

Yemen - Prisoner Swap and What May be Behind it

Transcript of an Interview with Press TV

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),
[US NATO War Agenda](#)

Background

The fourth batch of Yemeni detainees has arrived in Sana'a as part of the largest prisoner swap between the country's warring sides. The residents in the capital received 112 prisoners after their plane landed in the Sana'a international airport. 1-thousand 81 men will be released in two days.

A two-day prisoner swap between Yemen's warring sides is underway. The move is part of a deal reached last month in Switzerland. Here is a report:

Yemen's warring sides are exchanging detainees in the largest prisoner swap between the Ansarullah movement and the Saudi-backed former regime. One-thousand eighty-one men will be freed in a two-day swap. -Hussein al-Bukhaiti - Political Commentator

The exchange was agreed last month after a week of negotiations in Switzerland. The prisoner swap is being overseen by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Analysts believe the exchange is a victory for Yemen's Ansarullah movement. - Naseh Shaker - Political Analyst

Ansarullah Spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam says the swap brings hope for peace-building. The United Nations special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths also hailed the success of the operation.

"Today's release operation, led by the I-C-R-C, is another sign that peaceful dialogue can deliver. I hope the parties will soon reconvene under UN auspices to discuss the release of all conflict-related prisoners and detainees." - Martin Griffiths, UN special envoy for Yemen.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to bring former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power.

But the campaign that was supposed to last only a few months is raging on more than five years later now. The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has killed more than 100-thousand people, mostly civilians.

Saudi Arabia's US-backed deadly war and an all-out blockade against Yemen, in tandem with outbreaks of cholera and now the covid-19 pandemic, have left some 24 million Yemenis, or 80% of the population, in need of aid. 20 million Yemenis also lack sufficient food supplies and access to clean water.

Riyadh has so far turned a deaf ear to all humanitarian pleas to stop the war. Yemenis say today's prisoner swap is an important step, but what is necessary as a prelude to stop the conflict is an end to Saudi Arabia's aggression and blockade.

PressTV: Tell me the significance of this prisoner swap.

Peter Koenig: A prisoner swap is always a positive sign. It could be a first step to a cease fire - and leading hopefully to Peace negotiations.

At the outset, yes it may look like a victory, perhaps rather a "first step" towards peace, because *victory* is saying a lot --- of the Yemen's Ansarullah movement, actually for better understanding it is the Houthi Shia' movement.

All depends on what the Saudis will do next.

If they get instructions from the US and the UK and other European allies, like France - to halt the bombing, then we may be able to talk about an interim success.

The Saudis will do what their western Masters tell them to do.

The Saudis have been mostly a proxy for the US and UK. If you look at the map, you see how strategically located Yemen is... and Yemen in control of a left-leaning government, a government that supports the people, supports a move towards democracy, is not what the west wants.

However, the US has already reached a little talked-about target, namely to set up via the UAE (United Arab Emirates) a military base on Socotra, a beautiful island with some 60,000 inhabitants off the Yemeni Coast, off Aden, in the Gulf of Aden.

On 8 September 2020, politicians in Aden reported that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has begun building two military camps on Yemen's Socotra island. In this case it is the UAE building the military camps, what will eventually become a military base, to which the US and western allies will have access.

The UAE were supporting Saudi Arabia in the fight against the Yemeni Houthis, who were and are fighting for their freedom, autonomy and democracy. The UAE were instrumental in blocking the port of Hudaydah so that no food and vital medicine could enter Yemen. The UAE - close ally to the western powers - is co-responsible for famine, disease - foremost cholera - and death of tens of thousands of children.

So, perhaps UAE military bases on Socotra island, to which the west, i.e. NATO, will have free access, may have been a "chip" in the negotiations for the prisoner exchange. This is of course speculation, but it would make geopolitical sense.

Image on the right is from Al-Masdar News



PressTV: How significant do you think this exchange is where initially the Saudi regime thought that its war on Yemen would only take a month and now more than five and a half years later, Riyadh has had to agree to negotiate with AnsaraAllah?

PK: What we don't know is what went on behind closed doors. I understand negotiations on Socotra started already in 2016...

That would be one explanation - another one, more straightforward, is the Irani support the Houthis received.

It wasn't or isn't direct weapons support, but military advice and technical support, so that the Yemeni Houthis are able to build their own military precision weapons, like rockets, missiles and drones, and are able to hit with drones' guided missiles anywhere in Saudi Arabia, as we have seen when Yemeni missiles destroyed a Saudi pipeline last year.

Therefore the Saudi bombing had to go on - with of course weapons - bombs and missiles - supplied by the US, UK, and France. A Financial bonanza for the western weapons industry. War is a very profitable business.

PressTV: The talks leading up to this swap agreement were held in Switzerland. Do you think the so-called international community can play a more active role in trying to bring this war to an end?

PK: The talks were hosted by the International Red Cross (ICRC), that's why it was taking place in Switzerland.

Yes, I believe the international community should play a much more active role when PEACE is at stake - anywhere in a conflict zone around the world.

Unfortunately, those who have a political weight in the international community are also those who have a vested interest in wars and conflicts - not only weapons sales, also moving a step or two closer to controlling the energy-and other resources-rich Middle East.

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PressTV: Why has Saudi Arabia not been condemned for its blockade on Yemen which is preventing foodstuffs and even medicine from entering the country?

PK: They have been condemned, but not with much noise and only with tiny voices; to no avail, because they got the support from the US, UK, France and Germany. Yes, Russia and China have voiced their opposition to the Saudi / US / UK war on Yemen. But their voices were silenced by the western-bought and oriented media.

We are living in a dystopian world, where rights and international laws do no longer count.

Breaking international laws is the new normal. And the public at large is so used to it, it doesn't even react.

Laws and international rules are made up by the western powers, as they go along in the process of trying to conquer the world.

Fortunately, we have Russia and China as permanent members in the UN Security Council. Although, the UNSC has not been able to achieve Peace in Yemen - nor in Palestine, for that matter - it is at least a forum which the media cannot simply ignore. And little by little people will recognize who is behind all these conflicts and vested interests.

In the long-run, western powers for absolute dominance will not succeed.

Its not in the laws of nature.

PressTV: The Saudis are well equipped with sophisticated equipment and weapons which they buy from London and Washington despite their many human rights violations in this war. Shouldn't these two countries be held partially responsible for the death and destruction which has been taking place inside of Yemen?

PK: Absolutely. Of course they should.

They are not only behind the war in Yemen, but they are involved in all the Middle Eastern conflicts, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, now Lebanon - wherever you look it's the bloody fingerprints of the west, and often Israel acts as a proxy for Washington - almost all conflicts are started by the US, NATO and its European allies.

And not to forget, by western funding of terrorism.

PressTV: We have seen a big difference between the Yemeni fighters during the first year of war until now. It is no longer rare now that the Houthis are able to attack the Saudis. Does this help in being able to negotiate, even in being able to have a prisoner swap?

PK: Yes, probably. The fact is that the Houthis have become much stronger in the past five years of war - which the Saudis started in March 2015, when in the US the Obama Administration was still in power.

The Houthis have made technological advances in building their own drones, missiles, and rockets. They have shown the Saudis that they have the precision and capacity to attack Saudi Arabian targets practically anywhere in the Saudi territory. This is impressive and surely may have had a crucial influence in this first step of a prisoner exchange; first step to what I hope will be a much more important goal - Peace.

PressTV: Is the lesson learned here that in order to have effective political negotiations, that an entity needs to be strong militarily?

PK: In general, it helps.

We have seen other examples throughout the world, not least, North Vietnam won the war against the South which was basically the US Army, because the North Vietnamese were

well equipped and were strategic thinkers. They gained the upper hand - to eventually prompt the US the leave.

So, yes, military strength helps definitely in defining the term to the war or peace process. In this case the AnsaraAllah movement, alias the Houthis military strength and strategic thinking has certainly played a role - reaching the point where they are now; possibly a step away from a Peace Process.

PressTV: Where do you see the situation in Yemen going?

PK: I am optimistic, hoping that the ICRC will involve the UN Security Council in calling for a Cease Fire and Peace Talks. The suffering of a poverty-stricken population without the war, has become atrocious with the war, especially affecting children. The Saudis, helped by the UAE and of course supported by western powers, have literally committed genocide - by depriving the population of vital food and medication imports, causing famine and famine related diseases - and countless death.

PressTV: Do you think the Saudi regime, basically Muhammad bin Salman, is getting to the point that he is ready to negotiate with AnsaraAllah?

PK: Yes, I do hope so. It may not be an easy negotiation, because a "loser" can never admit losing. But I do hope under the guidance of the UN Security Council and the strong presence of Russia and China in the UNSC, negotiations for PEACE may emerge - and that Peace may bring restoration to this devastated country.

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