

# Scenarios of Peace and War in Yemen

Situation Assessment  
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## Introduction:

The peace process in Yemen has entered a state of deadlock ,and the negotiations have been suspended since the outbreak of the war in Gaza .The progress made during previous months of peace talks has also come to a halt ,and the diplomatic momentum has been declined .Despite the efforts made by Hans Grundberg ,the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen ,no breakthrough has been achieved in resuming negotiations and signing a UN roadmap .Recently Grundberg stated that his office would once again present this plan based on the previous understandings reached by the conflicting parties.

Regarding the suspension of the peace talks ,Houthis have expressed their annoyance and anger ,issuing statements to warn Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates about the consequences of further delays and procrastination .They demand both countries to fulfill the obligations of peace and the understandings that were previously reached. These warnings have been conveyed implicitly and explicitly by the group's leaders and their ruling entity ,Supreme Political Council in Sana'a.

Meanwhile ,the Houthi group anticipates a potential military operation against them by United States ,Saudi Arabia ,and UAE ,so they have raised their warnings regarding this possibility .Besides ,they have conducted military exercises simulating counter-operations in response to any anticipated military action .On the other side ,the front of the legitimate government has witnessed moves and military changes .The pro-Saudi forces, Nation Shield Forces ,have taken over the frontlines against Houthis in" Tawr Al-Bahah," Lahij Governorate ,replacing the forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council.

Recently ,the President of Presidential leadership Council ,speaking from Marib Governorate ,stated,(1) "We assure you that we will launch from here and from all governorates to liberate the areas still under the control of the terrorist Houthi militia... and victory will be achieved by the armed forces in all their formations and the support of the popular resistance." Although such statements reflect the government's preference for a military solution with Houthis, they, nevertheless, along with what is issued by Houthi group, raise concerns and questions about the future of the suspended peace negotiations and the future of the overall peace process in Yemen.

(1) <https://presidentialalimi.net/news1164.html>



## First :Future of Peace and the Absence of Moment of Maturity

The peace process in Yemen has taken a turbulent path in the past periods ,experiencing repeated setbacks and obstacles .The deadlock that the peace negotiations have entered for months is not unusual .However ,the resumption of the suspended negotiations does not necessarily guarantee the achievement of lasting peace as the peace process itself is still hampered by fundamental and deep-rooted structural complexities:

1 -The current situation is not yet prepared for fruitful and easy negotiations that can lead to the sustainable peace .It has not yet reached one of the” mature moments“, which may indicate that negotiations become more attractive and attainable .This can happen when ,for example ,the continuation of the conflict becomes impossible for any of the parties .It also indicates that the success of the peace process requires an increase in the level of peace interests and the risks of war for all parties involved .It does not appear that this is the case as the interests of peace and the risks of a return to war for the parties involved are asymmetric .The continuation of the war is still possible for some parties or even enticing for them.

2- Peace negotiations so far have been more like a maneuver or a game controlled by conflicting objectives and divergent expectations of the national stakeholders and other involved parties that influence them. In fact, the peace negotiation is dominated by a lack of trust and deep-seated concerns. The Houthi group, for example, engages in negotiations with the aim of enhancing its power and ensuring its political survival. They seek to neutralize the Saudis and Emiratis, halting their support for the local opponents as a step towards defeating them.

In contrast to their adversaries, Houthis demonstrate a readiness to go to war, driven arrogantly by a confidence in their military capabilities. This confidence or arrogance is reinforced by several factors, including the Saudi Arabia’s keenness for peace, which was understood as an impulsive and fear of being targeted again. This situation has led Houthis to believe that their participation in the negotiations is more like an opportunity to twist Riyadh’s arm. Furthermore, this misconception is also reinforced by the lackluster response of Western countries to their targeting of navigation in the Red Sea, which was limited to defensive actions. Houthis considered Riyadh’s concerns and the indecisive Western response as evidence of their strength.

3 -The Yemeni legitimate government and its allies still prefer a military solution ,even though they are compelled to engage in the political process and negotiations .However, some parties within the government do not hide their concerns about a potential agreement between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi group that would enable the group to tighten its control over the country and marginalize them at the same time .While the government still expresses its willingness to resume fighting ,the decision for war ultimately remains in Riyadh's hands and is driven by its own desires.

4 -Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in the Yemeni conflict as a regional power supporting the Yemeni government against Iranian interference .Its stance holds significant weight in determining war or peace .However ,Saudi Arabia faces conflicting desires .On one hand, it seeks to disengage from the Yemeni quagmire with least losses ;and other hand ,the concerns about the Houthis 'resumption of targeting its interests pushes Riyadh towards negotiations .It also faces contradictory concerns about Houthis exploiting their position in the future to pose a threat to its national security .This makes Saudi Arabia cautious and hesitant between war and peace .Therefore ,it will continue seeking ways to exert pressure on Houthis on one hand ,and resist international pressures on the other.

5 .The Yemeni file is also governed by and connected to the surrounding geopolitical landscape .This connection restricts the freedom and the will of the direct conflict parties on one hand ,and makes it susceptible to the fluctuations that affect this landscape on the other hand .Peace processes in cases where the conflict has regional and international dimensions are always subject to volatility and marginalization ,as regional and international actors prioritize the most urgent crises they face .This was evident with the escalation of the conflict in Gaza ,which triggered an immediate and strong international response, redirecting attention and political and diplomatic resources away from Yemen ,resulting in the suspension of negotiations .The danger lies in the fact that this issue is not limited to this conflict ;the whole landscape in the region still suffers from the ongoing tensions and numerous hotspots of conflict .Each crisis and action in this geopolitical landscape imposes its burdens on the Yemeni file.

6 -In the same context ,the peace process and negotiations will be governed by new pressures and transformations resulting from the expected complexities in the regional and international dynamics and positions .This will make the path to peace more fragile and hesitant .The conflict in Gaza has brought the regional situation and the positions and priorities of external parties to the brink of reshaping .It may diminish their enthusiasm for peace and push them to re-evaluate their strategic interests and positions regarding peace ,leading to a more resolute approach.

The involvement of Houthis in the confrontation with Israel ,their targeting of maritime navigation ,and the resulting confrontations with Western countries ,as well as the revelations from the mutual attacks between Iran and Israel—all of these developments may compel regional and Western powers to reassess their perception of the possible type of peace with the Houthi group. It is expected that some adjustments will be made to their perceptions for this peace to be less tolerant towards the Houthi group, less willing to make significant concessions, and more cautious about granting Houthis an opportunity to gain control over the entire country through negotiations or any peace agreement.

Saudi Arabia, in particular, is engaging in negotiations to secure security agreements with the United States. While awaiting the signing of such agreement, it will resort to postponing the option of negotiations with Houthis. If successful, these agreements would strengthen Saudi Arabia's position in confronting Houthis and engaging in negotiations, making this negotiation process more difficult than before.

## Second: Scenarios

The peace process in Yemen is intricately governed by and tied to the surrounding geopolitical landscape and its dynamics. To anticipate the potential directions and scenarios for peace in Yemen, it is crucial to closely monitor this this landscape and the changes connected to, and the results from.

### 1- Scenario of Continuation of Deadlock

The situation will remain stagnant, with negotiations suspended. The main condition for the continuation of the current situation is the presence of distractions that divert the regional and international attention away from Yemeni file, i.e. the continuation of regional and international circumstances will contribute to the current state of deadlock, particularly the ongoing war in Gaza and the related issues, such as Houthi attacks on maritime navigation. Another factor that could reinforce this deadlock is a significant escalation in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Such problem would undoubtedly become a priority for the international community, pushing the Yemeni issue down the list of concerns.

There are also factors that help maintain the current situation; the existing deadlock has proven to be relatively non-detrimental to all parties involved, discouraging them from actively pursuing negotiations. This is further supported by the continuation of the cease-fire, which reduces the sense of urgency for stakeholders to resume talks. This stagnant state provides a certain level of reassurance and stability. It also exempts the conflicting parties from the pressures due to the military operations which always lead to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Furthermore, there is a lack of sufficient pressure from the conflict parties; despite Houthis expressing discontent; they have not exerted substantial pressure in recent weeks to restart negotiations. While their statements have escalated, including warnings to Saudi Arabia and UAE, this escalation has not revealed any tangible results. It is assumed that Saudi Arabia, in its efforts to resolve the Yemeni conflict, would prefer to resume negotiations with the Houthis. However, there have been no concrete and publicly announced efforts in that direction. This could be interpreted as a response to international pressures or as a desire to use the suspension of negotiations as a means to impose more pressure on Houthis. Saudi Arabia's negotiations for a security agreement with the United States may also influence its apparent hesitance and coldness.

As for the legitimate government and its local allies, they lean towards a military solution and have concerns that a peace process might lead to Houthi control over the country. Thus, the continuation of the negotiations suspension aligns with their preferences and serves their interests.

Therefore, the continuation of the deadlock of the peace process means nothing but perpetuating a state of neither peace nor war. It will also prolong the costs of war and extend the suffering of Yemeni people. This situation not only fails to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, but exacerbates it. Consequently, Yemen's social and political fabric remains on the brink of disintegration. Moreover, the continuation of this deadlock further fuels political, sectarian, and tribal fragmentation. Despite the ceasefire's endurance thus far, a prolonged pause in peace talks does not guarantee its continuation. With the absence of diplomatic means, the effective actors on the ground will resort to force to achieve their goals and send messages to break this situation.

## 2 - Scenario of Negotiation Resumption

The peace process will break the deadlock and resume the suspended negotiation if the conditions that led to the current situation in the peace process changes, and regional hostilities subside, especially the war in Gaza and Houthi attacks on navigation. This scenario also requires the parties involved in the war and peace in Yemen to maintain their positions as they were before October 2023. If these positions remain unchanged, negotiations may resume avoiding the risks associated with continued suspension, such as the collapse of the ceasefire and a return to armed confrontations. This can happen if the international community, particularly the United States and other Western powers feel that there are real conditions for the collapse of ceasefire and the return of the conflict on a large scale. Thus, this development may lead them to change their position and accept the resumption of negotiations.

In this scenario, peace negotiations may resume from where they left off. They may be built upon the understandings previously reached between Saudi Arabia and Houthis. They will proceed at the same pace and be subject to the same dynamics that governed them before the suspension. However, there is a possibility that these negotiations may not resume from the same point or progress at the same pace as before. This can happen if there are changes in the positions of the conflicting parties, which could result from developments since the outbreak of the war in Gaza or other factors.

### 3- Scenario of the Collapse of Peace Process and Resumption of War

**The peace process will completely collapse, leading to the resumption of the war. This scenario can occur due to the following:**

A. One of the conflicting parties becomes convinced that pursuing peace efforts and negotiations under the current circumstances and power dynamics is futile.

B. Deliberate military actions or one-sided provocations occur. For example, Houthis may engage in military actions against Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to pressure them into reviving the stagnant negotiation efforts. They may also do so under the concerns of an imminent military action being planned against them. Recently, they have reiterated that a US-Saudi-Israeli-Emirati military alliance is preparing to attack Yemen, referring to the joint military exercises conducted in Al-Dhafra Air Base in UAE. This apprehension may lead Houthis to carry out pre-emptive or warning military operations targeting the interests and strategic sites of their opponents. They are now threatening that any conspiracies involving United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and UAE against them will have a negative impact on Saudi Arabia.

C. Houthis target the Western warships, causing significant human and material losses.

There are also factors that push towards this scenario and support it, such as the prevailing sense of apprehension among the conflicting parties and their mutual concerns, as well as Saudi Arabia's normalization of relations with Israel. If the peace process collapses and the conflict resurfaces due to unintended, incidental, or misunderstood reasons, the conflict will likely persist for a certain period before negotiations can resume. However, if the decision to return to war comes as a result of an agreement between the opponents of Houthis and allied international powers, the conflict will either end by compelling Houthis to request or agree to return to negotiations on the conditions set by their opponents, or it will end with defeating Houthis and overthrowing their coup.



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