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Office of the Special Envoy
of the Secretary-General for Yemen



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Briefing of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Yemen to the open session of the Security Council

16 September 2019

Thank you, indeed Mr. President, and thank you for giving me again the opportunity to brief the Council today on the situation in Yemen.

Mr. President,

Today I will argue, on the basis of the facts in front of us, that we have no time to waste before moving forward with purpose and resolve towards the political solution to end the conflict in Yemen. At my last briefing to this Council I made just such a call. If anything, the facts before us now make this even more compelling.

What are the reasons behind this appeal?

Mr. President, the first reason is the worrying military escalation.

The attack on ARAMCO facilities in Saudi Arabia this past Saturday morning, 14th of September, which has caused significant disruption to the Kingdom's crude oil production, has consequences well beyond the region. And I echo of course the Secretary-General's statement condemning this attack. At a minimum, this kind of action carries the risk of dragging Yemen into a regional conflagration. Because of one thing we can be certain, and that is that this extremely serious incident makes the chances of a regional conflict that much higher and of a rapprochement that much lower. With Yemen in some way or other linked, none of that is good for Yemen.

And this is frankly terrifying and is an eventuality which runs completely counter to the many and detailed conversations I have had in recent weeks with people in the region, in Yemen and elsewhere in favour of a series of steps to be taken by the parties towards de-escalation. It is not entirely clear who was behind the attack, but the fact that Ansar Allah has claimed responsibility is bad enough. And whatever we will discover of the attack, it is a sure sign that for Yemen, the direction of travel seems to be away from the peace we all seek. Every day that war goes on, the greater the threat to regional stability. So we need to take a bold move.

Mr. President,

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It is always and inevitably invidious to choose for attention one event in a war as broad and complex and violent as the one we face in Yemen. But we do so and I do so on this occasion to illustrate the horror of the war, and that is an appeal to the collective conscience, and an emphasis on the terror faced by ordinary people in Yemen on a daily basis.

The attack in Dhammar on the 1st of September led to the deaths of about 110 people and the wounding of 43 more. Only a handful escaped unhurt from that building. I am well aware of the reasons put forward for this attack, and my purpose here is not to adjudicate of course on that decision. But the attack itself, nevertheless, reminds us so vividly of all that we want to bring to an end.

These actions, the actions I have described make peace more difficult and indeed even more necessary.

Mr. President, the second reason for my appeal is the situation in the south.

Events there present to us an eerie calm. The city of Aden remains broadly under the control of the Southern Transitional Council. In neighbouring Abiyan, its forces face those of the Government of Yemen. In Shabwa, further to the East and the North a shaky standoff has been achieved. Forces from other fronts have moved to support their respective sides in this new and dangerous crisis. And these moves, in turn, destabilise those other fronts encouraging new military adventurism.

There is really nothing good to be said about this besides that calm I mentioned. I am, of course, encouraged by the calls for peace from other groups in the southern governorates, who do not want events in Aden to be repeated or to spread. Nevertheless, the risk of further fragmentation and of violence and displacement is real. The status of forces and their rearmament makes even the most optimistic of us cautious in judgment. I condemn - as I did last month to this Council- the unacceptable efforts by the Southern Transitional Council to take the control of state institutions by force. The functioning of state institutions is a necessity and must prevail.

In Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is intensely focused on mediating a solution. We discussed this at the last meeting of this Council on the 20th of August. I wish them every success. They are indeed, as I said then, the indispensable mediator and they frankly bring real meaning to the phrase that their success will be our success. I welcome the presence of delegations from the Government of Yemen under President Hadi's leadership and the Southern Transitional Council in Jeddah. And I can imagine and know this Council joins me to wish the Saudis, their leadership and the two delegations every success in that crucial effort.

As many have said before, the lasting and resounding message from developments in the south is a clarion call for an urgent need to end the conflict in Yemen as a whole. As President Hadi told me last month, we need to urgently make progress for the war not to expand further. There is simply no argument, no choice, no better use of our energy now than that endeavour.

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We see therefore the war not merely continuing to wreck the lives and livelihoods of men and women in Yemen. We also see it threatening to metastasise into something that threatens the existence of Yemen itself.

So we must move, Mr. President, to end it and end it soon.

Mr. President,

Despite this admittedly very grim picture, we had some limited progress this month. Since my last briefing, the parties have taken further steps towards implementing the Stockholm Agreement. On 8th and 9th of September, the parties held the sixth joint meeting of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) in the Red Sea to discuss ceasefire enhancement, disengagement from the frontlines and the implementation of plans for redeployment of forces.

The meeting was held in a very positive and a very pragmatic atmosphere. And I am grateful to the leaderships of the parties who made this so and their representatives present on that vessel. I am very pleased to say that the tripartite ceasefire and de-escalation mechanism is now live and well and a joint operations centre has already been set up and running for a full week. This mechanism, perhaps overdue, allows for greater communication between the parties with liaison officers physically present on a 24/7 basis and with commanders on the ground to prevent military escalation. This tripartite mechanism is in fact, again way overdue, the first joint practical initiative since the Stockholm Agreement was made. Practical in the sense of an immediate, visible impact on the way parties operate in Hodeida. Both parties asked, I repeat asked, for this mechanism as part of their efforts to shore up the ceasefire. And I am sure it will help to save lives and we have already seen a decrease in incidents in Hudaydah city during this past week.

I am encouraged therefore by the parties' willingness to implement further measures, including the regular meetings of these liaison officers I've mentioned and their meetings in specific locations along the frontlines in Hudaydah city, as well as the opening of key humanitarian corridors. The sustained reduction in violence, still somehow controversial in some minds, but not in ours, has been one of the major achievements of the Hudaydah agreement so far. I welcome these concrete steps to reinforce it and to improve access for delivery of humanitarian aid and we must be reminded that this Hudaydah agreement was and is a humanitarian agreement. These were, are and shall continue to be, the primary goals of that agreement reached in Stockholm last December.

On the basis also, Mr. President, of detailed analysis in that last RCC meeting of the issues surrounding the phase one redeployments we have all been waiting to see happen for so many months and on the basis of the proposal I had tabled to them, the parties now have a revised proposal with them on the basis of the discussions for their urgent consideration to allow those redeployments to take place. We are expecting their response by the 20th of September. I appeal to the parties to respond positively.

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So Hudaydah does move forward, slowly perhaps, late certainly, but with purpose. My own hope is that we will continue to manage improvements in the ceasefire and prevent any major attacks in the governorate and that is the bottom line of that agreement. Meanwhile the parties have in their hands now the decisions about redeployments.

As you have heard Mr. President and as this Council has certainly been involved, but I would like now to congratulate the new head of the UN Hudaydah mission and the new Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee, my good friend and colleague Lieutenant General Abhijit Guha. I can think of no one better qualified for this difficult, and demanding and important role. I wish him every success in his position. Of course he has my full support. I would also like to express and reiterate my gratitude to UNMHA colleagues, who continue to work under extremely difficult conditions and who have maintained the level of attention, and engagement and pace during the period of departure of General Lollesgaard and the imminent arrival of General Guha.

Mr. President,

I don't have much to say today on other elements of the agreements reached in Sweden. I have seen no breakthroughs on prisoners' release, a matter made all the more tragic given the deaths in Dhammar. My proposal for the release of a first batch of prisoners was welcomed by one party but not so by the other which insisted instead that all prisoners everywhere must be released in one go. An interpretation of the 'all for all' principle. I'm afraid that this is not a practical suggestion. If it was, we certainly would have followed it some time before this. Both sides are reluctant at different times to avow the identity, existence and location of prisoners. And indeed identifying prisoners and their location in the fog of war, not exclusively in Yemen, is a desperately difficult task. Which is why I had concluded, rightly or wrongly, that we should identify and release and thus continue to identify and release. That the first batch of prisoners be followed by other batches until we exhaust the list of all prisoners agreed between the parties. But for now this is not to be.

The complexity of the military situation in Taiz, the third element agreed in Sweden in December last year, the military situation there has posed serious challenges to all our efforts and they have been frequent to implement the Statement of Understanding, the title of that agreement reached in Stockholm. However, I was encouraged by a recent statement by the excellent Minister of Planning of the Government of Yemen, we were together in a meeting in Berlin just a few days ago, to still engage and be ready to help the people of Taiz as it was originally agreed, so we have not given up. But I want to do this primarily now through support for the local community and for women's groups and local groups that have always been so active on the same issues in Taiz and who came together and I was privileged to meet them in a seminar hosted by the European Union in Amman a few weeks ago. The energy, and the creative will and the desire to improve the conditions of families and civilians as represented and exemplified by those groups is a remarkable energy and I would like to associate myself in support of it. I think they will light the way for the rest of us and I hope that at a future meeting, Mr. President, of this Council you would allow them to brief us all on the ways and means of how Yemeni

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civilians see resolving the conflicts that oppressed them in this war. Our main goal, their main goal, in Taiz continues to be the opening of humanitarian corridors to alleviate the human suffering and of course allow access to humanitarian assistance.

Mr. President,

I began by saying that the case for an urgent move towards peace has never been more strong. I hope these remarks, these various aspects of the situation in Yemen, the war itself, the threat from the south, the as yet unforeseen way in which the Aramco attack will take us, I hope that all these remarks have made that plain. I know from the daily and detailed discussions I have with Yemenis, with officials, with youth, with women and indeed with diplomats of those states anxious to see an end to the conflict, I know from all of these and they tell me clearly that they want me to get on with my job. Just as you do and as you made so clear in your Presidential Statement, for which I am very grateful, indeed, Mr. President.

In parallel to the continued efforts to implement the Stockholm agreement, and not forsaking it for a minute, the Yemeni parties must move forward to resume an inclusive political process to reach a comprehensive solution to end the conflict, and that must be done without delay. We must maintain the momentum if we are to preserve the unity and future of Yemen for its people.

So I will be continuing and intensifying the engagement I have already begun with a wide range of Yemeni stakeholders in the coming weeks. As part of these efforts, I am aiming to start informal discussions of different stakeholders, including representatives of political parties, but also public figures, women, youth, civil society. These discussions of course will include the key elements of their views of the key elements that are needed to be included in a final agreement to be decided, debated and hopefully agreed between the parties in the near future.

Finally, **Mr. President**, I would like to make a personal statement.

I was present in Sweden when agreements were made as I think we're all aware. I have a personal reason therefore to hold those agreements very dear. Nobody needs have the slightest doubt about my desire and our desire in the United Nations to pursue those promises to their conclusion. I am frequently reminded for example, that, Hodeida must be implemented before we do other things. To these people I say that the United Nations will continue, now under the leadership of Abhijit Guha to devote time, effort, energy, unparalleled I think by others to achieve that objective. Let us have no doubt about that. Let us have no doubt either that that will not detract from our focus, our essential focus on efforts to reach a political settlement to resolve the conflict in Yemen.