We’re proud of the UAE’s military role in Yemen. But it’s time to seek a political solution.

By Anwar Gargash

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As the United Arab Emirates draws down and redeploy its forces in Yemen, we do so in the same way we began — with eyes wide open. We understood the challenges then and we understand them today. There was no easy victory and there will be no easy peace.

But now is the time to double down on the political process. The Yemeni parties — the Houthis specifically — should see this move for what it is: a confidence-building measure to create new momentum to end the conflict. The international community also must seize the moment. It must deter any side from exploiting or undermining this opportunity, stop the Houthis from blocking aid, hasten compromise from all sides and support a determined U.N.-led mediation effort.

In the meantime, there will be no security vacuum. The government of Yemen’s military carried the greatest burden in taking back control of large parts of the country. These local units will remain in place under Yemeni command and with ongoing support from the coalition.

In fact, it was these same local Yemeni forces that broke the Houthi stranglehold on Yemen. Supported by the coalition, they fought bravely and successfully to take back Aden, Yemen’s second largest city, along with much of the coastlines along the Red Sea and Arabian Sea.

Their push on Hodeida with deliberately calibrated military pressure was decisive in persuading the Houthis to reengage in talks. The subsequent U.N.-facilitated Stockholm agreement and its implementation have been imperfect, but the de-escalation has saved lives, improved the humanitarian situation and has provided a foothold for a broader political process.

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The coalition intervention also accomplished other important objectives. Iran has been denied another strategic maritime chokehold in the region — freedom of navigation between Asia and the Mediterranean through the Bab el-Mandeb strait, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal has been protected. The world does not want to see the threat to global shipping in and around the Strait of Hormuz repeated on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula.

Without coalition intervention, Iran was also well on its way to replicating its destabilizing and corrosive Lebanese Hezbollah model of proxy warfare in Yemen. Trained, equipped and encouraged by Iran, the Houthis gained access to some of the most sophisticated arms ever employed by a non-state actor — weaponized drones, ballistic missiles and radio-controlled IEDs. Iran was prepared to take full advantage of the Houthis’ total control of Yemen.

We have also effectively neutralized the threat from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) — one of the terrorist group’s most dangerous franchises. Local Yemeni units, enabled and supported by the coalition, took down AQAP’s budding caliphate in and around the port city of Mukalla. One Western intelligence analyst hailed it as a “textbook solution of dealing with terrorist groups that hold territory.”

But just to be clear, the UAE and the rest of coalition are not leaving Yemen. While we will operate differently, our military presence will remain. In accordance with international law, we will continue to advise and assist local Yemeni forces. We will respond to attacks against the coalition and against neighboring states. With international partners, we will stay vigilant in securing access to critical waterways. Having donated more than $5.5 billion in aid to Yemen since 2015, our support for large-scale humanitarian assistance programs, as well as U.N. and international organizations working in the country will continue.

Martin Griffiths, the United Nations special envoy, told the Security Council last week that “we need to think now together of the realities and opportunities which now define our chances of making a move on peace.”

The coalition’s latest moves improve these chances. Military force alone will never solve Yemen’s Rubik’s Cube of conflicts and constantly shifting alliances — but is has created the conditions for a reenergized peace process.

With eyes wide open, the world should take a closer look at what has changed in Yemen. The legitimate government regained control of large parts of the country. Living conditions are better in these areas. A political dialogue has restarted. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is at its weakest point in years, and Iranian aggression was checked.