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Russia's Diplomatic Rush on Yemen

Russia has been multiplying diplomatic contacts and official meetings on Yemen, often in coordination with Iran: this could further undermine the United States' leverage not only in conflict resolution, but also regarding the post-conflict alignments and reconstruction.

On the 16th of October, Russian's deputy Foreign Affairs minister Sergey Vershinin and the Iranian senior advisor of the Foreign ministry, Jaber Ansari, met in Muscat, separately, with the Omani minister of Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi [*Muscat Daily*, "HE Alawi Meets Iranian Official", October 16, 2018"]. The Sultanate of Oman hosted frequently representatives of the Huthi movement, as well as informal talks between the warring parties. On the 21st of October, Jabel Ansari met a United Nations' official in Tehran, discussing the Yemeni war and, two days later, he flew to Moscow for diplomatic talks on the region with Russian officials. The 5th of November, Vershinin and Ansari met for a second time in Moscow discussing Yemen.

Although more discreet in comparison with Syria, the Russian-Iranian axis on the Yemeni dossier has emerged since 2015, when the Saudi and Emirati-led military intervention became visible. For instance, on February 2018, Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution aiming at condemning the transfer of Iranian-made missiles to the Huthis. Previously, Moscow prevented the presentation of a resolution condemning the creation of the insurgents' parallel cabinet in Sana'a.

Russia was able to create relationships with almost all Yemeni political-military players. Former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh enjoyed good relations with Russia and he also offered to Moscow in 2016

the use of military bases in Sana'a [Daily Sabah, "Ex-Yemeni president Saleh offers military bases to Russia", August 22, 2016]. Nowadays, his relatives and political heirs, as the nephew Tareq, side against the Huthis, but maintaining a certain degree of military autonomy with respect to the forces loyal to Yemen's internationally-recognized president Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi. Capitalizing on the enduring connections with former People Democratic Republic of Yemen's socialist representatives, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), the Emirati informally-backed "third government" claiming for Southern independence, can rely on good connections with Moscow. Moreover, Russia has a strong relationship with the United Arab Emirates, currently the most influential regional player in the South of Yemen and its coastal cities.

Russia's enhanced diplomatic offensive on Yemen is part of a broader geopolitical strategy "in and beyond" the Mediterranean, with an eye to Eastern Africa and the Southern Asian's rimland. Moscow would reportedly seek to re-establish a naval base in the South of Yemen to gain access to the Red Sea. In this framework, Russia is also pursuing outreach efforts in the Horn of Africa. Traditionally the Soviet base was in Aden, while the Socotra Archipelago was just an anchorage point.

Given the assertiveness of Moscow's policy on the Yemeni file, Washington risks to be sidelined, especially if its posture on the Yemen's conflict will continue to follow Riyadh's one.

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