



Failure to Extend the Truce in Yemen Prompts Fears of Renewed Violence and Humanitarian Disaster

Days after the Sunday deadline for an extension of the UN-backed ceasefire came and went in Yemen without an agreement, Hans Grunberg, UN envoy to Yemen, and rights groups continue to implore both sides to reach a deal – citing humanitarian benefits that the truce has allowed for in recent months. However, despite strong efforts so far, a revival of the respite seems to be a major challenge. One important source of contention is compensation for public servants, many of whom have not been paid in years by the Houthis. But the reasons for the truce collapse go further than that, and much of the evidence officials involved have referenced point to the Houthis being largely responsible. In a statement lamenting the possibility of newfound violence, Grunberg all but blamed the Houthis by instead praising the efforts of the internationally-recognized government during the negotiations. In more direct remarks, Mareike Transfeld, co-founder of the Yemen Policy Center, accused the Houthi camp of using their control of Sanaa and the vital Hodeidah Red Sea port as a means of getting what they want.

Despite saying publicly that they fully support reopening the air and sea ports they control, the Houthis appear to be unwilling to do so without aggressive concessions made by the opposition. Additionally, the Houthis have not ended the Taiz blockade, which was part of the terms when the truce was first agreed upon back in April. Experts believe that the Houthis feel as though they currently have the upper hand, and are therefore unwilling to make compromises. Reports indicate that they remain organized, resolved, and have increasingly advanced weaponry at their disposal. On the other hand, infighting has broken out amongst the Saudi and UAE-backed government forces, even as the Houthis have threatened more violence, especially against private oil companies that refuse to evacuate their oil fields. In fact, some critics have spoken out against the truce, citing its usefulness in allowing the Houthis to bolster their weaponry and numbers. Others have criticized the effectiveness of the ceasefire by pointing out that the Houthis still have not allowed the unrestricted usage of most roads.

That being said, the truce agreement has created a state of temporary “peace” and a lull in fighting. This is the first time since the war broke out about eight years ago that the fighting has mostly ceased. The number of civilians killed and injured in Yemen has dropped more than 50% since the start of the truce agreement. In the month before the truce, around 213 people alone were killed. The following month, that number was reduced by 95%. The nationwide two-month truce started the 2nd of April after an agreement between the warring parties to pause the conflict, which has lasted for more than seven years. The reprieve from fighting has since been renewed twice – once in early June and again in early August. The data shows that since the truce, there has been a significant decrease in the number of casualties from airstrikes, shellfire, and shootings. It has also improved humanitarian aid access to people in need, which is especially helpful to those in hard-to-reach areas.

The truce has also significantly improved the flow of fuel into Yemen’s red sea port, and led to the opening of Sanaa airport to commercial flights. Thousands of people have been able to travel on commercial flights, and critically ill individuals have been able to seek treatment abroad. In the six months since the first announcement, the number of displaced civilians has dramatically decreased by 76% as well. The United States and others have urged the Houthis to continue negotiations in good faith, and to work with the UN to come to an agreement to extend the truce and keep Yemen on the path to durable peace.