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The Yemen deal: Riyadh capitulates, Washington loses leverage

Sanaa's brash threats have compelled Saudi Arabia to make significant concessions to Yemen, showcasing not only Sanaa's sharp regional ascent but also the US and Israel's rapidly shrinking influence.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

Yemen's strikes against Saudi Arabia over the past three years – including Operation Break Siege in early 2022 and persistent threats to use force when Riyadh fails to meet its commitments – have successfully pressured it into largely yielding to Sanaa's demands.

The significant Saudi retreat, underscored by repeated disruptions to its economy since the [Aramco attack in 2019](#), poses a serious challenge to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's coveted Vision 2030.

Yemen's ultimatum

In early April, the Saudi-backed “legitimate Yemeni government,” no doubt under US directives, mandated banks and the Yemeni flag carrier, Yemenia Airways, to relocate from Sanaa to Aden within 60 days.

This decision coincided with the Ansarallah-aligned government’s operations in the Red Sea in support of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza. As the deadline approached, [Yemeni pilgrims](#) undertaking the annual Hajj in Saudi Arabia were suddenly detained in Jeddah in late June.

In response, on 7 July, Ansarallah leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi [threatened](#) Riyadh with a stark warning: “We will respond in kind: banks for banks... the airport in Riyadh for the airport in Sanaa... and seaports for seaports.”

Riyadh wisely took the warning seriously, and the brief standoff ended with the [safe return](#) of the pilgrims to the Yemeni capital, prompting Ansarallah’s political bureau member Mohammed al-Bukhaiti to remark that “If the Yemeni pilgrims had not been returned, Saudi Arabia’s airports would have been closed at this moment.”

Broadly speaking, Houthi’s threat, backed by widespread popular support shown in massive demonstrations, underscored the [Yemeni resolve](#) to confront Riyadh, the US, and Israel. Recognizing the gravity of these threats, Saudi Arabia quickly sought mediation to resolve the crisis with Sanaa.

Riyadh’s retreat

Following Yemen’s sensational [drone strike on Tel Aviv](#) on 19 July, those communications intensified, leading to an agreement announced by Mohammed Abdulsalam, the head of the Yemeni negotiating delegation.

The agreement included the cancellation of recent decisions against banks from both sides, a commitment to refrain from such actions in the future, the [resumption](#) and increase of flights by Yemeni airlines between Sanaa and Amman, and the expansion of routes to Cairo and India.

Additionally, it included holding meetings to address administrative, technical, and financial challenges faced by the airline and starting discussions to resolve all economic and humanitarian issues based on a previously agreed roadmap.

The deal signaled a significant shift in Saudi Arabia’s approach, as the Riyadh-backed puppet government in Aden, in effect, reversed all its previous decisions following the agreement’s announcement.

The lack of denial from Saudi officials illustrated the importance of this deal. [Bloomberg](#) reported the development, noting that Riyadh’s quick retreat was aimed at

avoiding renewed hostilities with Yemen, indicating a substantial change in the kingdom's foreign policy strategy.

Posting on X, Yemen's Deputy Foreign Minister, Hussein al-Ezi, underscored Sanaa's determination to restore sovereignty in all domains:

The resumption of oil exports is contingent upon the reinstatement of government employees' salaries. Any attempts to circumvent this are prohibited and their consequences are known. Foreign companies should understand this. We will not allow oil to be looted again while our people remain without salaries.

This indicates Sanaa's seriousness in securing its citizens' rights and state resources by all means and its refusal to tolerate any attempts from its adversaries – regional or external – to procrastinate or buy time.

Unreliable States of America

For the Saudis, the experience has shown that delaying tactics and banking on Donald Trump's potential return to the US presidency will not alter Yemeni threats. It is worth noting that Yemen's strategic operations against Saudi Arabia began during Trump's presidency, targeting Aramco's [Baqiq and Khurais oil fields](#), proving the previous administration's inability to curb Yemeni forces.

Betting on time delays as a strategy is also increasingly seen as futile in Riyadh. The Saudis have been corralled into recognizing the merit of promptly fulfilling their commitments to Sanaa to protect their interests.

With a Saudi retreat clearly in evidence, the Sanaa agreement represents a significant blow to the Americans, whose leverage over Yemen had long been to threaten the resumption of Saudi warfare. Last week, [Axios](#) reported that a US delegation arrived in Saudi Arabia to discuss the situation in Yemen and the latter's latest escalations against Israel.

The outlet notes that "Saudi Arabia has become more concerned in recent weeks about the rising tensions and being dragged into a renewed conflict in Yemen."

Consequently, with the Sanaa deal, the Yemenis have also succeeded in neutralizing the crucial American "humanitarian" leverage, which was one of the main pressure tools aimed at forcing a reversal of Yemeni support for the Palestinian resistance.

Sanaa has accomplished nothing less than bringing Saudi Arabia to its knees, which has huge implications in this sensitive and critical regional confrontation phase, as well as in future dealings with Riyadh and its neighbors.

By prioritizing support for the Palestinian resistance, challenging US and British hegemonic ambitions, and preparing for [further Israeli aggression](#), Sanaa has emerged as a significant regional player with strong alliances that are drawing recognition and respect.

Yemen's sustained pressure and strategic strikes have forced Saudi Arabia into significant concessions, reshaping West Asian power dynamics and showcasing Sanaa's growing influence and rock-solid resolve. This development will have far-reaching implications for future regional stability and strengthens the case for the Sanaa government's wider recognition on the international stage.

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