

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 09, 2018

Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
3522 International Court, NW Suite 400
Washington, DC 20008

Ambassador Khalid bin Salman bin
Abdulaziz Al Saud
Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
601 New Hampshire Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Ambassadors Otaiba and bin Salman:

We write to express our alarm about the deteriorating crisis in Yemen and to urge the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to secure a necessary cease-fire and work toward a political solution to the conflict.

We have supported Coalition efforts to create pressure on the Houthis and their Iranian backers to reach a political settlement. Iran's sustained support for destabilizing actors, including the Houthis, threatens our mutual interests across the region. The Houthis continue to prevent humanitarian access to the most vulnerable populations and have reportedly severed water pipelines and sewers and laid mines. We stand with you in condemning the Houthi ballistic missile attacks against your countries. And we share your concern about freedom of navigation and support our joint efforts to prevent interference in the Bab al Mandeb.

At the same, we recognize that your governments' decision to pause the military offensive to capture the city and port of Hudaydah has created a diplomatic opening. With Martin Griffiths, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, attempting to reinvigorate peace talks, we urge you to reconsider the assault and redouble your commitment to Mr. Griffiths' efforts. We fear that the humanitarian impact of this operation would be so severe as to outweigh any military or security gains derived from its success and that it will make a Coalition de-escalation strategy in Yemen more challenging.

We are also mindful of Mr. Griffiths' statement on June 21 that "further military escalation in Hudaydah would have severe political and humanitarian consequences." The UN-led process is the only viable approach to resolving the conflict, and we urge you to actively support this political track by giving Mr. Griffiths the time he needs to build consensus toward an agreement.

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Given Mr. Griffith's comments, we urge you to be flexible with regard to your requirements to avert escalation at Hudaydah – specifically, your demands that the Houthis unconditionally leave the city and port, and more recently the entire Red Sea coast, immediately. We understand that the purposes of the assault are to change the battlefield equation, to deny Houthis a key source of revenue, and to eject the Houthis from strategic territory in an effort to propel them to the negotiating table, separating the Houthis from their Iranian backers.

However, experts contend that the Houthis will continue to generate revenue through overland smuggling. Moreover, the level of financial commitment necessary for the Houthis to prosecute a campaign against the Yemeni government is relatively modest. For these reasons, we are increasingly convinced that a sustained campaign against the Houthis in this fashion will not yield results that soften the Houthis' negotiating position. Further, to the extent the Houthis will continue prosecuting the war, and that previous major assaults have failed to provide de-escalation opportunities, we are concerned this assault will deepen, not reduce, Coalition engagement in Yemen.

We also have strong concerns that the next stage of fighting would aggravate what is already the world's most urgent humanitarian crisis. Even before the current war, food insecurity and violence were unconscionable in Yemen. Three years into the war, 22 million people need humanitarian assistance and almost 18 million people are food insecure. Over 350,000 civilians in Hudaydah are estimated to be in jeopardy. Most health facilities are not able to operate and more than 8.4 million people are one step away from famine. Additionally, those fleeing the fighting are arriving in districts highly prone to cholera, exacerbating concerns about access to safe water. Humanitarian assistance providers also remain concerned that they do not receive timely confirmation of their deconfliction requests, thereby increasing the risks to their personnel and to the very assistance that the international community is providing.

We understand, as of the date of this letter, that the Hudaydah port is operational and has not been further disrupted in significant ways by the ongoing fighting. However, according to humanitarian groups, restrictions to the flow of essential commercial goods remain in place through the coalition holding area, and the threat of an attack on the port is expected to affect the willingness of shipping companies to deliver commercial goods. We have received assessments that current plans would be inadequate to ensure that humanitarian and commercial flows will not be severely disrupted if fighting progresses toward Hudaydah's urban center, port, and major commercial arteries. Disruptions in these flows would result in increases in market price and, in some areas, shortages of critical items like food, fuel, and medicines.

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In light of the serious humanitarian and political impacts that your operations could have on the crisis in Yemen, we hope you reconsider this assault. We continue to share your outlook on the danger that Iran presents to the region, but only a political settlement reached through negotiations can end this conflict. We look forward to continuing our longstanding collaboration with your countries on issues of mutual concern.

Sincerely,




STENY H. HOYER
House Democratic Whip




ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs



NITA LOWEY
Ranking Member
Committee on
Appropriations



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