

We Must Seize on Recent Diplomatic Openings to Finally End the Tragic Yemen War

The tragic war in Yemen and accompanying Saudi blockade on the country have [killed nearly 400,000¹](#) and left [17 million on the verge of starvation.²](#) Since March 2015, the United States has been complicit in this humanitarian tragedy. The U.S. provided the critical military support that enabled the Saudi-led assault on the poorest country in the region. Right now, significant diplomatic developments in the region bring an opportunity to once and for all end the Yemen war. We must seize on them and invest in peace for Yemen.

The U.S. needs to commit to cutting off military support to any faction of the conflict while diplomatic talks to end the war are ongoing. The U.S. should immediately pause all weapons sales and military assistance to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and any member of the Saudi-led coalition until peace is secured and their forces are withdrawn from Yemeni territory — as well as maintain American support for the United Nations arms embargo on the Houthis — in order to give negotiations to bring sustained peace a real shot.

Momentum Toward Peace is Growing

- As part of a negotiated ceasefire last year, Saudi Arabia ceased its deadly airstrikes on Yemen. This allowed for the beginning of [fruitful back-channel talks³](#) that most recently resulted in official negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebels. Encouraging these talks gets us one step closer to ending the tragic war before it enters a ninth year.
- The [two groups are in negotiations⁴](#) on a host of issues including an official long-term ceasefire, lifting of the Saudi blockade that crippled Yemen's economy and exacerbated the suffering of the Yemeni people, prisoner exchanges, and an eventual permanent peace agreement.
- Saudi Arabia and Iran have re-established diplomatic relations. Not only will this be beneficial to the region as a whole, but Iran also stated it will [no longer provide weapons to the Houthi rebels⁵](#) in Yemen — a move that may de-escalate tensions in Yemen.

The Need for Humanitarian Aid in Yemen is Dire

Years of blockades and restrictions on Yemen have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. With [80% of Yemen's population dependent on humanitarian aid,⁶](#) we must ensure that aid flows freely into the country and restrictions are lifted in full during the negotiations process.

- Recent prisoner releases by both sides and an apparent alleviation of the Saudi blockade on Yemen's ports in Hodeida and Aden are [positive early steps.⁷](#) While not definitive, [recent reports⁸](#) also state that progress is being made around import restrictions on so-called "dual-use" items like batteries and fertilizer. A final diplomatic resolution to end the war, however, is still far from certain.
- The U.S. can ensure that the Saudis continue on this path by exerting positive political pressure in favor of this diplomatic course. We can use the window of opportunity to stand with the Yemeni people and urge for the lifting of continued restrictions — such as those on the Sana'a airport, roads in Taiz, etc. — to allow for full freedom of movement of civilians and aid.
- The U.S. can also pressure the Saudis to unconditionally lift the blockade in order to ensure the brutal tactic cannot be used as leverage in negotiations.

The U.S. Should Assist in Funding Yemen's Reconstruction

Given its complicity in the war, the U.S. bears the moral responsibility to help fund locally-led peacebuilding

and reconstruction efforts in war-torn Yemen. The Yemeni people need the resources to rebuild their country.

- According to a [multiyear study by the United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#)⁹, the ongoing war has set back human development in Yemen by over two decades and resulted in \$126 billion in lost economic output for the country.
- The study found that “**the most important determinant of successful recovery is sustained peace.** This pertains both to the terms of any negotiated settlement as well as to the pathway of post-conflict recovery, emphasizing improvement in governance and strengthening institutions.” In order for Yemen to stand any chance at recovering, the ongoing war and violent conflict must come to an end.
- Furthermore, the study found that a reconstruction model in which the international community is “an active and engaged partner” that supports recovery with “significant financial resources” to be invested into agriculture, economic development, empowering women, human capabilities, education, health, and infrastructure **can offset the war’s impact on human development within a decade.** The Yemeni people have a shot at a peaceful and stable future.
- As of 2020, a World Bank Dynamic Needs Assessment [estimated costs for reconstruction at between \\$20 billion and \\$25 billion](#)¹⁰ over five years. These findings look into twelve sectors — education, food security, governance, health, housing, ICT, power, social protection, social resilience, solid waste management, transport, water and sanitation. Since bombings impacting these sectors continued into last year, the costs are now likely to be higher.

Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **Publicly call out for generous humanitarian and reconstruction aid to be sent to Yemen.** Support any legislative efforts to add aid or report language supporting aid for Yemen that is offered as part of the appropriations process. \$1.2 billion has been proposed by a number of legislators as part of FY 2024 State and Foreign Ops Appropriations bill, and it should be but the start of generous aid.
- **Publicly speak in support of recent diplomatic developments in the region** — from the restoration of Saudi-Iranian diplomatic relations to the unfolding negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebels. Additionally, call on President Biden to speak to the importance of reaching a lasting peace and the steps taken to get there, including a halt to Saudi weapons and military assistance.

1 *Yemen war deaths will reach 377,000 by end of the year: UN*, Al Jazeera, November 23, 2021

2 *Yemen emergency*, World Food Programme, November 2022

3 Magdy, Samy, *Yemen rebels, Saudis in back-channel talks to maintain truce*, AP News, January 17, 2023

4 Wintour, Patrick, *Saudi Arabia makes peace proposal for Yemen after Houthi talks*, The Guardian, April 20, 2023

5 Nissenbaum, Dion, Summer Said, and Benoit Faucon, *Iran Agrees to Stop Arming Houthis in Yemen as Part of Pact With Saudi Arabia*, The Wall Street Journal, March 16, 2023

6 *The UN in Yemen*, The United Nations, 2023

7 *Yemen prisoner exchange begins amid peace talks*, Reuters, April 14, 2023

8 El Yaakoubi, Aziz and Mohammed Alghobari, *Exclusive: Saudi delegation to hold ceasefire talks with Yemen's Houthis in Sanaa - sources*, Reuters, April 7, 2023

9 Hanna, Taylor, David K. Bohl, and Jonathan D. Moyer, *Assessing the Impact of War on Development in Yemen: Pathways for Recover*, United Nations Development Programme, 2021

10 *Updated Dynamic Needs Assessment for Yemen Brief*, The World Bank, December 15, 2020