

As US Beefs Up Military Presence in the Gulf, Yemen's Houthis Turn to Russia for Support

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Houthi attempts to engage the UN to broker a peaceful solution to the war on Yemen have stalled. Now, out of options, the movement may have found a willing partner in Moscow.

Yemen's Houthi movement has reacted with concern to an announcement by Washington that the U.S. is pursuing an increased military presence in the Persian Gulf. U.S. Central Command announced [Operation Sentinel](#) on July 19, claiming that a multinational maritime effort is needed to promote "maritime stability, ensure safe passage, and de-escalate tensions in international waters throughout the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Arabian [Persian] Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf of Oman."

The Houthis' Supreme Political Council, the highest political authority in Sana'a, held an [emergency meeting on Monday](#) to discuss the developments. After the meeting Houthi officials released a statement denouncing Operation Sentinel, saying that Yemen is keen on the security of the Red Sea and that any escalation by Coalition countries, including the United States, would be met with a response. The statement went on to say:

What makes waterways safe is an end to the war on Yemen, a lifting of the siege on the country and the end to [th Saudi-led Coalition] restricting access to food and commercial vessels in Yemeni ports, especially the port of Hodeida, not the presence of multinational forces there."

Houthi officials also weighed in on the [arrival of U.S. troops](#) in Saudi Arabia as a part of a broader tranche of forces sent to the Gulf region over the past two months following increased tensions between Washington and Tehran. Mohammed Abdulsalam, the spokesman of Houthis and one of the most important decision-makers within the movement, told *al-Mayadeen TV* that the arrival of 500 U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia is "not welcome in the region."

On Monday, Abdulsalam ridiculed Saudi Arabia's celebration of the arrival of the U.S. troops, pointing to the Kingdom's relying on U.S. and British protection while at the same time not knowing how to extricate itself from Yemen.

"On one side, there are the Saudis seeking protection from others and on the other side, we have Yemen facing those superpowers with strength, rigidity and wisdom," Abdulsalam said in a Facebook post.

Abdulsalam also said that the deployment of U.S. troops to the Kingdom was aimed at boosting the morale of Saudi Arabia in the face of Yemen's ballistic missile and drone attacks.

Abudlsalam's comments were made during an [official visit to Moscow](#), where a Houthi delegation was visiting at the invitation of the Russian government. The July 24 meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister to the Middle East and North Africa Mikhail Bogdanov was held to discuss, among other things, U.S. military presence in the Gulf. Abdulsalam claimed during the meeting that U.S. and Western visions for a solution to the conflict in Yemen would be unsuccessful, telling his Russian counterpart that there won't be security and safety in the region without an end to the aggression against Yemen. He went on to say that,

“we [Houthis] have common interests with the Russians regarding peace in the region.”

Both Bogdanov and Abdulsalam expressed commitment to abiding by the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement, which calls for a ceasefire in the Hodeida port in western Yemen. The Houthis also expressed support for [Russia's policy vision](#) for security in the Gulf, which was presented by Bogdanov on Tuesday.

While Russian efforts may not necessarily produce peace in Yemen, they may give the Saudi-led Coalition a chance to see that all options for diplomacy have been fully explored. They will also provide the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — which recently pulled out a significant portion of their military forces from Yemen, amidst [fears of Houthi retaliatory attacks](#) on Dubai — a chance to jump on the Russian bandwagon. Saudi Arabia, which has made little progress in its more than four-year-long adventure in Yemen, could also use Russian efforts as a face-saving opportunity, according to Yemeni diplomats who spoke to *MintPress*.

According to well-informed sources in the Houthi movement, Russia is pushing hard to play a role in bringing an end to the war on Yemen, and Russian and Houthi interests are becoming more aligned, including opposition to an increased U.S. military presence in the region. Houthi officials are also hoping that Russia will use its position in the UN Security Council to veto resolutions adversely affecting the interests of Yemen. One Houthi official, who asked to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the issue, even told *MintPress* that Russia played a role in the [recent withdrawal](#) of the UAE forces from Yemen.

“No subordination to Iran”

Mehdi Al-Mashat, the Head of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, [told delegates](#) from the International Crisis Group on Wednesday that the Houthis are ready to stop drones and ballistic attacks on Saudi Arabia if the Kingdom stops its attacks on Yemen. He also expressed readiness to engage in dialogue with Saudi officials to “achieve a just peace for all,” but warned that the “U.S. must know Yemen is a country which has sovereignty and is not subject to anyone.”

Regarding Iran, Al-Mashat told members of the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based NGO that works to resolve violent conflicts around the world, “with regard to the false claims that we are followers of Iran, which the Coalition countries know to be false, we

confirm that there is no subordination to Iran.” Tehran’s support for the Houthis [is limited to political, diplomatic and media support](#) and the country’s influence in Yemen is marginal at best.

For its part, the United Nations says the years-long war in Yemen can be stopped and is eminently resolvable if the warring sides commit to the UN-brokered Stockholm peace agreement reached in Sweden late last year. Under the agreement, both the Houthis and Coalition forces agreed to withdraw their troops from the Yemeni ports of Hodeida, Salif, and Ras Issa, and to allow the deployment of UN monitors.

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths said on Tuesday,

“I believe that this war in Yemen is eminently resolvable, both parties continue to insist that they want a political solution and the military solution is not available, they remain committed to the Stockholm agreement in all its different aspects.”

UAE “not leaving Yemen”

While the Houthis have had some success in forcing a dialogue with Coalition leaders through the United Nations, Russia, and various NGOs, it appears that their celebration over the recent announcement that the UAE is withdrawing its troops from Yemen may have been premature. In the Houthis’ first official statement since the UAE announced it was withdrawing its troops from Yemen, Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam said on Wednesday that “the UAE has not withdrawn any its soldiers from Yemen, and instead has redeployed its forces from a number of areas in Yemen, including battlefields in Hodeida and Marib province in eastern Yemen.” Abdulsalam went on to encourage UAE leaders to pull out of Yemen, saying “the UAE getting out of Yemen is positive and natural and we encourage its leaders to do so.”

The UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Mohammed Gargash, in an opinion piece published in *The Washington Post* on Monday, confirmed the UAE was not leaving Yemen, saying:

“Just to be clear, the UAE and the rest of the Coalition are [not leaving Yemen](#).”

He added,

“While we will operate differently, our military presence will remain. In accordance with international law, we will continue to advise and assist local Yemen forces — referring to the myriad UAE-funded Yemeni rebel groups including the Shaban elite forces, the Mahri elite forces, and the Security Belt.

According to Mohammed Abdulsalam, the seemingly contradictory statement coming from the UAE may be a result of Saudi pressure.

Meanwhile, [Turkey’s state news agency Anadolu](#), citing a spokesman for the UAE allies, reported on Wednesday that the Sudanese armed forces had partially withdrawn from parts of Yemen following the withdrawal of UAE troops from the same areas. Yemeni armed forces

will replace the Sudanese troops around Hodeida, a Yemeni source told Anadolu.

The UAE and Sudan, parts of a Saudi-led military coalition, have been active members in the brutal Saudi-led Coalition's war on Yemen since it began in 2015, which the United Nations says has produced the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions on the brink of starvation.

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