

# Can United Nations Talks in Geneva Bring Peace to Yemen?

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*Even though peace talks are slated to begin on June 14 in Geneva, Switzerland between the major parties involved in the current phase of the conflict over the control of Yemen the fighting rages on inside this underdeveloped Middle Eastern state.*

Prior to the announcement of the U.N.-sponsored talks, the discussions were taking place between the Obama administration's State Department and the Ansurallah movement (Houthis) in Oman. The Saudi Arabian and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) led alliance backed by the U.S. has been conducting aerial bombardments and supporting militias to attack the Ansurallah and forces within the military still loyal to former President Abdullah Ali Saleh.

However, even prior to the commencement of the negotiations, the Saudi-backed political forces of fugitive President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi have set parameters for the talks based upon the restoration of his government to power in Sanaa. Hadi fled to the south of Yemen and later to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia where he claims to be the legitimate head-of-state for the country.

The U.S. appears to recognize Hadi as the de facto regime in Yemen despite the taking of large amounts of territory by the Ansurallah. The White House withdrew 100 Special Forces from Yemen earlier this year and recalled its diplomatic personnel. Hundreds of Yemeni Americans have been stranded in the embattled state where Washington has ignored the plight of those who hold U.S. passports.

An Associated Press (AP) report noted that "Yemen's internationally recognized prime minister said Monday (June 8) that upcoming United Nations-sponsored peace talks in Geneva are aimed at 'restoring power' to his government and pressuring Shiite rebels to withdraw from the capital and other cities. Speaking to reporters from the Saudi capital, Riyadh, Khaled Bahah said he hopes the June 14 meeting will lead to more intensive negotiations on a road map for Yemen's future, including an eventual referendum on a draft constitution and fresh elections." (June 8)

A spokesman for the Ansurallah forces immediately dismissed the assertion by the Hadi faction.

Their position is that the discussions should focus on the implementation of a UN resolution passed earlier in the year calling for the withdrawal of armed forces from various regions of the capital and throughout the country.

Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdel-Salam stressed in a statement that the Hadi regime is

illegitimate and consequently they are in no position to force preconditions for UN supervised talks. Abdel-Salam characterized President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi a “tool of Riyadh.”

The Houthis spokesman went on to say that the Saudi-backed regime of Hadi “can’t talk the language of logic, instead they can talk the language of aggression.”

Ansurallah movement forces question whether the Saudi-backed Hadi regime even wants the Geneva talks to take place, saying the U.S.-allied interests would not be able unify its own fractious elements irrespective of a national mandate for peace.

### **Ground Attacks Intensify Along Saudi Border**

Cross border attacks into Saudi Arabia by forces in Yemen from the Ansurallah movement and the Saleh loyalists resulted in dozens of casualties. In response to the constant bombing since March 26, the Ansurallah and loyalist forces are taking the war into eastern Saudi Arabia.

A missile launched from Yemen on June 8 was reported to have fatally struck two Saudi soldiers. These deaths were acknowledged by the Riyadh-led coalition. (Al-Arabiya, June 8)

Just a few days before at least four Saudi troops were also killed in a similar attack.

These attacks in the Asir region occurred at (0540 GMT), the coalition said in a media release carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. Details say that a National Guard soldier and another from the Border Guard force were killed. An additional two border guards were killed in a missile strike carried out in the same area in late May. (Al-Arabiya, June 8)

It is estimated that 37 people in Saudi Arabia, many of whom were members of the armed forces along with noncombatants, have been killed in border clashes and cross-territorial shelling since March 26 when the Saudi-led coalition began its massive bombing campaign in Yemen.

An additional four soldiers were slain along with dozens of Yemenis on June 5 when units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh launched an offensive operation in the Saudi border districts of Jazan and Najran. Scud missiles were fired into Saudi territory but were repelled says official sources in Riyadh.

On a regional level, the war is being portrayed as a conflict between Saudi Arabia and the GCC-backed coalition supported by the U.S. on one side and the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies on the other. Any proposed settlement will have to take into consideration these factors.

In addition, inside Yemen itself, there is the re-emergence of a secessionist movement in the South which evokes the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen which was in existence from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The demands for greater autonomy and possible independence must also be taken into consideration in projecting the future of the country.

Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS) are also active in Yemen. U.S. drone attacks for years have claimed to target the AQAP resulting in many

deaths including some who held U.S. passports.

### **Fighting Continues in the South**

There are intense battles still raging in the southern port city of Aden where the Ansurallah (Houthis) are regaining territory they had lost in recent clashes with militias backed by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which are given air cover by the Pentagon coordinated aircraft.

Reuters reported on June 3 that “Saudi-led air strikes killed a group of around 20 Houthi fighters outside the southern Yemeni port city of Aden on Wednesday (June 3) and also shook the capital Sanaa in the north, militiamen opposed to the Houthis said. The militia sources said the Houthis were killed when the air raid hit their military convoy as it was transporting an artillery piece toward the northwest suburbs of Aden. The death toll could not be independently verified.”

Due to the ongoing airstrikes from the Saudi-GCC alliance people living in Aden are consistently reporting on the deteriorating conditions as the U.S.-backed forces have implemented a blockade preventing food and fuel from reaching many areas of the city. The district of Crater, where fierce battles have taken place for weeks, residents said that four people died of dengue fever on June 2.

Regular supplies of electricity, water and trash removal have been severely hampered since the intensified fighting began on March 26. The foreign policy of Washington is creating more deaths and destruction in Yemen and throughout the region.

In Iraq, Syria and Libya, the impact of Pentagon wars of regime-change is continuing to prompt dislocation and human misery on a mass scale. Efforts to re-shape the Middle East and North Africa are being resisted in Yemen and in other states. The bombing of Yemen for over two months has still not resulted in the defeat of the Ansurallah and its allies.

Until the people of the region unite against imperialist interventions the humanitarian crisis cannot be abated. The resources and waterways of the region belong to the people and not the multi-national corporations and the international financial institutions.

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