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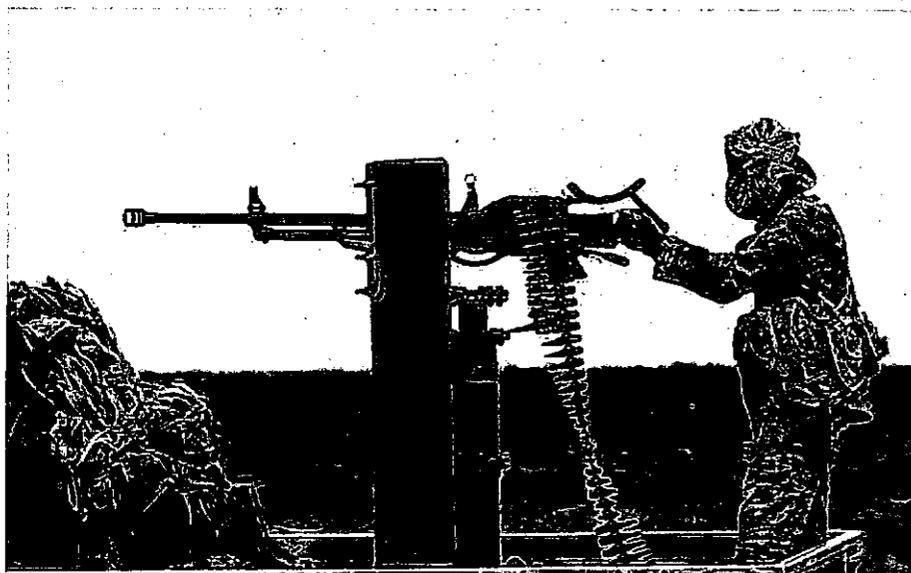
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To take on the Houthi rebels in Yemen, we must liberate Hodeidah

- Anwar Gargash

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A Pro-government Yemeni soldier

fires a machine gun near the city of Al Hajjah in Yemen's Hodeidah province CREDIT: NABIL HASSAN/ AFP

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Anwar Gargash

The Arab Coalition is responding to a request from Yemen's President to liberate the Port of Hodeidah and return it to the control of the country's legitimate government.

This is a last resort only after extensive diplomatic efforts have been exhausted, and indeed the only reasonable option left open. Hodeidah is the principal gateway for the illegal Iranian arms flow to Houthi militia, who have stepped up their use of sophisticated Iranian missile and drone attacks into

Saudi Arabia in recent months. During this time, it has become abundantly clear that the UN's Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM) has failed to staunch the flow of arms and material to Iran's proxy forces in Yemen.

No country on earth would allow such a threat from a neighboring territory to go unanswered without taking swift and decisive action. Securing the Port of Hodeidah and restoring its legitimate government is therefore more than justified under the universally accepted principle of self-defense enshrined in the United Nations founding charter.

control of Hodeidah will also have an immediate and profound positive impact, as it will open up a corridor for humanitarian assistance that has been impeded by Houthi rebels for two years. The Arab Coalition is coordinating with UN agencies and international NGOs to ensure delivery of a comprehensive humanitarian assistance package, even during any military action. We have enough ships, planes and trucks standing by to provide adequate food and essential supplies. What is more, we will be able to greatly enhance these efforts once the port is secure.

Once Hodeidah is returned to government control it will also help break the political impasse that has frozen Yemen's progress over the last three years

The action we are taking is rooted in our commitment to restore the right of self-determination to the people of Yemen in line with UN resolution 2216 that calls for all parties to recognize the legitimate, freely elected government and return all territories that have been illegally seized.

The Yemeni people made a clear choice in 2012 when they elected a President and through a National Dialogue agreed on the political structure of the state. The Houthis were the only group to reject this peaceful process and pushed aside the Yemeni people's choice by violent means in 2015. Since then, the Houthis have terrorized the local population under their control and committed countless human rights violations.

They also represent a clear and present danger to the strategic security of international shipping lanes from the Bab el Mandeb Straights through the Red Sea approach to the Suez Canal. In fact, Houthi militia have repeatedly threatened to block maritime traffic in a criminal attempt to use this threat to gain leverage over the international community.

Once Hodeidah is returned to government control it will also help break the political impasse that has frozen Yemen's progress over the last three years, by finally forcing the Houthis to come to the negotiating table in good faith, so that the country can move forward.

The liberation of Hodeidah will be the third port that the Arab Coalition has wrestled away from Houthi control. In the case of Aden and Mukallah, the security and welfare of the local populations has been greatly improved by our actions. In fact, not only has the rightful government been restored, but other terrorist threats, including from Al Qaeda, have been mitigated by the return of the rule of law.

Yemen, just as any other nation, deserves a future defined by peace, stability and prosperity. Our actions are aimed at delivering exactly that.

Anwar Mahamed Gargash is UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs