



## Russian Foreign Policy and International Crisis Management: The Yemeni Crisis as a Case Study

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### Abstract

**Research Idea:** This research provides an analysis of the nature and conduct of Russian foreign policy towards the Yemeni crisis. It examines Russia's attempts to propose peace initiatives for resolving the crisis, its endeavor to underscore its standing on the international stage, and its efforts to safeguard its interests in the Arabian Gulf region.

**Objective:** This research aims to illuminate the management of Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis the Yemeni crisis and the political and strategic dimensions of this posture at the international and regional levels. Russia has sought to implement its strategy and advance its peaceful initiatives regarding the Yemeni conflict through various means, both diplomatic and economic.

**Methodology:** The research adopted the historical method, the analytical method, and the inductive method in addressing the research subject.

**Findings:** Russia has sought to bolster its position in Yemen in alignment with its aspirations to reclaim its standing within the international system. Consequently, its mediation efforts are poised to enhance its status and contribute to cultivating an image of a peacemaker on the global stage. This approach has enabled Moscow to foster expanded Russo-Yemeni relations while simultaneously reinforcing its ties with the Arab Gulf states.

**Conclusion:** Russian foreign policy approaches the Yemeni dossier through the prism of its interests vis-à-vis regional powers. It will undoubtedly need to account for the positions of its partners within OPEC+ and in numerous investment portfolios, as well as balance its interests with Tehran. Concurrently, Moscow emphasizes the importance of establishing an equilibrium among Yemen's centers of power. The ultimate objective is to facilitate the formation of a national unity government, after which Russia could move to reactivate the bilateral cooperation agreements between the two countries.



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## السياسة الخارجية الروسية وإدارة الأزمات الدولية الأزمة اليمنية أنموذجاً

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### الملخص

**فوكة البحث:** تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً عن طبيعة وإدارة السياسة الخارجية الروسية تجاه الأزمة اليمنية، ومحاولتها لطرح المبادرات السلمية لحل الأزمة، وسعيها إلى اواز مكانتها على الساحة الدولية، والحفاظ على مصالحها في منطقة الخليج العربي.

**الهدف:** يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على معرفة إدارة السياسة الخارجية الروسية تجاه الأزمة اليمنية، والابعاد السياسية والاستراتيجية لها التأثر على الصعيد الدولي والإقليمي، إذ سعت روسيا إلى تنفيذ استراتيجية لها وطرح مبادراتها السلمية تجاه النزاع اليمني عن طريق العديد من الوسائل سواء كانت دبلوماسية أو الاقتصادية.

**المنهجية:** اعتمد البحث المنهج الترتيبي والمنهج التحليلي والمنهج الاستوائي في معالجة موضوع البحث.

**النتائج:** سعت روسيا إلى تغيير موقعها في اليمن بما يتوافق مع طموحاتها لاستعادة مكانتها في النظام الدولي، لذا فإن جهود الوساطة الروسية سيغرس من مكانتها ويساهم في تغيير صورتها كصانع سلام على الساحة الدولية، وبهذا فقد تمكنت من بناء مؤيد من العلاقات الروسية - اليمنية، وكذلك تغيير علاقتها مع دول الخليج العربي.

**الخلاصة:** تنظر السياسة الخارجية الروسية للملف اليمني بعين مصالحها مع القوى الإقليمية في المنطقة، فسيتعين عليها بلا شك مواجهة شوكائها في أوبلوك وفي الكثير من ملفات الاستثمار، وكذلك مواجهة مصالحها مع طهوان، كما أنها توكل على أهمية تحقيق توزن بين مواكز القوة في اليمن، للوصول إلى إنشاء حكومة وحدة وطنية تستطيع روسيا بعدها العودة إلى تعزيز اتفاقيات التعاون بين البلدين.

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### المراسلة

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## Introduction

Russia's foreign policy towards the Yemeni crisis since its beginning in 2011 is an example of the pragmatism that Russian policy has come to be characterized by. Moscow has tried to distance itself from the tribal conflicts within the country with all their peculiarity, in order to avoid getting involved in the conflict and taking sides with any of its parties. In this way, it has been able to stay in contact with all the warring parties in Yemen. Russia's approach to the Yemeni file differs from its methodology for managing the Syrian file, as it has taken a position that conflicts with the Western position and the Gulf states. Russia has been keen to obstruct various draft resolutions in the Security Council against Assad and has intervened militarily to tip the balance in his favor. However, Moscow knows very well that the Yemeni file is a file that Saudi Arabia controls more than any other party, regardless of the number of countries trying to influence the situation in Yemen. Russia also considers the Yemeni government, which enjoys support from the Kingdom and the United States of America, a legitimate government, in line with its policies of preserving the national system, whether in its movements at the United Nations level or at the regional level. Russia is moving cautiously and carefully to maintain its relations with the various Yemeni parties in a direction that would consolidate its position as an influential force in the region.

**Research objective:** To know the management of Russian foreign policy towards the Yemeni crisis, as Russia sought to implement its strategy and put forward its peaceful initiatives towards the Yemeni conflict through many means, whether diplomatic or economic.

**Importance of the research:** The importance lies in the nature of Russian foreign policy towards the Yemeni crisis, and the attempt to put forward peaceful initiatives to resolve the crisis, and Russia's efforts to highlight its position on the international arena and work to limit the influence of the United States of America by playing the role of a mediator in the Middle East, with the necessity of preserving its interests in the Arabian Gulf region.

**The research problem lies** in studying the role of Russian foreign policy towards the Yemeni crisis. So, this problem raises a set of research questions, as follows:

- 1- What is the importance and position of Yemen in Russian foreign policy?
- 2- What is the history of bilateral relations between the two countries?
- 3- What are the causes of the Yemeni crisis?
- 4- What is the role of Russian foreign policy in resolving the Yemeni crisis?

**The research is based on the hypothesis that:** The Russian intervention in Yemen aims to preserve its strategic interests, restore its position, reach the Middle East, revive the Russian role there, and attempt to reduce American influence in the region, while maintaining its relationship with the Arab Gulf states.



**Research Structure:** The research is divided into two sections, the first of which deals with Russian foreign policy towards Yemen, and was divided into two requirements, the first of which deals with the importance and position of Yemen in Russian foreign policy, and the second requirement deals with bilateral relations between the two countries. The second section deals with Russian foreign policy and the management of the Yemeni crisis, and was divided into two requirements, the first of which deals with the causes of the Yemeni crisis, while the second includes the role of Russian foreign policy in resolving the Yemeni crisis.

**Section One: Russian Foreign Policy Towards Yemen:** Yemen occupies a distinct strategic location in the region, and gains special importance in the concept of long-term Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, as Russia is still interested in using Yemeni seaports as bases for resupplying its military and commercial fleets. Therefore, in this section, we will try to clarify the importance and position of Yemen in Russian foreign policy and bilateral relations between them:

**The First Requirement: The importance and position of Yemen in Russian foreign policy:**

Yemen enjoys strategic importance at the political, economic and security levels in the Gulf region and the Arabian Peninsula in particular, as it overlooks the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal. Yemen controls the passage that connects it to the Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden, and also controls the maritime navigation routes leading to Asia. It also forms a single strategic bloc with the Gulf countries, as Yemen overlooks the southern part of the Red Sea, and there is a close interconnectedness between the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab, which represents a route for tankers loaded with Gulf oil towards Europe. In addition, it connects the security belt of the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf, starting from the Suez Canal and ending with the Shatt al-Arab. This is what made Yemen occupy this location of great and exceptional importance, especially for Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the countries of the region(A. Y. Abdullah, 2020, 250).

One of the most prominent factors of the main strength of Yemen's geopolitical and strategic location lies in Yemen's overlooking Bab al-Mandab Strait, and its ability to control it, and the movement of global trade is linked to its security and stability, as this strait is considered the second most important main waterway in the world in terms of strategic importance after the Suez Canal, in addition to the presence of Yemeni coasts and ports (B. Abdullah, 1982, 12), which are distinguished by their length of (1906 km) overlooking vast bodies of water, and it also has more than (183) islands, the importance of each of which varies according to its location, area, and the extent of the possibility of benefiting from it from an economic and military perspective. These islands make Yemen control the

movement of commercial and military ships, and they can be exploited in building naval and air military bases, subject to Yemeni sovereignty.

Due to its important strategic location in the region, Yemen is of particular importance in ensuring Russia's long-term interests in the Middle East, especially in using Yemeni seaports as shipping bases for its military and commercial fleets. Yemen is located on the main trade routes from the Red Sea through the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, and Russia considers establishing stability in southern Yemen a precondition for achieving its goal of obtaining a sphere of influence in the Red Sea region. After South Yemen gained independence from British occupation in 1967, the Soviet Union supported the new Yemeni state economically and politically. This allowed the use of the Yemeni island of Socotra, located off the Somali coast at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden, for the use of the Indian Eighth Operational Squadron of the Soviet Navy at the time. Moscow is counting on those days to return. The Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow has described the Yemeni island of Socotra as the ideal place to build a Russian base in Yemen. Moscow is also betting that a potential base in southern Yemen is an important gateway to exert its influence in the Horn of Africa (Aksenov, 2017).

Russia's policy was directed towards the Middle East. In 2002, the principles of friendly relations and cooperation between Russia and Yemen were declared. The agreement included cooperation in the fields of culture, science, education, sports and tourism, as well as international governmental agreements that reflect, in particular, the rapprochement of the two countries' orientations on many global and regional issues, including the rejection of the unipolar model of the world order, the fight against religious extremism and terrorism, as well as the settlement of regional conflicts (Russian Foreign Ministry, n.d.), and the 2002 Mutual Investment Protection Agreement, which laid a solid foundation for bilateral cooperation between the two countries (Kommersant newspaper, 2019, 6). In October 2008, the Chairman of the Russian Federation Council (Sergei Mironov) visited Yemen, and discussions were held with the Yemeni leadership about establishing a military base on the Red Sea coast in the future. However, the instability that followed the overthrow of Yemeni President (Ali Abdullah Saleh) in 2012 led to this plan going off track (The View of Western Experts, 2017).

Since the beginning of 2011, Yemen, like other Arab countries, has been witnessing an internal political crisis, which later developed into a civil war that reduced the scale of cooperation between the two countries. Most joint initiatives were reduced, and the Russian diplomatic presence was ended in December 2017. However, Russia continues to monitor events in the country and provides support to Yemen through the United Nations Security Council (Kommersant newspaper, 2019), as well as providing humanitarian aid to Yemen.



Russia deals realistically with Middle Eastern issues that have international and regional dimensions, according to its political and economic interests. The objective content of Russian foreign policy after 2000 represented the goals and means of achieving its strategic interests and playing a stronger role in the Middle East region, establishing relations in various fields, and attempting to intervene peacefully to resolve conflicts, settle disputes, and solve the region's problems. This is represented by its position in Syria, Iran, Yemen, and Libya. Russia's attempt to open up to different countries of the world and to follow a diplomacy based on strengthening its role as a mediator in resolving international disputes and crises, all of which indicates its attempt to restore its international standing and restore its prestige on the international arena (Hassan, 2022, 210).

Russia uses military and technical cooperation and economic relations to secure its growing geopolitical influence in the Arabian Gulf region. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Russia renewed its rapprochement with these countries. In 2011, the so-called strategic dialogue between the Arabian Gulf countries and Russia was launched. The second conference, held in Saudi Arabia in 2012, witnessed a discussion of the Syrian file. Due to the assessments of the Arabian Gulf countries of the Syrian problem, the conference was not held in 2013. According to the opinion of the advisor to the director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, specializing in Asia and the Middle East (Elena Suponina), (despite the existing differences, there is mutual understanding on many issues. One can notice that despite the storms and different viewpoints on certain issues, the Arab countries have consistently valued Russia's weight in the system of international relations) (Suponina, 2023).

Returning to Russia's interests in Yemen, it seeks to secure the flow of oil on the southern border, and there are many commercial contracts that were signed between the Russian and Yemeni governments in armament, mining and other sectors before the Houthi group's coup against the legitimate authority in September 2014 (Nehme, 2016, 53–54). On the other hand, Russia is important to Yemen, as it is a partner in developing infrastructure projects and logistics services. In the period (2013-2014), Russian specialists rebuilt thermal power plants in Aden, and at the same time developed projects to build thermal power plants and develop the highway network (Tsukanov, n.d.). Russia is taking constructive measures to overcome the Yemeni crisis, and believes that in order to sign a peace treaty between the two warring parties, it is necessary to observe the interests of all parties to the conflict. So, it calls for holding a Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue in which the interests of all active parties are observed, and thus it can achieve more than one goal for Moscow.

**The Second Requirement: Bilateral relations between the two countries:** Russia and Yemen maintain friendly relations. In 1928, the first treaty of friendship and trade was signed between the two countries, and diplomatic relations were established in 1955. Relations between the two countries are based on a legal basis represented by the treaties of friendship and cooperation with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (1979), the Yemen Arab Republic (1984) and other bilateral documents. In May 1990, the Republic of Yemen was formed as a result of the voluntary union between the Yemen Arab Republic (the republic that was in northern Yemen after the Yemeni revolution in 1962) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). In December 1991, the Republic of Yemen officially announced recognition of Russia as the legitimate heir to the former Soviet Union, including recognition of all signed international treaties and agreements (Kirpichenko, 2013, 60).

In December 1991, during the official visit of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to Moscow, a declaration of principles of friendship and cooperation was signed between the two countries. Cooperation included many areas, including military-technical cooperation, as Yemen is a traditional importer of Russian military products. Many military contracts were concluded to supply fighter aircraft and helicopters. In 2009, Yemen announced its readiness to purchase fighter aircraft, helicopters and wheeled vehicles from Russia. On April 3, 2013, a meeting was held between Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. The latter was interested in obtaining Russian air defense systems and light weapons (Mohammed, n.d.). Agreements were reached in 2013-2014, and the equipment was supposed to be completed by the end of 2021, but due to the arms embargo in effect since 2015, these contracts were frozen<sup>1</sup>.

In terms of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries, economic and trade relations with Yemen have developed since 1956, as a large number of industrial and social facilities were built in the country. In 1996, a cooperation protocol was signed between the Federation of Yemeni Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In November 1997, a meeting of the Paris Club was held to discuss the issue of restructuring Yemen's external debts and signing a document to pay Yemen's debts to Russia on preferential terms for Sana'a. The meeting resulted in the signing of an agreement between Russia and Yemen regarding debt cancellation. In December 1999, about (80%) of Yemen's debts amounting to (6.4) billion dollars were written off. In 2007, the volume of trade exchange between the two countries amounted to about (178.9) million dollars. In terms of cultural cooperation, the Russian Ministry

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<sup>1</sup> Леонид Цуканов, Россия и Йемен: зеркало стратегических интересов, URL: <https://2u.pw/lkIDqEKq> (дата обращения 18.6.2024).



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of Education and Science provided the Yemeni side in 2007 with about (70) university scholarships, and after graduation, most of the graduates of technical and medical specialties were employed (Mohammed, n.d.).

The conflict in Yemen has delayed dozens of major contracts (especially in the field of oil and gas production). The oil and gas fields located near the cities of Balhaf (Shabwa Governorate) and Al-Ghaydah (Al-Mahrah Governorate) were considered by Russian companies as promising production areas, but Saudi, Emirati and Turkish companies control them and seek to achieve their own goals in Yemen, as they are increasingly trying to increase their economic and political influence there (Tsukanov, n.d.). Despite this, cooperation between Russia and Yemen continues. On February 28, 2024, the Speaker of the Russian Federation Council (Valentina Matviyenko) said that the volume of trade exchange exceeded (600) million US dollars during 2023, and the Chairman of the Russian Duma (Vyacheslav Volodin) said that the rate of Russian trade exchange increased by (90%) with Yemen compared to last year (Yemen Daily News, n.d.).

On May 15, 2024, Russia and Yemen agreed during a meeting held by delegations from the two countries in Moscow to develop a joint memorandum between departments that creates a legal basis for the interaction and cooperation of specialists in the field of geology and subsoil investment. The statement of the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment quoted the Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Climate Change in the Ministry (Ivan Kosh), (Our countries are linked by warm friendly relations and we are pleased to have the opportunity to discuss issues of Russian-Yemeni cooperation in the field of geology and subsoil investment). In turn, (Rashid Barbaa), a member of the Advisory Council of the Republic of Yemen, said, "I am confident that there is great potential for continuing to develop mutual and beneficial cooperation in the geological field between our two countries." The Yemeni side pointed to (the discovery of deposits containing oil and hydrocarbon materials in the Republic of Yemen, in addition to the discovery of reserves of solid minerals such as nickel, copper and gold), indicating that (the country currently enjoys favorable conditions for attracting foreign investments in the field of subsoil investment) (Russia Today channel, n.d.).

## **Section Two: Russian Foreign Policy and Management of the Yemeni Crisis**

Russia deals realistically with Middle Eastern issues. In the case of the Yemeni crisis and the Russian role in this crisis, Russia's interests in the Arabian Gulf must be taken into consideration. This section will clarify the causes of the Yemeni crisis and the Russian role in it:

### **The First Requirement: Causes of the Yemeni crisis**

The Yemeni conflict erupted on February 11, 2011, when protests began at Sana'a University with student demonstrations and human rights activists demanding the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh from power. The crisis also emerged after the president's removal from power and the subsequent internal political conflicts and external interventions that led to the failure of the political settlement sponsored by the United Nations, the increase in the control of armed groups and tribal forces, and the decline of economic resources (Hill et al., 2013, 5–6).

There were many reasons that led to trigger the crisis in Yemen, including internal political reasons. The Yemeni political system had no stability at all stages, starting from the monarchy, republic, or the era of the unity state, which lacked the institutional nature and the formal nature of pluralism prevailed on one hand, and was characterized by authoritarianism and violence on the other hand. This caused the emergence of tribal and sectarian identity, which hindered progress in the country. There were many parties to the conflict in the Yemeni crisis, including the Houthi Ansar Allah (a sectarian military group in northern Yemen supported by Iran, calling itself Ansar Allah), and they are considered the important party in the conflict if they seize power, exploiting the political vacuum and their strong relationship with Iran. As for the other party, they are the General People's Congress Party, which is the wing of the legitimate authority, and the General People's Congress Party is the largest Yemeni party. The third party is the Islah Party, which is the largest opposition party. The fourth party is the Salafis, and there are also tribal sheikhs. The last party is the Southern Movement, which is a number of forces and entities. These forces demand a special status for the southern governorates. It ranges between independence and federalism (Dashila, 2019, 136–138).

There were other reasons for the revolution, which were the deterioration of economic conditions, the low standard of living, the spread of administrative corruption, and the high unemployment rate, which reached 60%. It can be said that the Yemeni social structure, which is based on intertwined tribal, sectarian, and religious foundations, could be a cause of the Yemeni crisis. The tribal perspective dominates all aspects of life, as President Ali Abdullah Saleh maintained the apparent form of the state throughout his rule, but in reality, he ruled it as a tribal state, as each tribal sheikh had his own army and prisons. In many cases, the tribal system exerted pressure on the political authority by demanding secession (Muhammad, 2021, 105–107).

As for the external factors of the crisis, they were represented by international foreign interventions, which made Yemen an arena for a proxy war between Iran, through its ally the Houthi groups, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia and the Emirates on the other hand. Iran's goal was to make the Yemeni government loyal

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to it and to limit the role of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Thus, the internal and external factors led to instability in Yemen and the exacerbation of the crisis, and had repercussions on the region, including the growth of Iranian influence, the impact on the security of the Gulf, and the growth of the threat of terrorist organizations (Muhammad, 2021, 105–107).

On September 21, 2014, the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, fell into the hands of the Houthi group. They established the so-called Revolutionary Council and placed the northern Yemeni governorates under their control. Despite this, they did not receive international recognition, except for Iran (Red Spring News Agency, 2023). The conflict escalated in January 2015, when the Houthis seized the presidential palace in Sana'a. After that, President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and his government in Aden announced a general mobilization (5-T.V., n.d.). In March of the same year, the Houthis took control of the city of Taiz (the third largest city in Yemen) and then headed south in an attempt to control the Yemeni legitimacy.

After this coup, Yemeni President Hadi called on the United Nations and the Gulf States to “urgently intervene” in order to stop the aggression by all possible means and support the legitimate government. On March 22, 2015, the Security Council affirmed the legitimacy of the presidential authority of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who in fact has no control over the situation in the country. The United Nations acknowledged its impotence and entrusted the resolution of the Yemeni conflict to the kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula - the main strategic partners of the United States in the region. On March 23, Yemeni Foreign Minister Riyadh Yassin requested assistance from the Gulf Cooperation Council. At the same time, the Yemeni president blamed Iran for inciting the anti-government uprising and described the Houthis as “Iranian puppets.” Saudi Arabia, which has long been competing with Iran for an influence in the Islamic world, announced its readiness to support the “legitimate Yemeni government” in confronting the Houthi militants. At the same time, the Yemeni president fled to Djibouti because his stay in the country had become impossible - the Houthi militants had besieged Aden and seized an air base located 50 Kms away from the city. On March 26, 2015, the Saudi monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, announced the start of a military campaign against the Houthis. The Saudi armed forces were joined in the operation by the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, and Pakistan. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced his readiness to send ground forces to Yemen, and the Sudanese leadership announced readiness to send an armed force to fight against the Houthis (Topwar, 2015).

Thus, the formation of a military coalition was announced under the name (Arab Coalition to Support Legitimacy), and a large-scale military operation was launched that included air strikes on Houthi sites and camps. Saudi Arabia had motives to engage in this conflict, including fear of a similar rebellion on its

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territory by Saudi Shiites and that the same scenario would occur on its territory, as it has approximately (14-15%) of Shiites who actually rose up against the Saudi King (Abdullah bin Abdulaziz) during the so-called Arab Spring revolutions (Filatov, 2015). In addition to the importance of Yemen's oil and its location; Yemen owns the oil port of Aden, which is one of the most important ports in the region, and represents the key to the transit of hydrocarbons in the Middle East. Aden is the road to the Red Sea, through which oil supplies pass towards the Suez Canal (Malysheva, 2010, 108–112).

International reactions to the war in Yemen were mixed. Russia's position in this conflict was clear in reaching a peaceful solution to the crisis. At the same time, the Russian Foreign Ministry drew attention to the clear practice of double standards used by the United States and its allies regarding the situations in Yemen and Ukraine. Iran, Syria and the Lebanese Hezbollah opposed the aggressive policy pursued by Saudi Arabia towards Yemen. Lebanon and Iraq condemned foreign military interference in Yemen's internal affairs. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine confirmed that Saudi Arabia works for the favor of United States and the West. The Chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Shura Council (Alaeddin Boroujerdi) confirmed that the United States of America is the main instigator of the turmoil in the situation in Yemen (Topwar, 2015).

Yemen has thus become a proxy war theatre involving Saudi Arabia and Iran, which supports the Houthis. It is clear that Iran has become increasingly involved in events in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. This has led to tension in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have always been complicated, as both countries claim to have a leading role in the region.

### **The Second Requirement: The role of Russian foreign policy in resolving the Yemeni crisis**

Russia proceeds from the principle of economic pragmatism that it has adopted in its foreign policy since the beginning of the rule of President (Vladimir Putin). It no longer proceeds in its foreign policy from the ideological factor or principle. Although the strategic importance of Yemen to Russia has declined after the end of the Cold War, Yemen's location in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, especially along the Bab al-Mandab Strait at the entrance to the Red Sea, confirms this importance for Moscow's efforts in power calculations in the Middle East. In the wake of the outbreak of the political crisis in Yemen, Moscow stood at the same distance from all parties of the conflict and remained neutral. It did not stop its contacts with the legitimate authority in Yemen, represented by President (Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi). During his visit to Moscow, the former Foreign Minister of the legitimate Yemeni government (Abdul Malik al-Mikhlaifi) said, (Yemen appreciates the balanced Russian position regarding the conflict issues in the



region, and Russia does not interfere in our internal affairs, and always adheres to this position in its foreign policy, and we in Yemen appreciate that. Russia is still committed to the international law) (ANNA News Inf., 2018).

In April 2015, Russia reluctantly allowed the adoption of Security Council Resolution No. 2216 when it abstained from voting on the resolution, which included a demand that the Houthi forces surrender their weapons and withdraw under Saudi pressure. The Russian representative to the United Nations (Vitaly Churkin) criticized the resolution to the United Nations and said that it was an unbalanced resolution after it was adopted (Naji, 2019, 10–11). He announced that he would have preferred (if the arms embargo was complete), meaning (if it included both parties and not one party). He also considered that the resolution did not emphasize much the need to adhere to a humanitarian truce, and said (it is not permissible to use this resolution to justify the escalation of the conflict), adding: (Al-Qaeda terrorists benefit from chaos) (France 24/ AFP, 2015). Russia called for resolving the crisis through the United Nations, but without pressure from other countries. This is confirmed by the concept of Russian foreign policy for the year 2016 (that Russia is working hard to strengthen the action of the international system and resolve conflicts within the framework of the United Nations and work to strengthen the role of international law in resolving conflicts)<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, Russia remained the only international player that maintained its embassy in Sana'a, before moving to Riyadh after the killing of former President Saleh by the Houthis in late 2017. Russia established relations with Yemeni President Hadi and his government, and held consultations with various political parties in Yemen (Russian International Affairs Council, n.d.). Since the start of the Saudi-led military intervention in March 2015, Russia has not changed this approach, even in light of developments in the Yemeni file, including the killing of former President Saleh, who had promised the Russians in an interview on Russia 24 in 2016 to open Yemeni airports and ports in order to combat terrorism, which the Russians understood as a clear indication of the possibility of building a Russian military base (Russian International Affairs Council, 2017).

Former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh won wide favor in Moscow after pledging in August 2016 to allow Russia to build a naval base on the Red Sea. In a gesture of appreciation for Saleh's offer, Russian diplomats facilitated dialogue between Saleh and Saudi Arabia throughout 2017. Russia sent a team of paramedics to treat Saleh when he fell ill in October 2017 (Ramani, 2018), but he was later killed by the Houthis. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described Saleh's

<sup>2</sup> Luma Mutter Hassan, Russian Foreign Policy and International Crisis Management (Karabagh Crisis as a Model), unpublished PhD thesis, Nahrain University, 2022, p. 210

killing as an act of extremism that undermined the possibility of stability in Yemen, and that the aim of his assassination was to hinder efforts to move toward a peaceful settlement of the situation in the country (TASS, n.d.).

Moscow's desire to act as a mediator in Yemen is related to its desire to benefit from Yemen's location and expand its partners in the Middle East. Here, Kirill Semenov, an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council, says, "Russia seeks to enhance its reputation as a mediator in several conflicts, and it is possible to exert influence in Yemen to push both sides to sit at the negotiating table as part of its efforts to obtain a permanent military base on the Red Sea coast, similar to several countries that have military bases on the Bab al-Mandab Strait" (Yemen Future, 2021).

Russia considers stabilizing southern Yemen a prerequisite for achieving its goal of gaining a sphere of influence in the Red Sea region. On September 7, 2018, Russian Ambassador to Yemen Vladimir Dedushkin said at a press conference that "southern Yemen is an important region of the country that must be adequately represented in a potential peace settlement." His statements were well received by members of the Southern Transitional Council, a separatist movement that has been excluded from UN-led negotiations on Yemen. The Russian Foreign Ministry has officially expressed interest in mediating to end the confrontation between the separatists in southern Yemen and supporters of the exiled Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. The Russian mediation offer was a direct response to the military aggression launched by forces loyal to Hadi against the STC's occupation of Aden, the capital of the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Since September 2017, the Russian government has been, under a contract with the Hadi government, printing banknotes and transporting them safely from Moscow to Aden. This contract helped the Yemeni government pay the salaries of its military personnel and security personnel in southern Yemen, and contributed to alleviating the liquidity crisis in the region (Ramani, 2018).

Russian decision-makers believe that successful mediation in the Yemeni file will help strengthen economic partnerships with its Gulf competitors in the energy market, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as with Iran. It may also pave the way for implementing its initiative for collective security in the Arabian Gulf region. The Yemeni conflict is considered an opportunity to showcase its mediation skills to the international community, especially since Russia, in its approaches to resolving the Yemeni crisis, calls for observing the interests of all parties to the conflict. During the visit of the UN envoy (Martin Griffiths) to Moscow in July 2019, during his conversation with the Russian Foreign Minister (Sergei Lavrov), the envoy called for (mutual consideration of the interests of the conflicting parties), and (Lavrov) confirmed his support for the efforts of the UN envoy, saying (We



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are still convinced that this is the only way to achieve the long-awaited peace and stability in Yemen) (MFA. Russia, 2021).

Thus, Russia is striving to develop a multi-level dialogue with all the main parties to the conflict. On the one hand, Moscow recognizes the legitimacy of President Hadi's government as a legally elected political force, emphasizing the importance of its participation in the peacemaking process. On the other hand, it nominally supports the Southern Transitional Council, in order to preserve its interests in the region, especially since China may become a competitor to Russia in the foreseeable future - its project (One Belt, One Road) is of great interest to Yemeni politicians (Tsukanov, n.d.).

Russia continued its diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, and tried to bring together the conflicting parties in Yemen. It supported the internal Yemeni talks between its internationally recognized government and the Houthis with the aim of reaching a political settlement to end the war peacefully. It also strongly opposed the ongoing blockade on Yemen, which it considers to be exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the northern part of it, which is largely under Houthi control. In June 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov indicated during his participation in the Primakov Forum that the West is partly responsible for Yemen's many challenges. In his speech before the United Nations, he said, "In Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and other hotbeds of tension, all external parties must demonstrate an understanding of the cultural and civilizational characteristics of society, reject the politicization of humanitarian aid, and help establish government bodies with broad representation of all major ethnic, religious, and political forces in the countries concerned" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021).

Russia criticizes military strikes in Yemen. In statements issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman (Maria Zakharova) on January 12, 2024, she expressed sharp criticism of the United States and Britain for the military strikes they carried out in Yemen, indicating that these strikes led to an escalation of tension in the Middle East, and that they represent a disregard for international law. Russia called for an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the situation in Yemen, noting that the US air strikes are in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. These criticisms come in the context of an international reaction to the air and naval strikes launched by the United States and Britain on Houthi military targets in Yemen, in response to Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea. The UN Security Council resolution adopted an American draft resolution condemning Houthi attacks on ships, affirming the right of member states to protect their ships and freedom of navigation in accordance with international law (Brezhnev, 2024). However, Moscow has clearly defined its position in this conflict. The Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation

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to the United Nations (Vassily Nebenzia) said that (Russia condemned - unequivocally - the aggression of Western countries against Yemen, which is taking place without any sanctions from the UN Security Council. At the same time, he referred to historical positions of similar actions by the West towards Arab countries, saying (The aggressive actions of our colleagues in the Security Council - the United States and Britain - in the Red Sea remind us of the bad times of the barbaric and illegal bombing launched by NATO on Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria), then he continued (We strongly condemn the aggression against Yemen, without imposing appropriate sanctions from the Security Council) (Savin, n.d.).

Russian foreign policy efforts to resolve the Yemeni crisis continued. On February 15, 2024, talks were held to discuss the prospects for a political settlement in Yemen and to consolidate relations between the two countries, especially with the continued escalation in Yemen. According to a statement by the Russian embassy in Yemen, which said via its account on the X platform (the meeting was held between the Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Alexander Kinshak, and the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs for Expatriate Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, Dr. Ahmed bin Mubarak, with the participation of the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Russian Embassy in Yemen, Dr. Yevgeny). It is noteworthy that on January 25 of the same year, a Houthi delegation visited Moscow, and the head of the Houthi delegation and spokesman for the group (Mohammed Abdul Salam) said in a statement (that he met in Moscow the Special Representative of the Russian President for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, and during the meeting, the situation in the region was discussed, especially the condemned and rejected crimes of genocide taking place in Gaza, and the need to intensify international efforts to pressure the United States and Israel to stop them... and the latest Developments in the negotiations and discussions with Saudi Arabia, mediated by the sisterly Sultanate of Oman, regarding developments in the Yemeni political process. Earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the importance of increasing international efforts to quickly prepare for a broad-based national dialogue between Yemenis under the auspices of the United Nations was emphasized during the meeting (Hael, n.d.).

On August 27, 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced in a press conference following talks with his Yemeni counterpart Shaye Mohsen al-Zindani that “Moscow welcomes the resumption of mediation efforts by Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and of course the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Hans Grundberg, with the aim of putting the situation in Yemen back on its political and diplomatic track.” Lavrov considered that the attacks launched by the Ansar Allah movement

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(Houthis) in northern Yemen on ships in the Red Sea constitute a serious threat to the safety of global shipping, but he stressed at the same time that “Russia does not support the decision of Western countries to respond militarily to the actions of the Houthis, as it exacerbates the situation in Yemen”. (RT channel, n.d.)

Hence, it can be said that Russia's foreign mediation efforts will enhance Russia's position as a military-political player in the region capable of making a real contribution to resolving crisis situations, and will contribute to strengthening Russia's image as a peacemaker on the international arena. Consequently, Russia's mediation efforts regarding the Yemeni crisis can be transformed into a valuable resource in terms of building more Russian-Saudi relations and converging positions on regional affairs.

### Conclusion

Russian foreign policy looks at the Yemeni file from the standpoint of its interests with the regional powers in the region. Russian foreign policy is no longer, as it was in the past, relying on the ideological choice in its approaches and relations with the countries of the region. Rather, today it looks with caution at its role in the Yemeni file, due to the regional characteristics that have appeared in the Yemeni scene. It will undoubtedly have to take into account its partners in OPEC and in many investment files, and it will have to take into account its interests with Tehran. It also focuses on the importance of achieving a balance between the centers of power in Yemen, which pushes towards establishing joint negotiation platforms between all Yemeni parties to reach the establishment of a national unity government after which Russia can return to activating the cooperation agreements between the two countries and the arms and investment contracts that are still in effect by virtue of international law. Thus, the Yemeni crisis led to many results, the most important of which are:

- 1- Russia's mediation efforts will enhance its position and contribute to strengthening its image as a peacemaker on the international arena, as Russia sought to strengthen its position in Yemen in line with its ambitions to restore its position in the international system.
- 2- Through its neutral stance and non-alignment with any party in the Yemeni crisis, Russia was able to build more Russian-Yemeni relations, as well as strengthen its relationship with the Gulf States.
- 3- Yemen has become a theater for a proxy war, in which Saudi Arabia and Iran, which supports the Houthis, participate. This has led to tension in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have always been complicated, as both countries claim to have a leading role in the region.
- 4- Russia is laying down constructive measures to overcome the Yemeni crisis, and it calls for observing the interests of all active parties in Yemen, which can achieve more than one goal for Moscow.

5- The sectarian and tribal factor played a role in the Yemeni crisis, which prompted some external powers to support the regime, while other powers supported the opposition.

### Recommendations

- 1- The solution to the Yemeni crisis lies in unifying efforts, implementing political and economic reforms, abandoning sectarianism and calling for the unity of Yemen.
- 2- Arab countries should stand by Yemen and support it in its reforms, and call for a Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue.
- 3- The chaos that occurred in Yemen was basically the result of the policies of the United States and Western powers, in addition to the position of the Gulf Arab states and Iran. So, we must stand with Yemen and try to benefit from peaceful initiatives to resolve the crisis.

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