

# HYPERFOCAL

Despite the long-standing conflict in Yemen, the country has largely been ignored in recent years by the Western world. This reality shifted in November 2023 when Iranian-supplied Houthis began their attacks on commercial shipping. The global community would then be forced to pay attention to the region and take action. In response, the United States and its allies began to reengage against the Houthis in an attempt to cease their hostilities. This was a major shift in comparison to previous US policy, also forcing the administration to reclassify the Houthis as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

Leading into this crisis, the Houthis were actively engaged in peace talks led exclusively by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and facilitated by the United Nations. While the Houthis were actively disrupting commercial shipping and attacking civilians in the Red Sea, the United Nations announced a roadmap to peace in Yemen despite these hostilities the following December. This roadmap largely ignored the concerns and inclusion of all parties involved in the war—in contrast to the promise of ensuring a Yemeni-Yemeni process.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC), the largest civil and military bloc in the UN-recognized government, was a group neglected in these negotiations. As such, many of the concerns highlighted by the STC, such as the removal of foreign counter-terrorist operations which the STC partners with to combat groups such as al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State in Yemen (ISIS-Yemen), were not included in negotiations. The STC has also been successful in halting the Houthi advance while maintaining order in the strategically important city of Aden. Most of Yemen's proven oil reserves, rare earth minerals, and the best deep water port (Aden) are all within Southern Yemen, which the STC administrates autonomously.

Responding to recent Houthi aggression in the Red Sea, the STC affirmed, "The Southern Transitional Council emphasizes its unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety of international navigation and safeguarding the vital international trade routes in the Bab Al-Mandab, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. To achieve this the Council remains ready to enhance the capabilities of our southern naval forces through cooperation with Arab coalition partners and other regional and international partners." STC leadership has echoed this commitment as they seek to increase their friendship with the United States.

As proven in recent months, the global community cannot afford to neglect the Yemeni peace process. Yemen's location is of great strategic and economic value to the United States and the world. Approximately 10% of all world trade travels through the strait of Bab el Mandeb, which gives access from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. The Houthis, outside of the control of the state, already showed that they can do immense damage to global supply chains. If the Houthis are allowed to integrate into the recognized state structure of Yemen, they will gain increased access to state assets, revenue, and greater strategic positioning to expand their piracy activities.

As it stands, discussions have been limited in scope since December. The US Ambassador to Yemen said that when the Houthi attacks stop in the Red Sea, the peace process and Roadmap in Yemen cannot just be resumed; it would have to be recalibrated/readjusted after the Houthi attacks. Crucial to this readjustment is the inclusion of all parties, such as the STC, giving them the UN-mandated right to bring forth their concerns and desired outcomes in negotiations.

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