THE REFLECTION OF THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN **YEMEN**

ON MILITARIZING THE INTERACTIONS WITHIN THE **HORN OF AFRICA**

Analytical paper

By

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Based upon the "War Game" theory, the security system of regional conflicts depends on geopolitical dimensions.

In his book The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate", the American Author Robert D. Kaplan stresses the equivalent relationships and the role the geographical location plays in determining the national security of the states and its reflection on the whole regional security stability which we can build upon in analyzing the developments of the political and security scene in Yemen and its reflection on the interaction track in the Horn of Africa.

Geopolitics of Yemen

The conflict in Yemen has not just changed the political scene but has also affected the whole geographical interaction. The land and maritime Yemeni borders have witnessed a feverish rivalry among the parties involved in the conflict

locally and internationally, including the Eastern governorate of Al Mahra and Socotra in South as well as controlling the Red sea's navigation lanes.

Therefore, all of such narratives cast their shadow on the environment of the geopolitical interactions of the conflict outcome based upon many considerations. The most important of which are as follow :

The centrality of the navigation lanes:

Yemen serves as the southern gate of the Red Sea's entrance and controls the lane connecting it to the Indian Ocean as well as across the Gulf of Aden.

It embraces both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean and controls the maritime navigation lanes to Asia as it overlooks Bab Al Mandab Strait, one of the most important strategic maritime lanes (it ranks third in the world after Malacca and Hormuz.

Additionally, Yemen has many islands with privileged locations, which duplicate the strategic importance of its maritime location, especially Socotra.

Illegal immigration crossing:

Yemen's location as a strategic point of contact between the Arab Peninsula and Africa makes it a destination and a crossing for illegal immigration coming from the Horn of Africa's states towards the Arab Gulf region.

For example, an International Organization for Migration's report monitored the crossing of about 138000 persons coming from the Horn of Africa's countries and the Gulf of Aden in 2019 compared with 110000 illegal migrants that crossed the Mediterranean towards Europe. This indicates an increase in the rates of illegal immigration in comparison with other areas in the world.

The increase of maritime pirac:

The turbulent security situation in Yemen has contributed to growing piracy activities in this vital maritime region. Although the Yemeni conflict is not the origin of this phenomenon, the deterioration of the political and security situation in Yemen pushed the U.N Security Council to issue several

international resolutions under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, most notably the resolutions 181-1846-1838 which have permitted an international existence in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coasts to confront it and ensure that Nato, for the first times, sends seven heavily-armed naval pieces to participate in the international efforts for this purpose.

However, the continuation of the Yemeni crisis has contributed to increasing the severity of the security threats related to this phenomenon for two reasons: the first of which is while Yemen overlooks a coastline with a length of about 2500 km, which the Red Sea represents 442 km (8.8%) and the remaining percentage are divided by the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean, there are 9 of 22 Yemeni governorates can't protect these coasts.

The second reason is that the Yemeni crisis has coincided with the instability in the Horn of Africa's states, whether internal conflicts or against each other and the ensuing failure to protect their maritime border.

The developments of the Yemeni scene:

The sixth anniversary of the March 2015- Decisive Storm has coincided with reevaluating the political and security Yemeni scene, especially after K.S.A declared its intention to re-advance the peace track and to present a “settlement initiative" to resolve the Yemeni crisis which has enjoyed the support of all regional and international forces.

In contrast, the Houthis "militia" and Iran have refused the initiative claiming that it does not match the political, strategic, and field changes within the Yemeni transformation map based upon a dynamic rule saying, "what happens in the negotiation table is a reflection of the field facts on the ground."

For instance, the Houthis have attempted to mobilize their supporters in Marib to control it to snatch the political and demographic representation of the northern region adjacent to the Saudi border.

Alongside the Saudi moves towards pushing the path of peaceful settlement, there is a specific breakthrough to the "Yemeni matter" through the change caused by The American Democrats' ascend to power as the Biden administration has tried to end the war in Yemen "politically."

Biden's team gives the humanitarian file utmost importance for considerations relevant to Washington's return to the "Principled Diplomacy" which has been more reflexes in the foreign policy presidential speech delivered by Joe Biden in February 2021 about "features of the American strategy to impose a settlement in Yemen."

The speech concluded in ending the American support of the Yemeni War operations and their relevant arms sales, paving the way to the legal conditions to clarify a diplomatic solution by removing the American labeling of the Houthis as terrorists, and canceling last days' Trump Administration's decision which classified them a "terrorist organization" and its ensuing various repercussions as well as the American commitment to protect Saudi Arabia from the attacks committed by violent non-state actors whose forefront includes the Houthis.

It is worth mentioning that the Yemeni scene has gained political and field momentum to all the involved parties and agents in the conflict.

The main obstacles that obstruct any efforts aiming at breaking the political deadlock are shown as follows:

1- The field imbalance:

On the field level, it seems that the balance of power is swinging more towards the Houthis rather than the "legitimate government" pushing the armed group to deep its moves towards snatching more representation within the official political formula in all future negotiation and refusing any efforts towards the "political settlement" based upon three factors, the first of which is that the Houthis' militia does not have the motive to involve in the political process and sharing of power with the other Yemeni parties due their current control over most northern areas.

Secondly, the growing military capabilities of the Houthis have made them less willing to give concessions under any settlement.

Thirdly, the international community does not have enough pressure cards to compel the Houthis to political settlement as they don't care by threatening penalties or the international criticism and they classify themselves as "an armed movement/ ideological entity rather than a political faction.

There is one more point related to the "structural adaptation" inside both parties as while the Iran-backed movement looks more coherent on the political and field levels, the legitimate government appears "troubled" because of colliding with some parties including the STC.

Accordingly, pushing the path of the peaceful settlement requires a parallel political combination that takes into account all active powers without alienating any party or letting it dominates the Yemeni political decision.

2- Duplicity/ and the institutional fragility:

There is some evidence that enhances the "institutional fragility" hypothesis including for example declaring Aden as an interim capital to manage state affairs following "Ansar Allah" control of Sanaa in September 2014, and the outcome of forming "the salvation government" in 2015, and conflict parties' sharing of ministries and privileges after the organizational deal between the Houthis-affiliated "Supreme Political Council" and the General People's Congress led by the former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the ensuing political vacuum after Saleh's assassination amidst the absence of heavyweight local figures who enjoys trust on a regional level.

Additionally, there is a deterioration of the existing institutions, which have failed to do their jobs due to the fragility of the security, social, and service situation in Yemen.

For example, according to the latest version of the Fragile States Index, Yemen has become more fragile even than Somalia.

Therefore, the "political consensus" requires reaching "administrative compatibility" among the existing institutions and undermining all attempts, which support that "institutional malfunction" to benefit from the duplicity status.

For example, talking about structuring "the political consensus" obliges the decision-makers to look at "post-war studies" that focus on moving stability from the political level to the social/institutional one that is to alleviate the sources of conflict, and to create the suitable environment to exercise the roles of "the national state."

3- The spread of weapons outside the fighting squads:

There are concerns about the escalation of militarizing the "sub/tribal-disputes «inside Yemen in the post-conflict- settlement phase between the legitimate government and the Houthis, due to the increase of individual ownership of weapons and the fragility of the security institutions which fail to undermine and constrict this phenomenon, and the lack of ability to control weapons and confine them within the official frameworks, especially that the Yemeni popular culture cherishes arms and considers them part of its social identity.

Those concerns have been fueled with the "terrorist groups"' exploitation of the security chaos and the Yemeni war, to diversify their armament systems, which means a future continuation of their threats even in case of reaching a peace agreement to end the war.

4 .- Reproducing the Qaeda in Yemen:

Despite the regress of "Al Qaeda" in face of the growing of "Daesh" on both media and geographical levels in the region, Al Qaeda supporters in Yemen still form a prominent security threat due to the practical and tactical experience of its leaders.

The Yemeni geography has long been a safe haven for "terrorists" and being exploited as planning and training theatre for terrorist operations or to escape security watch.

This has pushed President Joe Biden to exempt "combating terrorism" from the decision to end the American military activities in Yemen.

Consequently, the involved parties in case of structuring the path of political settlement should not deepen the security vacuum and they have to focus on "combating terrorism."

The lack of such security approaches would extend terror, Al Qaeda, and Daesh, threatening the security of the maritime lanes especially the vital navigation straight, Bab Al Mandab.

Noteworthy, the Yemeni file involves many political and security complications imposed by a number of considerations, most notably: the multiplicity of the local

conflict parties and their stubbornness as well as the war's regional and international dimensions.

There are other considerations such as the lack of objective conditions to complete the comprehensive political settlement process without neglecting the nature of the ongoing transformations in the region and its direct reflection on the extent of interdependence and overlap between many regional and international issues and files.

They include developments in the Iranian nuclear file, the Democrat Joe Biden's ascending to power, and the Gulf-Qatari reconciliation, etc.

This is reflected in the shift in the nature of regional interactions related to the Yemeni issue, and in particular, the nature of security, political and specific ties with the Horn of Africa's states.

Militarization of the Horn of Africa

The political and security turbulence of the "Yemeni cause" has coincided with the growing severity of the specific depletion in the Horn of Africa in light of the increasing strategic importance of this region, as it is classified as one of the most vital areas due to a number of considerations, the most important of which are:

Geographical concentration: The Horn of Africa countries are centered on the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden, as well as controlling the southern entrance to the Red Sea through the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

It serves as the meeting point of the vital maritime lanes linking East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, India, and Southeast Asia, which made that region an important international corridor for any military movements coming from Western countries and Washington heading to the Arab Gulf region, as well as its control over the global trade movement through the Red Sea, which represents between 13% and 15% of the total volume of global trade, especially the oil trade coming from the Arab Gulf states to Europe and the

United States without neglecting the geopolitical depth of the Suez Canal as the main link between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

The material weight: given the region's natural resources and mineral wealth, from gold, diamonds, phosphates, uranium, iron, oil, and natural gas, as well as water, this has become an important determinant of the interactions of nature in the region in light of the dispute over the Renaissance Dam.

Different agendas: The region is considered the scene of many conflicts and disputes threatening the interests of the regional and international powers as well as the region's security and stability, and its closeness to the scenes of regional African and Middle-eastern events and conflicts such as the Yemeni war.

Therefore, the Horn of Africa has attracted the attention of regional and international powers keen to maintain their foothold through various means besides the varying international and regional speculations of the extent of the region's geopolitical weight with the escalation of the "turbulent turmoil" in the Yemeni state, in a way that makes it difficult to "unify the roles" of the countries of that region according to the varying security threats facing each country separately.

It can be refuted with three main roles as shown below:

1- **Bases states:** the role of these Horn of Africa's states can be summarized in using its lands as military bases for the Arab Coalition in light of the regional interactions of the Yemeni cause.

For example, Djibouti has permitted the use of its territory as a starting point for the warplanes. It has allowed the use of its ports to impose a blockade. The Eritrean territory has also been used to train the Yemeni forces and as a permanent military base.

2- **The engaging states:** the roles of these countries can be briefly described as sending fighters to Yemen. Sudan has done this publicly but Eritrea has preferred the implicit way.

3 - **Neutral states:** these countries, such as Ethiopia and Somalia have distanced themselves from the war despite their public support to the

Coalition but without big involvement while bearing the consequences of the war as refugees.

Variable reflections:

The crisis situation inside Yemen has reflected the growing specific threats to the countries of the Horn of Africa, as follows:

- Continuous security threats related to countries on the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. For example, the Houthis' threat to target ships has put the economy and trade in those countries under the influence of these threats.
- The turbulent situation in Yemen was reflected in the exacerbation of the refugee crisis in that region, which is classified as one of the most vulnerable and affected regions in the world.

  Although Yemen has been for years the destination of African migrants and refugees, especially from the Horn of Africa, whether as an arrival or transit terminal for other countries, the repercussions of the conflict have created another scenario. Although Yemen still receives African refugees, there are Yemeni refugees who traveled to Africa to escape the war . For example, there are Yemeni refugees in Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. Sudan also welcomes Yemenis without visas.
- The increase of piracy operations, the collapse of the Yemeni state and the instability of its coasts have contributed to the growth of piracy groups' activities for the first time since 2009. A remarkable increase in the movement of arms smuggling and illegal immigrants through Yemen to the Arab Gulf states has been spotted.

It is worth mentioning that the turbulent crisis in the Yemeni issue may erupt a beyond-expectations war within the Horn of Africa again .

The indicators of such a war can be shown in the following point :

- Building military bases in Somali territory without taking the green light of the federal government may fuel the conflict inside Somalia again after limited stability, and there are multiple accusations related to a number of active players in the region.
- The ramifications of the conflict in Yemen have contributed to the growth of a specific relationship between the Eritrean regime and al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Shabaab (A Somali extremist group), For instance, a number of international reports indicated that during 2016-2017 Asmara delivered weapons to the extremist organization under an agreement with its leaders through Somalia and Yemen.
- Tensions have increased between Ethiopia and Eritrea, especially that the regime in Addis Ababa believes that the Arab coalition forces - in light of leasing the port of Assab - have provided direct and indirect aid to the Eritrean army. Hence, despite the signing of a peace agreement between the two countries in July 2018, this theory has still dominated the ruling Ethiopian regime.
- The security turmoil inside Yemen has resulted in a pattern of intimate rapprochement between the Somali Al Shabab and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as Yemen represented a new foothold with the continuation of the unrest. This possible alliance between the two extremist organizations would form a major power exceeding the influence emanating from the 2009- alliance between Al-Qaeda branches in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Conclusion:

- The growing political and security turbulence in Yemen has added more different threats to the geopolitical areas involved in the Yemeni cause.
- This threatens a possible re-emergence of the political and security tensions, especially within the Horn of Africa States, as well as the combination of specific problems such as refugees, extremism and terror, and militarization of bases in the Horn of Africa region.
- This would cause material and spiritual attrition by the relevant regional and international powers in this geopolitically important region.

- This prompts the need to cooperate for the success of political settlement efforts with all their moves, whether on the regional level, represented in the Riyadh Agreement or the international one through the new U.N. Envoy including:
- Firstly, continuing the ceasefire plan achieved by his predecessor, Mr. Martin Griffiths in cooperation with the American Envoy Tim Lenderking.
- Secondly, asking the help of the U.N. Security Council to impose the peaceful settlement principles through adopting a binding resolution under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter in case the Houthis insist on their refusal attitude.

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