measures: a halt to the battle of Marib in exchange for the full opening of Sana'a airport and the port of Hudayada. But such rhetoric sends messages to the Houthis about expanding their areas of control. Although the Houthi takeover of Marib may further complicate the Yemeni war and repeat the experience of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. As it will cause a major humanitarian crisis, as there are 2.7 million Yemenis, most of whom are displaced in the city of Marib, and their number is increasing with every advance of the Houthis towards the city. Marib is the last stronghold of the Yemeni government in the north of the country and an oil area that will increase the Houthis' revenues to control the rest of the country's governorates.

The Houthis immediately picked up the UN envoy's messages and launched an attack in Al-Bayda and took control of the center of Al-Somaa district. They took control of large parts of the districts of "Usaylan", "Bayhan" and "Ain" in the neighboring governorate of Shabwa in the south, and they are now threatening the "Laudar" district of Abyan. They also took control on most parts of Harib district in Marib and imposed a suffocating siege on the "Al-Abdiya" district, where 35,000 people live - according to government estimates. The Houthis bombard Al-Abdiya with missiles and artillery weapons on a daily basis as tribesmen resist the Houthis' entry into their lands. If the Houthis control the district, they will become closer to their goal, the arrival to the city of Marib.

Bypassing Resolution (2216) and increasing of actors:

Grundberg did not refer to Resolution (2216) as a reference for the solution, which recognizes the legitimacy of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and demands that the Houthis withdraw from the cities and hand over heavy weapons. The resolution is one of the three references that the legitimate government is adherent to as a base for a political solution in the country along with the Gulf initiative and its executive mechanism, and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference held in Sana'a before the war.

In his briefing, Grundberg focused on the fact that the parties to the conflict have changed from what they were in 2015, and said that the hotbeds of military confrontation have changed over time, and the combatants have taken turns to take offensive roles." He noted that he will be guided only by the mandate given to him by "relevant Security Council's resolutions.

It seems that Grundberg builds his vision of the solution by overriding the resolution 2216, and not limiting negotiations between the two main parties, the armed Houthi group and the legitimate government. "I will spare no effort in trying to bring together actors across the lines of conflict and engage Yemenis from all political viewpoints, societal components, and from all parts of the country," said Grundberg.

This encouraged the forces of Tariq Saleh, the nephew of former Yemeni president Ali Saleh, who is backed by the UAE to take over the administration of the Mawza and Al-Waziyah districts in western Taiz governorate, from the forces of the military commander, Haitham Qassem, in September 2021. Although this move may ignite a potential conflict between Tariq Saleh's forces and the local population and the pro-government army forces in the city of Taiz.

In March 2021, Tariq Saleh announced the establishment of a political bureau for the "National Resistance" that he founded with support and funding from Abu Dhabi in 2018, after he switched his allegiance from the Houthis to the Arab Coalition, following the killing of his uncle, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh by the Houthis. Tariq Saleh will present himself as a dominant power in a large area that includes several districts of Hodeidah and Taiz, including the strategic Mokha port, from which he runs his military operations.

Responsibility of International Parties:

In the past, the UN envoy called on members of the Security Council to support his efforts, but Grundberg spoke of a shared responsibility of all states. "We all have a common responsibility in our different capacities to end the conflict in Yemen. Therefore, we must use the beginning of my tenure as an opportunity to re-evaluate our respective responsibilities," he said.

Grundberg began his visit to Riyadh and met Yemeni and Saudi officials. He also made contacts with Iran and urged it to increase its "historical efforts for peace in Yemen."^{[3]+[4]} The Yemeni parties dealt with Grundberg's briefing with great caution. They did not support or reject the content. The Yemeni government uses this behavior to learn more details from the UN envoy during visits and direct interviews. While the Houthis use it to refuse his visit to Sana'a to meet with the leaders of the group before the group accepts his visit and imposes its own vision to end the war. The UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council issued a statement in which it supported Grundberg and showed its interest in participating in the peace process led by the United Nations. Later, the council revealed an "expected visit" by the UN envoy to Aden to meet with leaders of the Council. The Southern Transitional Council insists on the secession from the north, which is one of the main sources of tension between the STC and the legitimate government.

Challenges and Opportunities

Grundberg was appointed in the midst of a war that is intractable to a quick solution, growing societal fissures for political reasons, and an economic situation that collapses every day in light of the expansion of the war economy that is about to devour the country's economy and become its alternative - not parallel as usual. But the intractability of military solutions and the prolongation of the war may push the local parties to search for a way out of the war. However, it does not seem to be possible as the Yemeni case is multifaceted so that reaching a sustainable solution will be more difficult than ever.

There are challenges that the United Nations should face, and opportunities that it should get and use:

The Houthi military escalation: The Houthis escalated their attacks and took control of large parts of three districts in Shabwa. The goal of the escalation is to stop the supply of government forces in Marib from Shabwa, as well as to reach Usailan, where the "Jana" oil field is located. The Houthis took control of most of the high-altitude areas near the city of Marib, and imposed a stifling siege on the Abdiya district, which they failed to enter, where its people are fighting with support from the coalition aircrafts. If the Houthis control the districts of Al-Jouba and Abdiya, the government's forces and its allies will suffer a difficult battle to deter the Houthi expansion, which may extend to the rest of the country's provinces as quickly as the Taliban movement advanced and controlled most of Afghanistan.

Contrary to what Grundberg believes, the Houthis' expansion of their areas of control does not make it easier to reach a peace agreement as the legitimate government will be weak. Rather, it turns the war in those areas into battles between the Houthis and the local communities that consider the Houthis as an invader, carrying the legacy of the past enmity during the rule of the Imamate. In addition, the local communities believe that the Houthis do not only want to impose "Zaydism" as a different sect, but rather they want to impose beliefs that the Houthis brought from Iran. Then there will be no solution and no influential party. In addition, the attack will cause a massive displacement crisis that Yemen did not know, as nearly two million displaced people will be affected, most of whom fled previously from areas controlled by the Houthis due to persecution and repression, or left their areas due to the battles and sought refuge in Marib for fears from Houthis.

The Houthi control over Marib will mean opening the way for their control over the rest of other southern governorates, as no force will be able to stop it and the geography in the east does not contribute to the emergence of long battles. The Houthis continue their attacks with drones since seven years, so drones will be a power factor in the open areas, especially if the role of the Saudi-led coalition diminishes amid the Houthi escalation of attacks using drones and more advanced missiles to further pressure Saudi Arabia. Between August 25 and September 28, 2021, the Houthis targeted Saudi territory with approximately 50 drones and eight ballistic missiles, while most of these drones and missiles were intercepted by Saudi air defenses, the cost of doing so is high. The Houthis' drones and missiles are low in cost compared to what Saudi Arabia has to spend on air defense.

Multilateralism and Control: Analysts and governments underestimated the power of the Houthis at the start of the war in 2015, and the allies of the legitimate government underestimated the impact of prolonging the war within its camp, which led to cracks and the emergence of new parties that affect the centrality of the “peace” and “war” decisions.

As it happened in Afghanistan, the competition, the uncontrolled support of the coalition, and the absence of strategies along with the overriding presence of tactics, led to the strengthening of dependency, corruption and inefficiency among the forces that were established. Accordingly, the integration and qualitative performance in the face of the Houthis on the ground are absent. The problem becomes more complicated when conflicting factions confront an organized sectarian militia such as the Houthis, who use the social structure to root their presence and exploit their opponents' disputes to turn society against them, despite the great corruption of the group's leaders, who have become very rich during the war.

Third: Reproduction of parties during the war:

The Southern Transitional Council: It seeks the secession of southern Yemen, and it believes that the Houthis will conduct an agreement with them after they control Marib and that will enable them to rule the south and declare the return of the state of pre-May 1990 without any guarantees from the Houthis in this regard. It will also enable them to lessen the legitimate government's representation of the southern governorates in the peace negotiations, although this may cause a major conflict with other components in the southern governorates.

The Southern Transitional Council relies on financial and political support from the United Arab Emirates. The number of the council's forces is estimated at 120,000 fighters. Although the council represents the political front of these forces, it does not actually manage them. Most of them are run by Abu Dhabi, which trained, armed and funded those armed factions. The international pressure on Abu Dhabi will be able to diminish the council that is currently suffering from cracks. Its factions fought in Aden in early October 2021. Four brigades of the council launched an attack on another STC-affiliated brigade, led by Imam al-Nubi, a prominent military leader in the council. The council described al-Nubi's force as terrorists, and vowed to clean Aden from "terrorism." The confrontations ended with Saudi mediation, which has been leading the coalition in Aden since 2019 so that the Nubi would leave Crater and the Southern Transitional Council would take control over the city. There was conflicting information about al-Nubi's whereabouts.

It seems that these disturbances within the council will continue unchanged for several regional, Salafi/liberal considerations on the basis of which the council and the forces under its command were established. The council is also facing a major challenge in Shabwa, Hadramout, Mahra, Socotra and Abyan, which have their own councils that represent them, not the Southern Transitional Council.

Including the STC with its own delegation, as it wishes, or within the legitimate government's delegation, without representing the other parties will not lead to a "peace agreement" that can be accepted in those areas.

- The National Resistance: It is the force led by Tariq Saleh and it is part of the "Joint Forces" of the coalition on the West Coast front, supported by the United Arab Emirates. Most of members of the National Resistance, estimated at 5,000, are former soldiers in the Republican Guard and Special Forces that were loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh and/or tribesmen who were recruited from the northern provinces. A political bureau representing the National Resistance was announced in March 2021. Amar Saleh, the former Yemeni intelligence chief, is active nowadays in order to support his brother, Tariq, gain more supporters.

Tariq Saleh has already begun to exercise something like "rule and authority" in areas belonging to Hodeidah and Taiz, and he also wants special representatives of his new component in any upcoming dialogue, but he faces two main challenges:

First: the National Resistance' bureau does not represent the Joint Forces that include the "Tahami Resistance" brigades, which present themselves as representatives of the demands of "Tahama" and Hodeidah, specifically the areas of western Yemen, which have been marginalized during the 33-year-long rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. So this may increase tension, which is already exist, between Tariq and those brigades, and it will be difficult for him to adapt them.

Second: The army, the local authority, and the population in Taiz. The governorate that was the first one to rise up in 2011 against Ali Abdullah Saleh and later he called for targeting them with snipers. So they see that the control of Tariq Saleh over Al-Wazi'iyah" and "Mawzaa" hides a suspicious agenda.^[5]

Giving a special representation to the "National Resistance" in future negotiations will not lead to a sustainable peace agreement, but rather to a state of political and military war. The population will refuse to be represented by leaders from outside their areas, and "Tariq Saleh" will try to impose his hegemony by force, which will lead to battles. Since the UAE funds and supports Tariq Saleh's forces - which prompted him to present himself as representative of his areas of control - the pressure of the international community on it may push him to retreat and work within the legitimate government, which he refuses to recognize. This will require a Saudi role as an ally of the government.

The Vanishing of the Role of Political Parties, Social Forces and Organizations:

The political and social parties and organizations have disappeared from the meetings of the UN envoy. Unexpectedly, these parties and organizations still have an active role in politics and the current war, from mobilization to recognition of agreements, in addition to their role in transitional stages of war such as elections. Although most of the parties have retreated to the back due to the absence of political action due to the war, they are the only ones capable of achieving a transitional phase that preserves Yemen's unity and territorial integrity. Also, the tribal role in the north and south has the ability to have a great impact on any agreement, positively or negatively. It also has an impact on the war itself, as most of the prisoner exchange deals between the parties to the conflict were through tribal mediation. Most of tribal sheikhs remained neutral, far from parties' polarization, and despite the destructive behavior of the Houthis against the "tribes" in areas under its control, the tribal sheikhs still enjoy the same influence they used to have before 2014.

In the governorates of Mahra and Socotra, tribal sheikhs push their communities to reject the UAE and Saudi presence with a balanced behavior that avoids armed conflict so far. Although they receive support from the neighboring Sultanate of Oman, those sheikhs say that their rejection of the two states' presence comes from national motives.

Fifth: The expansion of poverty and the collapse of economy:

This war caused the collapse of the country's economy and further worsened the living conditions of the Yemeni people. The economic conflict between the Houthis and the government resulted in two economic and monetary areas: the population in the Houthi-controlled areas used the old currency edition, as they banned dealing with the new currency edition in December 2019, while people in the government areas use the new currency edition. This situation created two values of the national currency.

The exchange rate of the local currency in Houthi-controlled areas remained relatively stable, while the value of the national currency in the government-controlled areas declines every day. During the second half of 2021, the national currency collapsed rapidly. In June 2021, the exchange rate of one dollar was (937 riyals), and at the end of September 2021 its value rose to (1,200 riyals). As a result, the prices of commodities and foodstuffs increased in all of Yemen, while wages remained the same without any increase since 2014. In addition, in the Houthi-controlled areas, the public sector salaries have not been paid for years amid an escalating rise in the prices of fuel and basic commodities. The Houthis are accused of imposing large levies on traders to finance their war and running a black market for oil derivatives in their favor.

Accordingly, there are crises caused by the war that increase the frustration of the Yemeni people: the rise in fees of remittances from government-controlled areas to Houthi-controlled areas, reaching (102%)^[6] in early October 2021, the crisis of cooking gas and increasing in its price, electricity blackouts for long hours, and the absence of most of public services, including water and sanitation^[7] Roads are blocked, kidnappings and levies at checkpoints along the war lines, in addition to levies the Houthis imposed on residents, vendors and shops.

In September 2021, thousands of people went out in the governorates of Aden, Hadramout, Socotra, Abyan, and Taiz to denounce the declining living conditions and the lack of services. Nine protesters were killed and dozens injured. These are the largest demonstrations against the legitimate government and the Arab coalition since 2015. It is very difficult to demonstrate in Houthi-controlled areas, where the group prohibits any criticism against it, and arrests critics, even if the criticism is simple.

These demonstrations represent a popular factor pressing on the legitimate government and its allies, which the United Nations and the international community can use to pressure it to make more concessions. On the other hand, however, it may mean a development in the population's anger that turns into internal revolutions that further complicate the situation in the country. Every time the United Nations tries to seek a comprehensive solution without paying attention to these developments, it will face new transformations in the Yemeni scene that will make it difficult to find a solution. For the Yemenis, the economic crisis is more urgent than the sharing of power between the parties to the conflict.

Sixth: Talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia

Despite the Houthis' escalation of their attacks on Saudi territory, consultations between the two parties are continuing, albeit at a slower pace than it was between 2019 and 2020. In addition to the open back channel through the Sultanate of Oman, that moved much more during the Biden administration than it did during the era of his predecessor, Donald Trump.

The regular Houthi attacks on Saudi cities - including Riyadh, about 1,300 kilometers from Sanaa and critical oil infrastructure put more pressure on Saudi Arabia to start consultations with the Houthis, including the September 2019 strike against processing facilities that belong to Aramco^[8] which temporarily cut the Saudi oil production to the half.

Consultations (2019-2020) between the two parties reached an impasse, and during the Munich Security Conference in February 2020, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan indicated that the back-channel talks were not "ready to move to the highest level."^[9] But the situation changed after the Houthi missile attack on Jizan and Riyadh in late March 2020 and the following month the coalition announced a unilateral two-week ceasefire in Yemen.^[10] It was later extended for another two weeks. This came just a week after the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Muhammad Al Jaber, invited the Houthis and the Yemeni government to hold talks in Riyadh^[11], which was rejected by the Houthis because the kingdom supports the legitimate government.^[12] The Houthis exploited the coalition's de-escalation to obtain military gains in Al-Jawf.^[13]

The consultations, which proceeded slowly under the auspices of the United Nations - took another year to reach higher levels. In March 2021, Al Jaber and the Houthi chief negotiator, Mohammed Abdu-Salam, were discussing directly on WhatsApp^[14] a new agreement between the two parties, but without reaching any results.^[15] At the end of the month, Saudi Arabia announced its known peace initiative for Yemen.

The occurrence of talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, without the presence of the legitimate government, is not an emergency situation. In fact, the communication between them has not stopped since the start of the war. In 2016, consultations took place between them, which reached an agreement on the Yemeni-Saudi border, on top of which is Hajjah governorate. The agreement led to a ceasefire and the formation of joint committees to de-escalate the situation and monitor a ceasefire in the south of Saudi Arabia in what was known as the "Dhahran Al-Janoub" agreement.^[16] But that agreement failed months later^[17] due to the failure of Kuwait's consultations between the Yemeni government and the Houthis to end the war.

Any agreement between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, even if it includes the withdrawal of the coalition, could weaken the government forces, but it would not end the war against the Houthis. The United Nations and the international community can increase pressure on Saudi Arabia to abandon the Yemeni government, but the end of the war will need an approval from the Yemeni parties.

Seventh: Talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran:

The recent statements from Iran and Saudi Arabia give hope for an agreement to end the Yemen war, as the two sides have been negotiating since April 2021.^[18] The fourth round took place on September 21, 2021 at Baghdad^[19] airport, and the talks aim to improve relations between the two countries, which stopped in 2016.

On September 23, 2021, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said that his country had presented "dynamic" proposals to bring peace to Yemen, praising the consultations with Saudi Arabia.^[20] At the beginning of October 2021, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud expressed his hope that the talks would form "the basis for addressing the outstanding issues between the two sides."^[21] On the following day, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Saeed Khatibzadeh, told reporters that all parties were "trying to start a sustainable relationship within a mutually beneficial framework," adding that the talks "were at their best."^[22] The United States welcomed the dialogue between the two countries.^[23]

Despite the hard-liners' control in the Iranian elections, Iran is rushing toward de-escalation in the Arab region, especially with the Taliban's control of Afghanistan^[24] and the tension between Iran and Azerbaijan, so finding a solution with Saudi Arabia is very important to calm the situation in the region.

Therefore, the interplay between regional and domestic policies of states means that continued fighting in Yemen could impede any regional peace agreements or a new regional security order for the region. As a result, there is a need to stop the fighting in Yemen, so Riyadh and Tehran are looking forward to find a "mechanism for a long-term solution to the Yemeni crisis." Reports indicate that this has already happened during the past few weeks, and that the mechanism was discussed with Houthi leaders through officials in Tehran.^[25]

Saudi Arabia wants two things from its consultations with Iran: to stop the Houthi attacks on its territory with missiles and drones, it requires Iranian guarantees that the Houthi attacks on the kingdom will end, and to make the Houthis amenable to consultations with the legitimate government, backed by Riyadh. In return, Iran expects the return of diplomatic relations with Riyadh,^[26] the Saudi support to the Iranian nuclear agreement, lifting the siege imposed on Sana'a airport and the port of Hodeidah, the Saudi recognition of the authority of President Bashar al-Assad and its support for his return to the Arab League.^[27] Hossein Abdollahian moved between Moscow and Damascus at the beginning of October 2021, and the Yemeni file was discussed in Moscow,^[28] where he met with Bashar al-Assad and confirmed the existence of strong support for him.^[29] For the United Nations, this easing of tension between Saudi Arabia and Iran will support its efforts to stop the war. The United Nations and Western countries consider Iran's policy to be supportive for a solution.^[30]

Although Iran increased its support for the Houthis during the years of war, international bodies do not see that this support necessarily means that the entire group is under Iran's control.^[31] Therefore, in the event of an agreement between Riyadh and Tehran, we will see the extent of Iran's influence in Yemeni politics. Any reduction in the Iranian support for the Houthis is supposed to lead to the possibility that Houthis will make some concessions. Iran considers the Houthis to be in the axis of resistance and Houthis believe they need Tehran for their survival.

Eighth: Emirati influence:

The UAE and its local allies in Yemen represent an intractable knot. Although the UAE announced its withdrawal from Yemen in 2019, it still has a noticeable influence in the country,^[32] especially through the Southern Transitional Council, and the forces of Tariq Saleh on the west coast. The UAE might reject any political deal in which the Islah party would gain influence in Yemen's future. Also, its differences with Saudi Arabia may push it to use its Yemeni allies to thwart any vision of a political solution in the country. The failure to complete the implementation of the "Riyadh Agreement" represents the main point^[33] through which the UAE can waste efforts of the United Nations and the international community, including Saudi Arabia, to end the war. Pushing the Southern Transitional Council and forcing it to complete the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement in exchange for including a representative of the council, not of the southern governorates, within the government's negotiations delegation is very important. Riyadh has the tools and the edge in making this happen. The refusal to deal with the forces of Tariq Saleh and the political bureau that he established is necessary until the forces affiliated with him are integrated into the Yemeni army and security, and the areas under his control are handed over to the administration of the legitimate government. Although Abu Dhabi's cessation of its support for the "Southern Transitional Council" and "Tariq Saleh's forces" means the beginning of the end for them. Riyadh may provide guarantees for their survival as political components that enjoy representation in the future of Yemen, like other political parties and organizations.

Ninth: Omani mediation:

Oman is one of the actors who may be able to make an important contribution to ending the war in Yemen, although the Sultanate lacks the strength to exert a direct influence on the conflict parties. Although it has been involved in providing political and logistical support to the Houthis, it wants to end the war in Yemen, especially after the arrival of the new Sultan, "Haitham N. Tariq". Muscat enjoys good relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran,

and it is believed to host background consultations between the two countries. The Sultanate played a role in the back channel consultations between Riyadh and the Houthis, who have a foreign relations office in Muscat.

Oman's determination to help resolve the Yemeni conflict is closely linked to its national security and economic interests. In addition to its concerns about the presence of its opponent, the UAE, on its western borders, Oman seeks to secure its long-term interests by balancing "measures with limited capabilities".^[34] So Oman saw that rapprochement with the Houthis is crucial to alleviate its concerns.

Throughout the war, the Omanis negotiated with the Houthis to release the Western nationals they had detained and provided the Houthis with a place for talks with American and Western diplomats in Muscat.

In June 2021, an Omani delegation visited the capital, Sana'a, and met with Houthi leaders to convince them to accept the initiative presented by Saudi Arabia,^[35] but the Houthis rejected the initiative due to their conviction that controlling the city of Ma'rib would strengthen their negotiating position.^[36] In September 2021, Omani Foreign Minister Sayed Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi said that his country was close to advancing the political process in Yemen and that "the Houthis have not rejected the Omani mediation efforts so far."^[37] The Saudi-Omani relations have recently shown signs that they are strengthening and support for Muscat's efforts to mediate the Yemeni war is increasing.^[38] In March 2021, after Saudi Arabia offered the Houthis a ceasefire, the Omanis encouraged the Houthi group to accept the proposal. However, the Houthis' refusal to do so highlights the limits of Omani influence on the Houthis. Simply, it will be difficult to convince the Houthis that they need to make concessions, while they succeed in exploiting Saudi weaknesses, using increasingly technologically advanced weapons.^[39]

Tenth: The role of the United States and the European Union

In mid-2018, the Arab coalition, the Yemeni government, and their allies launched an attack on the city of Hodeidah with the aim of expelling the Houthis from the city to strip them of the most important elements of funding and power.^[40]

The United States and the European Union initially gave a yellow light to the coalition to seize the port, but when the fighting escalated, the US and EU governments were subjected to pressure from civil society organizations that escalation in Hodeidah could cause a very huge humanitarian crisis, so the light turned to red. The military operation was stopped under Western pressure and the parties to the conflict reached the Stockholm Agreement, which the United Nations failed to implement. The agreement stipulates that governance of Hodeidah should be transferred from the Houthis to the local authority that existed before September 2014, and that the security affairs should be handed over to a neutral security forces, in addition to other provisions.^[41]

The same situation applies to the Houthi escalation against Marib and the humanitarian crisis that it could cause. Since the beginning of this year, the United States has repeatedly called for a halt to the Houthi attack. But the Houthis are continuing their attack, regardless of their human and material costs, refusing any pressure to stop the attack. It is clear that the United States is able to exert pressure on the legitimate government, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, but it does not have the same influence over the Houthis.

At the beginning of this year, the Biden administration announced its intention to end the Yemeni war, overturning a previous decision of the US administration to classify the Houthis as a terrorist organization, which encouraged them to launch a new attack on Marib. Biden appointed diplomat Tim Lenderking as a special envoy to Yemen. Nine months after this step, it seems that the US administration has largely failed to achieve any progress, as the Houthis continue to escalate and even expanding towards Shabwa governorate.

The United States pressured Saudi Arabia to present an initiative to end the war in Yemen - prompted by Riyadh's need to withdraw. It also stopped selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and withdrew the air defenses that confront the Houthi ballistic missiles and booby-trapped drones against the Kingdom,

presented negative messages through its withdrawal from Afghanistan, confirming its strategy to withdraw from the region.^[42]

On September 27, 2021, the US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan traveled to Riyadh, accompanied by Lenderking. The visit highlighted the Biden administration's continued interest to end the war in Yemen.^[43] Sullivan is the highest-ranking official in the White House to meet Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman since Biden came to power. This constituted a high boost to Lenderking, who remained in Riyadh to complete what was agreed upon, and then left for New York days after Sullivan left. Lenderking returned to the region on October 8, 2021 and visited Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Sultanate of Oman.^[44]

The European Union is leading efforts by the United Nations through its envoy, the Swedish Hans Grundenberg. Grundberg sees the possibility of achieving progress in the Yemeni file, given that Lenderking's efforts will be affected by the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, and that dealing with American efforts in Yemen and the Gulf will be worse than before.^[45] It seems that Sullivan's visit was to deny this hypothesis.

Summary:

- The fall of Marib or its encirclement by the Houthis does not mean only harming the position of the legitimate government and obstructing the peace process, but rather means the rupture and fragmentation of Yemen. The movements of other parties to the war, such as the "Southern Transitional Council" towards Shabwa and Wadi Hadramawt, and the forces of "Tariq Saleh" in Taiz, indicate that they are preparing to control the largest possible area after the fall of Marib to expand their authority under the justification of strengthening their position in any negotiations.

This will lead to the emergence of small wars with the local communities, the tribes of Taiz, the Tihama tribes, the Hadhramaut tribe alliance, the Mahra and Socotra tribes, the tribes of Shabwa and Abyan...etc.

No party, including the Houthis, has the ability to impose its control over the rest of the parties, which establishes the division of the country into more than one state. If Grundberg ignores this battle, any subsequent agreement will not lead to a sustainable peace.

- Unless the Yemeni government returns and rearranges its political, economic and military cards, it will gradually lose on the ground and its value in any future agreement will reduce in favor of the militias that are expanding at its expense.
 - It is important to find quick solutions to the collapse of the Yemeni economy and the high cost of living and to address the frustrations that Yemenis are experiencing before finding a comprehensive solution. Such unresolved conditions can complicate the conflict and cause the emergence of new military and political factors that topple any peace efforts.
 - The inclusion of political parties, social forces, and organizations, whose role has retreated due to the tyranny of military actions over politics, in discussions and meetings and obtaining their support and keeping them in the country's transitional phase within the vision of a comprehensive solution, so as not to militarize the transitional phase and limit it to the conflict parties.
 - Riyadh must realize that its borders are threatened with the presence of militias that possess strategic weapons and control a large area, and that they will not be safe unless the Iranian project in Yemen is broken, and that the Houthis will not go to a comprehensive peace unless there is a military pressure that forces them to do so. This requires that Saudi Arabia should bear the responsibility to prevent any military collapse of its allies on the ground before any agreement. Rather, it will be responsible for bridging the gap between them and arranging their cards on the ground in an integrated manner.
- Accelerating the agreement between the international community and Iran on one hand, and also between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the other hand, especially since Tehran used the Houthis as one of its cards in the nuclear negotiations.

Washington considered Yemen as a gift to Iran to encourage it to engage in the nuclear agreement so it removed the Houthis from the lists of terrorism without any conditions or obligations to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region.

- Usually, when it is difficult to resolve a conflict like the Yemeni one, its solution should be in stages: pressure on the parties, building confidence, and then pushing them towards peace consultations between the parties. But this solution is not feasible in Yemen, so Grundberg's path towards presenting an initiative for a comprehensive settlement may enable him to move forward. The main reason for the failure of his predecessor, Griffiths, was the fragmentation of the solution. The reason for the progress of the UN envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh, was his comprehensive vision in the Kuwait-brokered consultations in 2016.

- When presenting any initiative to resolve the conflict in Yemen, the international community, the United Nations, and the United States must understand what it means to have a torn state on the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, near Bab al-Mandab Strait, where the activities of armed and terrorist groups are increasing.

Opening a serious dialogue with the UAE to find out the limits of its ambitions in Yemen, and including its interests in any future agreements to ensure obtaining its support for a peace agreement through its pressure on its allies in Yemen, especially the Southern Transitional Council that dominates Aden and neighboring southern governorates, the National Resistance in Mocha and the Western coast, and a faction of the General People's Congress.

- The Russian support will be necessary; not only at the United Nations, but also to convince Tariq Saleh - who leads the National Resistance Forces on the Red Sea coast - that the best for his interests is to be part of a unified Yemeni state.

Tariq Saleh, the nephew of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, recently traveled to Moscow for consultations there. Unlike most countries, Russia did not withdraw its embassy from Sanaa following the Houthi invasion in late 2014. Instead, Russia strengthened its relations with Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was an ally of the Houthis. Russia did close its embassy only after the Houthis killed Ali Saleh in 2017. Today, Russia is looking to re-establish its relationship with the Saleh family through Tariq.

- The Houthis must realize that this war and its political, economic, and humanitarian repercussions on Yemen and the region are due to their armed choices in taking power and imposing a reality on the ground using force and violence. Therefore, this war will not end unless they retreat from those bloody choices and accept political choices.

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