

Saudi-Houthi Talks: Lasting Peace or Sowing the Seeds of a New Conflict?

Case Assessment

Political Analysis Unit

October 2023



Table of Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	3
The New Parlance	4
Back to Talks	4
What issue are being discussed in the talks?	5
obstacles the talks	6
The Mediator-Coalition Leader Dialectic	8
Challenges to Reaching an Agreement	9

Summary

The Omani-mediated Saudi-Houthi talks have been resumed again following the visit of a Houthi delegation to Riyadh for the first time in September, after a period of recession since a Saudi delegation visited Sana'a last April.

While the Saudi jargon towards the Houthis changed, with the Saudi officials referring to the Houthi delegation as "the Sana'a delegation," the armed group adopted the Kingdom's description of its role as a mediator to end the 9-year-long Yemeni war. However, some obstacles stand in the way of successful talks. There are also challenges that thwart building on any possible agreement between the two parties to reach a lasting peace in Yemen. The agreement, therefore, can merely turn to a new recipe of failure, and thus sows the seeds of a new and multi-party conflict.

Introduction

Between September 14-19, a Houthi delegation and a team of Omani diplomats held high-level talks in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. The talks focused on creating a ground for ending the Yemeni war that has been going on for nine years. This is the highest level of public official talks between the Houthis and the Saudis in Saudi Arabia. The Houthis and the [Saudis](#) said that the visit yielded positive results.

Talks between the two parties have been slow-paced since the Saudi ambassador, accompanied by a negotiating delegation, visited Sana'a in April and met with the Houthi leaders there, a visit that was facilitated by the China-brokered Saudi-Iranian agreement in March.

The recent moves push diplomats and observers of the situation in Yemen to be optimistic. They think that circumstances seem to lead to a peaceful resolution in Yemen and concluding a long-term truce between the Houthis and the Kingdom. However, there are concerns that the situation on the ground is more complicated, and that any agreement could lead to renewed fighting between the Houthis and other Yemeni factions.

Since April 2022, when a truce was concluded under the auspices of the United Nations, Yemen has witnessed a relative calm. Although the parties to the conflict failed to renew the truce officially in early October 2022, it was generally respected despite the intermittent violations from time to time, but all parties refrained from launching major battles.

In October 2022, the Houthi group attacked Al-Daba, Al-Nashima and Qena oil ports, in the provinces of Hadramout and Shabwa in the southeast of the country. The aim was to prevent oil export. The attacks resulted in depriving the government of oil revenues, interrupting the flow of oil and the exacerbation of humanitarian crisis in the country. The government said it lost more than a billion dollars.

The New Parlance

During the past weeks, a new interlocutory parlance has been adopted in contacts between the Houthis and the Saudis. After the visit of the Saudi Ambassador, Muhammad Al Jaber to Sana'a, the Houthi media attacks of Saudi Arabia declined, even though the Houthis continued to voice threats. A new Saudi language has also emerged towards the Houthis since they were invited to visit Riyadh on September 13. The Saudi Defense Minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, referred to the Houthi delegation as the "[Sana'a delegation](#)" instead of the Houthis or "Ansar Allah," the latter being the designation used by the Houthis themselves.

This seems to be a Saudi symbolic recognition of the Houthis as the de facto authority in Sana'a and other provinces under the group's control. At the same time, Saudi officials want to change the general perception that the Saudi media has propagated about the Houthis during the past years of war, replacing such designations as the "Iran-backed Houthi rebels" and "Iran's militia" by the "Sana'a delegation".

These changes in nomenclature and the toning down of reciprocal condemnation and attacks in the media and politicians' statements reflect and underpin a mutual desire by the Saudis and the Houthis alike to create a better atmosphere of talks, remove tensions, and gradually change public perceptions.

Back to Talks

The Houthis and the Saudis tend to prefer a long-term negotiating approach, to reach an agreement to end the war, but several reasons prompted the two parties to move towards direct talks after a stagnant period that has continued since the Saudi delegation's visit to Sana'a.

For the Saudis, this change regarding the Yemeni conflict is based on their feeling that their goal was not achieved after nine years. The military operation did not result in "ending the Houthi coup and restoring the legitimate Yemeni government to power in Sana'a." During the war, the Houthis, with the support of Iran, developed offensive weapons, including ballistic missiles and drones, a development that represents the direst threat to Saudi national security since the Gulf War.

The [Houthis launched](#) more than 1,350 ballistic missile and drone attacks during the period 2016-2022. Saudi accounts with the Houthis reflect the changing priorities of the Saudi decision-makers, most of which are related to the economy and the Crown Prince's Vision 2030. The Houthis had threatened to target NEOM just before commencing the new round of talks in Riyadh.

For the Houthis, the visit to Riyadh comes at a time when the group goes through a state of [vulnerability and deterioration](#) and an internal crisis as economic pressure on the group increased due to rising demands of paying the salaries and stopping levies,

in addition to the emergence of new trade unions that advocate the rights of public employees, especially salaries that have been suspended for years. At the internal level, demands have also increased by fighters recruited by the group. These recruits demand jobs. There is also the rise of the voice of the last ally of the armed group in Sana'a; namely, the General People's Congress (GPC)- Sana'a faction – whose alliance with the Houthis revealed dismal failure in running state institutions. The war has always been the Houthi scapegoat to justify its failure to pay state employees and its arbitrary practices of increasing illegal levies, taxes and customs. This does not mean that the group sees in the state of peace a compulsory path, as the Houthi group was born in a state of war, and has lived and thrived in the context of war from 2004 until today.

Although the visit to Riyadh endows the Houthis with a recognition and an equal state that they badly needed, it is also linked to concerns over the lack of international recognition of the group, including by their main allies, especially after the Saudi agreement with Iran. The Yemeni government's moves to [renormalize relations](#) with Bashar Al-Assad regime in Damascus is a case in point. The Yemeni Foreign Minister met his Syrian counterpart on the margins of the Arab League summit. It may be noted that the Yemeni embassy in Damascus is run by the Houthis.

What issue are being discussed in the talks?

The issues raised in the Saudi-Houthi talks in April-September 2023 are the same as those raised in the Omani-mediated talks [during the past two years](#), especially as no progress had been achieved. The most important issues put forth by the Houthis in September during their [visit to Riyadh](#) are payment of the salaries of employees in the areas under the control of the armed group from the oil and gas revenues, a permanent armistice at the Yemeni-Saudi border and stopping attacks on Saudi Arabia,

opening the main roads, the exit of foreign forces from Yemen, the nature of relations between the two parties after the war, and finally launching a political dialogue between the Houthis and the other Yemeni parties to reach an agreement to end the war.

However, the talks are hampered by several obstacles, including:

Firstly, the issue of paying the salaries of public sector employees in the Houthi-dominated areas which embrace 80% of the country's population. The Houthis demand that the salaries shall be paid from the oil and gas revenues collected by the internationally recognized government. It seems that the Houthis are contradictory in this aspect: at times they demand payment of salaries against the whole period during which government employees have gone unpaid and sometimes their demands are merely restricted to current salaries and proceeding with payment from now onwards while scheduling salaries of the past period. They also dropped their demand of payment of the salaries of all employees, including their recruits who were employed after 2015, to payment of salaries based on the 2014 payrolls. The Houthis have already handed over 2014 government payrolls to Omani mediators. Currently, there are proposals that the Saudis shall pay public sector salaries for a period of six months until arrangements for exporting oil and gas are completed.

The talks discuss the nature of the committee that will implement this part of the agreement. It is believed that the United Nations and Omani and Saudi officials will participate in implementing it.

This raises concerns about the fate of the Houthi-collected revenues of taxes and customs, which amount to more than two billion dollars annually, and are usually spent on financing war efforts and to enrich group leaders, while the internationally recognized government has to pay the salaries of employees in Houthi-controlled areas. According to the United Nations Security Council [team of expert](#) on Yemen, "the Houthis continue to control legal and illegal sources of income; namely, customs, taxes, zakat, non-tax revenues and illegal fees" to enrich themselves and finance their activities.

Secondly, distribution of oil and gas revenues: The Houthis want to obtain the share of areas under their control of oil and gas revenues according to the practice that was followed in 2014. This means that between 75-80% of those revenues will be allocated to their areas of control. If the internationally recognized government rejects this demand, the Houthis may probably strike oil and gas ports to prevent the government from exporting oil and gas.

Succumbing to Houthi demands, on the other hand, will embolden them to try to dry up the sources of income of the internationally recognized government. In February 2023, Saudi Arabia announced the [dismantling of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen \(UNVIM\)](#) in the Red Sea— which was established under the Security Council Resolution in 2015 to obstruct arms shipments to the Houthis— and thus lifted restrictions on the entry of ships to the port of Hodeidah. The Houthis interpreted the unilateral [Saudi concessions](#) as a sign of their victory in the war and their feeling that they, rather than the internationally recognized government, are the only legitimate representatives of the country. In subsequent weeks, the Houthis prevented businessmen from delivering their goods to the Port of Aden and doubled customs tariffs on goods coming through this port. They threatened to shut down commercial enterprises that would persist in importing goods through ports under the control of the internationally recognized government rather than the port of Hodeidah. It is also possible that the Houthis are [behind a fake entity](#) that hacks the identity of UN Inspection Authority. This entity misleads commercial ships in the Red Sea by instructing them to head to the port of Hodeidah instead of the port of Aden. Later, [customs tariffs](#) on the goods coming to the port of Hodeidah have been raised. Since [mid-2023](#), the Houthis have banned importing cooking gas from Marib governorate, a measure that contributes to the decline of government revenues to the extent that state resources did not meet 30% of government expenses, [according to a statement](#) by the CBY governor in June 2023.

Thirdly, Houthi access to CBY funds: So far, talks have dealt with means of reuniting CBY by either keeping its headquarters in Yemen or moving it abroad, to Muscat or Amman, for example. The Houthis are trying, through negotiations, to have the rights of access to and spending from CBY funds.

Despite the need to reunify the CBY in order to stabilize the economy and the value of the national currency, granting the Houthis the right to access CBY funds will enable the armed group to act as a central government, a role it had assumed between September 2014 and October 2016.

Fourthly, opening airports: The talks also deal with the Houthi demands to reopen Sana'a International Airport and other airports in Houthi-controlled areas without restrictions.

Fifthly, releasing prisoners and opening blocked roads: Saudi talks with the Houthis on the release of prisoners and detainees are based on the principle of all for all. The two parties discuss setting up a joint committee representing the Houthis and the internationally recognized government to conclude the agreement on the basis of the Stockholm Agreement 2018.

The issue of opening the main roads in the country, including the Taiz city road, is also discussed. The Houthis insist on opening alternative roads instead of the main street linking the Houthi-dominated Hoban with the city center, which is under government control.

Sixthly, the ceasefire: Talks also focus on reaching a permanent ceasefire between the Houthis and the Saudis along border areas, in addition to stopping Houthi attacks on Saudi territory. The two parties seek to reach an agreement on the basis of the Dhahran Al-Janoub Agreement, 2016 which lasted for three months before it collapsed along with Kuwait negotiations between the Houthis and the internationally recognized government. [The Houthis view](#) that agreement as the best agreement they have entered into since the inception of the Saudi-led coalition operations against them in March 2015. A truce between the Houthis and the Yemeni government is also being negotiated in the talks and is expected to enter into effect after announcing the agreement.

Both the Houthis and the Saudis will have to rebuild mutual confidence between them to achieve a permanent truce along the border. Although confidence between the two sides has increased since April 2022 due to the ongoing Saudi concessions, and the Houthis' suppression of their desire to fire ballistic missiles and launch drone attacks across the border besides toning down their anti-Saudi media campaign, the Houthis are an armed group that employs violence as a means of realizing its demands. This is evidenced by the Houthi drone attack on September 25 along the Yemeni-Saudi border, which killed at least [four Bahraini soldiers](#), at a time when talks between the two sides were being held. Therefore, the attack appears to be a means of exerting more Houthi [pressure](#) to get more Saudi concessions. Such actions can lead to a setback in talks. It will be important to observe whether the Houthis will carry out more such attacks and how Saudi Arabia and the UAE will respond to those threats.

The Mediator-Coalition Leader Dialectic

In its official statements before and during the Houthi visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia persistently [affirmed](#) its role as a mediator along with the Sultanate of Oman and that this role came as part of an initiative it had proposed in March 2021. This position also recurs in statements by other GCC countries. There was no open Houthi objection to this designation of the Saudi role, which seems to be an implicit concession on their part at least at present. The presence of Saudi Arabia as a mediator at the end of the Yemeni war boosts the role of Saudi diplomacy in reducing tension in the region.

It also grants Riyadh the advantage of continuing to play its "patriarchal" role in Yemen, which it has always played during the previous decades, especially since 2011, through the Gulf Initiative and the relevant Executive Mechanism. The role of mediator allows it to stay close to political interactions in Yemen with the least involvement in Yemeni politics. It also gives it the right to avoid any future international blame for committing war crimes in Yemen. Such accusations against Saudi Arabia flare up international tensions with the Kingdom, especially as they have been raised by countries whose foreign policy conflicts with that of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, it seems that Saudi Arabia does not want to appear during reconstruction in Yemen as a "direct party in the war" that has to build what had been destroyed in battles over a period of nine years. Rather, Saudi Arabia wants to appear as part of the GCC states consortium, and to be a contributor to a donor-financed fund that will be proposed by the Saudis for reconstruction in Yemen.

Similarly, Iran, the main supporter of the Houthis, apparently wants to enter into the Yemeni crisis as a mediator. In April 2023, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanaani, stated that his country would accept "the role of mediator in the Yemeni peace talks if such role is proposed."

Challenges to Reaching an Agreement

Most wars end with talks and agreements, regardless of who the victor is; and the Yemeni war will be no exception. It seems that the Saudis feel that reaching the end point of the war, while the risks of the continuation of war in Yemen are not addressed, will not be a sufficient ground for concluding an agreement with the Iranians and the Houthis. A panoramic reading of the situation in Yemen predicts that any compromise with the Houthis may lead to small wars that will constantly break out as Yemeni grievances caused by and even predating the war increase.

A set of challenges that may hurdle reaching and implementing a Saudi-Houthi agreement.

1. Failure to engage other Yemeni parties

Houthi-Saudi talks are characterized by lack of engagement of their allies. Actors excluded from the talks include the internationally recognized Yemeni government, the Yemeni [political parties](#) that demanded to be involved, and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC)— which has [repeatedly complained](#) about its [exclusion](#) from those talks. The Houthis also [exclude](#) their partner in power, the GPC, from participation in their talks with the Saudis.

Previous instances of agreements between the Houthis and the Saudis without the consent of the government or by coercing it to agree to those agreements have given rise to much discontent. For example, the Dahrn Al-Janoub Agreement 2016, which sought to conclude a ceasefire on the Saudi-Yemeni border, failed along with the failure of consultations between the government and the Houthis in Kuwait. The Stockholm Agreement, 2018, which was drafted hastily and was imposed through international pressure on the government and the Saudi-led coalition to prevent a military operation in Hodeidah, eventually failed as the Houthis did not implement the agreement.

2. The UAE and the STC

While Saudi Arabia was mending its relations with Iran and the Houthis, a [struggle](#) was on the rise between it and its main ally, the UAE in the southern governorates of Yemen as Abu Dhabi continued to consolidate its influence in these provinces and secure a long-term presence on the southern gate of the Red Sea. Although the UAE insists that it shall participate in the Saudi-Houthi talks, Riyadh fully rejects UAE participation in these talks at least at the current phase. At the same time, Abu Dhabi continues to bolster its presence in the Yemeni islands.

In response to Saudi moves and talks in Yemen, the UAE pushes its local ally, the STC, to [reject](#) any outcomes of those talks, including [transferring 70%](#) of the revenues of the oil produced in the southern governorates to Houthi coffers to be paid in wages for public employees in Houthi-controlled areas. It also supports the STC escalatory measures of secession of southern Yemen. STC chairman and member of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, visited New York, attended UN General Assembly meetings, and spoke in those meetings that he was [in New York](#) to promote the secession of southern Yemen, using his PLC membership as a cover for this task.

Apparently, [American efforts](#) to bridge the rift between the two countries, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have failed despite the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Kingdom, the UAE and the United States in New York [at the request of](#) the US envoy to Yemen, Timothy Lenderking. A day after this meeting, Emirati Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, met with STC Chairman, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, who stated after the meeting that the STC would not accept the outcomes of the talks if they did not provide for the secession of southern Yemen.

The STC controls most of the governorates of southern Yemen. In May 2023, it tried to expand towards the Hadramout Valley. Aidarous Al-Zubaidi organized an [STC parade in Mukalla](#), a step that angered Saudi Arabia and prompted it to form the Hadramout National Council. This was followed by the PLC Chairman's statement to grant this Yemeni province its old ambition to autonomy, a point that can encourage other provinces to follow suit, in an attempt to undermine the STC secessionist agenda. Perhaps the [conflict of interests](#) between Saudi Arabia and the UAE has snowballed into conflict since the STC took control of Aden in 2019 and the announcement of the Riyadh Agreement, which UAE allies refused to implement. This state of affairs continued even after the announcement of the creation of the PLC, half of the members of which are loyal to the UAE. This conflict even escalated further when the STC controlled Shabwa governorate in 2022, expended its influence to Abyan governorate and sought to control Hadramout Valley. Given this reality, Saudi-UAE relations have reached a dead end, and Riyadh has repeatedly rejected meeting Emirati leaders.

The UAE is capable of undermining any political agreement between the Houthis and the Saudis by pushing its allies in Yemen, who have more than 120,000 fighters and half the number of the members of the PLC, to refuse any such agreement. It is difficult to predict what Abu Dhabi can do in Yemen to keep its influence, but its feeling of being marginalized by Saudi Arabia would push it to resort to whatever options that could directly affect any agreement to end the war. It will do at least anything that ensures its continued presence in Yemeni coasts and islands. [Reports show](#) that the UAE hastens the construction of its airport and military base in Socotra Archipelago.

3.Lack of guarantees of the possibility of a political dialogue

There are no guarantees that the departure of Saudi Arabia from the Yemen war and adopting a neutral position can push the Houthis to hold a dialogue with the Yemeni government, political parties and other actors in the country. [Unfortunately](#), recent developments indicate that the adoption of a new approach by Saudi Arabia has further emboldened the Houthis. The Saudis agreed to show signs of goodwill towards the Houthis by setting up the PLC and removing Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Vice-President from the leadership of the Yemeni government. The Houthis viewed this step as the beginning of the collapse of the so-called "legitimate Yemeni government" and thought that it allowed them to maneuver. They united the services provided by the Yemeni government in their areas of control, including ports and customs.

By Contrast, the Saudi-led coalition blocked the three billion dollars it had promised the government after the formation of the PLC.

Moreover, whereas the Kingdom granted the Houthis the right of entry of ships to the port of Hodeidah without inspection, ships that are destined to the port of Aden [are inspected](#) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Certainly, this enhances their negotiating power at the expense of the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and boosts their main goal of obtaining international recognition.

The Houthis refuse to hold talks with the internationally recognized government and consider its members "mercenaries and puppets of Saudi Arabia". They think that negotiations with Saudi Arabia—under any cover—is the best way to achieve their aspirations. Obviously, Saudi concessions and acknowledgement of the Houthis as a de facto authority in areas under their control enhance the feeling of the Houthis that they are the legitimate representatives of Yemen at present. Even if the Saudis and the Houthis agree to holding intra-Yemeni consultations, it is not yet clear how the most vulnerable parties—especially political actors—can enter into arrangements to share power with the Houthi group which is by far the most powerful group in the country.

[Reports indicate](#) that the second stage of the Houthi-Saudi talks in Muscat will include PLC member and Governor of Marib, Sultan Al-Arada, as a representative of the internationally recognized government. If the second stage of negotiations ends successfully, the Houthis will negotiate with the Islah Party and the STC. However, the possibility that such prognostications will ever materialize is difficult to imagine as long as the Houthis are a main party to talks.

The radical changes announced by the Houthi leader, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, on September 27, 2023, raise questions on the group's lack of intention to accept any political partnerships, as the Houthis have systematically strived to build their theocratic police state. Most reports indicate that the Houthis plan to dominate power instead of sharing it with their Sana'a-based GPC allies. The general picture is that the Houthis want to completely dominate power and that the idea of sharing power simply means pushing them to control and run power from behind the scenes, while having a one-third blocking minority, or through full control and direct rule.

The issues being discussed in the talks, including the Houthi demand of the right to have access to and spend from CBY funds hint at this pursuit, which means their control of power and money. This is confirmed by the concerns of political parties and civil society organizations about the Houthi control of the course of any talks to complete their plan of controlling the state.

4. The Houthi strategy of making phased concessions to avoid an internal crisis

Most Yemenis, including political parties, are concerned that the Houthis will use their usual strategy of making phased concessions to avoid the internal crisis that the group is going through, and then direct their massive military power against society. As stated above, the group faces many internal challenges ranging from the internal conflict between two major Houthi wings to the escalating popular anger, which was clearly reflected in Houthi-controlled provinces by the public celebrations of the 61st anniversary of the September 26, 1962 revolution that ended the Imamate rule in northern Yemen. There are also the escalating demands by government employees and by the partners of the Houthis in power, the GPC- Sana'a wing, to pay the salaries of public employees from Houthi-collected revenues and levies.

With Saudi Arabia's potential exit after the signing of an agreement with the Houthis, the Houthis may move towards Marib city, as an initial stage of launching a military offensive against the southern governorates. While the Saudi air strikes and the fighting stopped, the Houthis continued to mobilize their forces and build their arsenal of missiles and drones. The Houthis also displayed warplanes over the capital, Sana'a, and Marib in [military parades](#). In addition to the [military parades](#) in Marib and Sana'a, the Houthis carried out another military parade in a march on foot to the frontlines in Taiz. Head of the Houthi Supreme Political Council in Sana'a, Mahdi Al-Mashat, also [threatened](#) commencing military operations in the Red Sea. [On August 31](#), Al-Mashat said that Saudi Arabia should solve basic issues or "we will solve them with missiles and drones." [On September 11](#), he stated that the group's missile force was able to "hit any target in any city in Saudi Arabia and the UAE."

[Houthi behavior](#) from 2013 until today sheds light on the way they make intermittent concessions to reach their goals. Examples include their agreements with the tribes which they soon broke, and their alliances with politicians, the last of whom was former Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was killed by the Houthis in 2017. The Stockholm Agreement 2018 provides a picture of how the Houthis made phased concessions that prevented their loss of Hodeidah. They soon violated the agreement, advanced in Hodeidah and secured it under their control. They refused to deposit the revenues of the port of Hodeidah to a special CBY account so that it could be used to pay the salaries of government employees.

5. Poor Experience in Agreements

There is lack of a clear vision, among Yemeni parties and politicians, of an agreement that would lead to peace in the country and allow peaceful coexistence in the post-war phase. The absence of such a vision increases due to the lack of Yemeni or regional experience in formulating and implementing power-sharing agreements. The good agreement that was believed to have represented the various components of the country and saved it from the bottleneck was the Gulf Initiative and the concomitant Executive Mechanism of 2011, but it ultimately led to the Houthi entry to the capital, Sana'a, in 2014. Then the power-sharing Peace and Partnership Agreement was signed by parties and political components and the Houthis, which in turn led to the intervention of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition. Moreover, recent Yemeni history reveals that the power-sharing agreement of the Yemeni Unification in 1990 led to the war of secession four years later.

This failure of the drafting and implementation of agreements is not merely restricted to Yemeni parties, but applies to the countries of the region as well. These countries do not have experience in formulating permanent power-sharing agreements. Saudi Arabia failed to push the UAE-backed STC to implement the [Riyadh Agreement](#), 2019, which was concluded with the internationally recognized government. The agreement eventually led to further complications, including recognition of the STC together with its paramilitary forces and disproportionately representing it in the PLC.

Saudi Arabia had mediated the talks to end the Lebanese civil war in 1989 in what came to be known as the Taif Accords, but this agreement failed to achieve a fair power-sharing in the country. Rather, it gave an armed militia—the Iran-backed Hezbollah—the right to possess an arsenal of weapons comparable to that owned by the state.

Similarly, as far as Yemen is concerned, the United Nations has never succeeded in reaching an agreement that leads to a comprehensive and sustainable peace in Yemen. The failure of the Stockholm Agreement, 2018 was partially due to the vague phrasing of the agreement, which led to two different interpretations that allowed the Houthis to use their interpretation to evade implementing their obligations as stated in the agreement.

Without reaching a clear and comprehensive agreement that achieves sustainable peace in Yemen, the cycle of violence will continue. It seems that Saudi efforts to reach an agreement with the Houthis will not go beyond the cycle of predicting a relapse to even a fiercer round of violence in Yemen.

6. The Iranian Role

It cannot be affirmed for certain that there is a decisive Iranian role to push the Houthis towards peace in Yemen. Iranian diplomacy has shown [two contradictory positions](#) since the Iranian agreement with the Saudis last March. Tehran says it will contribute to achieving a "peace agreement in Yemen," and [at the same time](#) sends more weapons to the Houthis. In April 2023, Iran expressed [its vision](#) of a political solution in Yemen: "lifting the siege entirely and establishing a government of national unity with national sovereignty over the whole country, followed by a comprehensive ceasefire, respecting the sovereignty of Yemen and its territorial integrity before launching a comprehensive political process in which all [Yemeni parties](#) participate without any external interference."

To Avoid a Surprise

While Saudi-Houthi talks can lead to an agreement, such agreement will only address one layer of the conflict that has become more and more complex in the course of the past decade. Given the fundamental reasons of the conflict and varied local interests, the Yemeni government, entities and political parties opposing the Houthis, including the Sana'a-based GPC, have legitimate concerns about the outcomes of this agreement, which Yemenis hope will lead to lasting peace in the country.

The UAE also presents another influential regional dilemma. The discomfort showed by Abu Dhabi and Washington's failure to address tensions between its Gulf allies can lead to a ceasefire on the Saudi-Yemeni border, as a result of which the Houthis will consolidate their grip on power in the north of the country, while the UAE and the STC announce the secession of southern Yemen and indulge in a war with the Saudi-backed internationally recognized government. The STC clearly stated that it would not accept a Saudi agreement with the Houthis without its consent. The Houthis can take advantage of tensions in the internationally recognized government camp and Saudi concessions to push their forces towards the oil-rich provinces in government-controlled areas and start a new stage of fighting to control all Yemeni territory, a point they have always expressed during the war.



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث

Abaad Studies & Research Center

-  00967 737 887 778
-  00967 737 887 778
-  @abaadstudies
-  @abaadstudies
-  Abaad Studies & Research Center
-  مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث
-  abaadstudies@gmail.com
info@abaadstudies.org

www.abaadstudies.org

Abaad Studies & Research Center (Abaad) is a non-profit organization that has a license from Yemen's Social Affairs Ministry No. (436) issued on October 18 2010.

focuses on politics, intellect, democracy, election, political parties, terrorism, freedoms as well as economic and social issues.