



## The Developments of the Turkish Position Towards the Conflict in Yemen

**Bandar Dabwan**

Master's student

Department of political science and international relations

Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

Email: [dabwan.bandar@std.izu.edu.tr](mailto:dabwan.bandar@std.izu.edu.tr)

Turkey

### ABSTRACT

*Turkey supported the military operations of the "Arab coalition" to restore "legitimacy" in Yemen, which began on March 26, 2015, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced at that time that the intervention came as a result of the Houthis group's violation of international agreements and resolutions, their explicit violation of UN Security Council resolutions, and their rejection of Politically dialogue. after the military intervention, and as a result of several variables, Turkey's position of support for the military operation shifted to concern only with the humanitarian issue and gradually criticized the mistakes of the military operations carried out by the coalition forces.*

*Contrary to years of tense Turkish-Saudi relationship, the first months of 2022 have witnessed positive development in the relationship between the two countries, following the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Saudi Arabia. In the same issue, the Yemeni file witnessed a major development through the formation of the "Presidential Leadership Council" and the transfer of the powers of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi to it, which is important to study the impact of these two variables on "Turkey's position towards the conflict in Yemen".*

**KEYWORDS:** Turkey, Yemen, Yemeni conflict, the Arab coalition, Saudi Arabia.

### Research Methodology

The study used the realism theory that help to understand the Turkish position towards the conflict in Yemen. Where the realism theory is based on basic concepts, the most important is power and national interest, considering that interests drive the foreign policy of states in light of the capabilities and sources of power available that enable it to make an impact in its regional and international environments. Morgenthau proclaimed at the beginning of Politics Among Nations that 'international politics, like all politics, "Foreign policy is a power struggle". He also defines power as "man's control over the minds and actions of others" (Morgenthau, 1948: 127). He added that 'whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim' (Morgenthau, 1948: 25).

According to Edward. H. Carr believes that "power is essential to politics", and also considers that "politics are in one sense always power politics', therefore impossible to remove power from it". and it is in three forms: military power, economic power, and the power to control thoughts and opinions (Carr, 1946, 108).

Hans Morgenthau also defines "national interest" as "power", meaning that it is linked to the issue of national survival. while Waltz considers that "the national interest determines foreign policy" in the sense that states do not act in the regional or international environment except according to their national interests. He also believes that "the struggle for power arises 'because men are born seekers of power" (Waltz,1959,35).

### Basic Questions of the Research

In the Yemeni issue, some foreign parties intervened directly, such as the Arab coalition, or indirectly way, such as Turkey's support for the coalition.

Therefore, the problem addressed in this paper seeks to answer the main research question in the study, which is:

What are the stages of the development of the Turkish position in Yemen?

### The Purpose of the Research

The research seeks to describe the evolution of the Turkish position towards the war in Yemen, analyze its motives, and its impact on the path of the war.

### Turkish Support for "decisive storm and the Coalition"

Ankara depends on its position towards the "Decisive Storm" from its vision of Iranian expansion, and Tehran's desire to impose hegemony and influence on several capitals of Arab countries, such as Damascus, Baghdad, and Sana'a. as well as

Ankara thinks that this expansion makes a threat to regional security, at a time when Ankara wants to play a major role in the regional balances in the region, as it is concerned with international policies in its regional neighborhood because it will benefit or be harmed by it.

with Turkey's desire to rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and support its positions in the region, Ankara hastened to explicitly support Operation Decisive Storm, led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, as well as the political, economic, and humanitarian steps that Saudi Arabia adopted in the first year of the war in 2015.

The Turkish position in support of "legitimacy" was based on Ankara's desire to prevent the disintegration of Yemen, its fragmentation, or its dependence on external forces that threaten Yemen's sovereignty and independence. It is a position consistent with Turkey's policy of supporting the territorial integrity of countries that witnessed a revolutionary movement in the context of the so-called Arab Spring. In the Yemeni case, the most legitimate option was the Saudi intervention. Therefore, Turkey



stood against Iranian interference and supported the military intervention of the Arab coalition.

### **An Independent Turkish Role in Yemen**

The Turkish position continued in support of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Alliance, but several variables were imposed on Ankara to review its policies, as Saudi Arabia sided with the UAE's policies in the Yemeni issue, and the two states refused the presence of any other actor, whether from within the alliance or from outside, in the Yemeni issue. This included any humanitarian efforts undertaken by Ankara in Yemen and UAE-backed security and military forces that impeded Turkish relief and humanitarian work in Yemen and detained their members for several days<sup>1</sup>.

In light of the security chaos in the country, an attempt was made to assassinate the financial officer of the Turkish Red Crescent in Aden<sup>2</sup>, and accusations were directed at Yemeni parties, which were supported by the UAE, as well as many reports of human rights violations by the coalition in the Yemeni issue.

The Turkish position changed due to the Gulf-Gulf crisis, with Turkey siding with Qatar and providing support in the face of the blockade imposed on it. Furthermore, the severe tension in the Turkish-Saudi relationship because of the issue of the killing of the Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul at the beginning of October 2018, caused a break in the relationship between the two states and a lack of coordination between them on the Yemeni issue. This change synchronized with several states suspending their military operations within the Arab coalition and the rise in international voices calling for the cessation of military operations. In this context, Turkey's position has changed, as it has stopped its support for the Saudi-led coalition and focused on supporting the mediation efforts led by the United Nations.

It is necessary to note that Ankara's adoption of an independent position on the Yemeni issue that is different from the policy of the Arab coalition did not necessarily lead to a clash with Saudi policies, as Ankara remained supportive of the Yemeni legitimacy and rejected any intervention in the Yemeni issue without the approval of legitimacy and coordination with the Coalition, despite the urging of Yemeni personalities to share Turkey and enter on the line of solutions to the crisis in Yemen.

On the other hand, Yemeni citizens and leaders who disapprove of Iran's policies and suffer from some of the alliance's members' policies have fled to Turkey. Many of them are at risk of arrests, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, torture, or assassinations. Other than that, Ankara is still following the scene and monitoring reality, waiting for a future role there, in a desire to preserve its geostrategic interests in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea, as well as protect its military bases in the Horn of Africa.

At this stage, Ankara also gave priority to supporting the peace process. In January 2019, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, stated that priority was given to efforts to bring

peace to Yemen, stressing that Turkey would "contribute to ending the war in Yemen." In this context, Turkey praised all efforts to bring peace to Yemen, including the Stockholm Agreement on December 13, 2018, and the Riyadh Agreement on November 5, 2019. It is a position that is consistent with the Arab Alliance's recent call for the Yemeni parties, following the formation of the "Presidential Leadership Council", to enter into a peace process that will avoid Yemen the war and its announcement of a unilateral armistice to allow the UN Special Envoy for Yemen to support the peace process and to persuade the various parties of the conflict.

Furthermore, the Turkish government turned its attention to dealing with other issues that affect its interests and found it available for intervention, such as those in Libya, Azerbaijan, and Syria. It showed its ability to resolve some of these issues through its political, military, and security performance, which made the others focus on the successes that were achieved in these issues very quickly for the benefit of its allies and gave it credibility for its military and security capabilities.

### **The Turkish-Saudi rapprochement**

It is hard to say that Ankara will play a bigger role in the Yemeni issue unless there is a real rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. This is because the political situation in Yemen is directly linked to Saudi Arabia's policy and, more recently, to the policy of the UAE. In light of the tense relationship between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and the UAE, a state of tension and estrangement, and the fact that the Yemeni legitimate government is under the pressure of the "coalition" and its presence on Saudi lands, the Turkish intervention in Yemen would necessarily have a collision with these parties. Despite the above, the government of Turkey has consistently condemned the attacks carried out by the Houthi group on oil installations and vital Saudi interests, as acts outside international law. In this regard, the Turkish Foreign Ministry expressed its strong condemnation of the attacks launched by the Houthis on Saudi interests, near the city of Dammam in March 2021, wishing "best wishes for the kingdom and its people"<sup>3</sup>. The Turkish government kept working to clear up the main problem in its relationship with the two Arab alliance parties by opening multiple diplomatic channels and resolving several issues<sup>4</sup> that were getting in the way of resuming political and economic ties, which had been hurt by the political rift. Officials from both states met in public and unannounced meetings for several months as a way to get back on good terms. And through the exchange of positive messages to restore good relations. There has been an improvement in bilateral relations at the end of 2020, especially after Saudi Arabia signed a contract with the Turkish "Vestel" company for defense industries worth \$200 million as part of the common manufacturing of "Karial" unmanned aerial vehicles, according to Turkish media sources<sup>5</sup>. On April 28, 2022, the Turkish president went to Saudi Arabia for what is thought to be the first time in five years. This was a sign

<sup>1</sup> Alshawa Net, (21/10/2020). Gov't: security services to pursue perpetrators to murder attempt of Turkish official. Available at the link: <https://rb.gy/0d3akh>

<sup>2</sup> YMC, (8 Oct 2020). Authorities in Aden release Turkey's relief team after hours in detention. Yemen media center. Available at the link: <https://rb.gy/2nu6p4>

<sup>3</sup> Middle East Monitor, (March 10, 2021). Turkey condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, accessed 12/03/2023, available at the link: <https://rb.gy/pa3st>

<https://ijbassnet.com/>

<sup>4</sup> The judicial authorities' move of the case file of the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi from Ankara to Riyadh comes as a clear indication that the curtain has been drawn down on an issue that was extremely important and dangerous for Riyadh and evidence of the trend towards ending disputes between the two states.

<sup>5</sup> Tastekin, F. (April 2, 2021). Could Turkish involvement in Yemen free Saudi Arabia?, al-monitor, accessed 13/03/2023, available at the link: <https://rb.gy/mjusoh>



that both countries wanted to move on from the past, and it was also part of a larger effort by Ankara to improve relations with countries in the region, such as the Arab Republic of Egypt and Israel<sup>6</sup>. The Turkish President's trip to Saudi Arabia will not be the same as in the past. Instead, it will be the start of a new era of relations between Ankara and Riyadh, which are based on the fact that each country needs the other and wants to make the most of their economic, political, and military cooperation to change the political geography of the region in response to the risks and threats they both face. It may take a long time until strong relations are built again because of several issues that caused tensions in the relations between the two states, but the willingness of the political leaders can remove those sediments and start a new era of relations. The Turkish president wrote on his Twitter account that his trip to Saudi Arabia "opens the doors to a new era with the friendly and brotherly kingdom." He said, "We, as two brotherly countries with historical, cultural, and human relations, are making unremitting efforts to strengthen all kinds of political, military, and economic relations to start a new era between us" stressing that he is confident of raising relations between the two countries to a "better level than it was in the past"<sup>7</sup>.

Most likely, Ankara's political position is a result of the democratic elections that are set to happen in 2023. Because of these elections, as many local, regional, and international problems as possible need to be fixed. In return, it has to make various concessions to reassure the alliance countries, including suspending the activities of opponents of the regime in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and those residing on Turkish lands.

The success of the Democratic Party in the US elections and "Jobaiden's" tendency to resume the Iranian nuclear negotiations, which raises the concerns of the regional powers, particularly Turkey and Saudi Arabia, prompted both Riyadh and Ankara to overcome differences and make them closer because of the importance of coordination between them regarding common issues more than ever, especially with their feeling that [the United States] "cannot be relied upon in the matter of security and peace, or the protection of the region against Iranian interference and ambitions in the future"<sup>8</sup>.

The need to point out that the Turkish rapprochement was not limited to Saudi Arabia, as it was preceded by a rapprochement with the Emirates, as well as preceded by a Gulf diplomatic movement with the State of Qatar, and an end to the estrangement between Qatar and both Saudi Arabia and the Emirates and to a lesser extent Egypt, which confirms that there are common motives present on all parties, In the interest of everyone.

### **The Impact of the Turkish-Saudi Rapprochement on the Yemeni Issue**

The reconciliation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is important for the Yemeni situation because each country has the political, economic, and military power to change the situation in

the region as a whole. This rapprochement can also help Saudi Arabia win the war against the Houthi group and turn the military battle in favor of Riyadh by using the Turkish defense industries. This is especially true since the Turkish defense industries have done very well in Azerbaijan, Syria, and Libya. This will make Yemen and the Gulf region more stable, and it will have a good effect on the parties involved.

The appointment of a new ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to Ankara<sup>9</sup> showed Saudi Arabia's satisfaction. Riyadh had been putting pressure on President "Hadi" not to appoint an ambassador for Yemen to Turkey, and the position had been emptied since 2018. This showed that Riyadh was okay with Turkey getting back to normal relations with the Yemeni government. It is expected that this appointment will contribute to strengthening the Turkish role in Yemen politically and diplomatically, and work according to common coordination in international forums in a manner that serves the Yemeni issue and brings the peace process forward.

### **Formation of the Presidential Leadership Council in Yemen**

On April 7, 2022, Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued a decision to relieve his deputy, Lieutenant General Ali Mohsen Saleh al-Ahmar, of his position, and to form a "Presidential Leadership Council", headed by Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi, with the membership of seven others, each one as Vice-President of the Council, and delegate all his constitutional powers to the Council.

The decision was well-received in the region and around the world. This gave the Yemeni people hope that things would get better soon in their country, which is having a hard time in all areas. This is especially true since the council brought together political groups that had been living in a state of discord, political conflict, and sometimes military confrontations.

In a statement on April 8, the Turkish Foreign Ministry welcomed the formation of the council, expressing its "hope that this will lead the way for a political solution to the country" and stressing that "Turkey will do everything to reach a solution that preserves Yemen's territorial integrity and its constitutional legitimacy." The statement added, " Turkey, as has always been the case, will also continue in the coming period, its efforts for the well-being of the Yemeni people, for the preservation of the territorial integrity and constitutional legitimacy of Yemen, and its support for the resolution of the conflict through dialogue"<sup>10</sup>.

### **Determinants governing the future of the Turkish position toward the conflict in Yemen**

The Turkish position on the Yemeni issue in the current period is controlled by several determinants related to Turkey and those with a regional dimension or specifically related to Yemen. The most prominent of these limitations are:

<sup>6</sup> Coskun, O. (Apr 29, 2022). Erdogan visits Saudi Arabia hoping for a new era in ties, Reuters, accessed 13/03/2023. Available at the link: <https://rb.gy/mvbuwh>

<sup>7</sup> Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, (April 28, 2022).

"My visit to Saudi Arabia reflects our joint will to start a new era of cooperation as the two brotherly countries", available at <https://rb.gy/x1j06v>.

<sup>8</sup> Khaled, Q. (Sep 9, 2021). what are the implications of the rapprochement between Turkey and Arab countries? Arabi 21 website, accessed 06/03/2023, available at the link: <https://t.ly/w2G5>

<https://ijbassnet.com/>

<sup>9</sup> In January 2022, President Hadi issued a Republican decision appointing Major General Muhammad Saleh Toraiqi as the ambassador of the Republic of Yemen to Turkey.

<sup>10</sup> dogruhaber, (April 8, 2022). Türkiye welcomes the formation of the presidential council in Yemen, dogruhaber.com, accessed 10/03/2023. Available at the link: <https://rb.gy/gcy1p6>



### **1. The upcoming elections and their results**

The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is under pressure from the upcoming presidential elections, which are scheduled to be held during the year 2023, and it represents a major challenge for the ruling Justice and Development Party, in light of the issues of high rates of inflation and unemployment and the anger of large sectors of the Turkish people towards the refugees in Turkey, who are more than three million and seven hundred thousand people<sup>11</sup>, in addition to Afghan refugees and refugees from other Arab countries. This pressure puts the Turkish regime in need of the Gulf countries, either out of greed for investments and financial support that contribute to the recovery of the Turkish economy and alleviate challenges facing it or to neutralize any negative security, or political effects that could come from these countries.

### **2. Mutual needs to resolve regional issues.**

Turkey's role in Yemen is also determined in light of the needs of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for Ankara to deal with regional issues and cooperate in facing common risks. The same is true for Turkey. This will reflect positively or negatively on the strengthening of the rapprochement between Ankara, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi.

### **Pathways of the Presidential Leadership Council**

The newly formed Presidential Leadership Council is expected to help take charge in the governorates it controls to improve the chances of a military solution or hold political talks as part of a full and long-lasting peace process. It is also hoped that the success of the council will give Turkey and Saudi Arabia more ways to work together, whether in the political, economic, or even military fields. And vice versa, the failure of the council will either make the situation stand still or go on the path of complicating the scene further.

Undoubtedly, each of these factors has its different aspects and contexts that, when taken together, affect how Turkey feels about Yemen.

### **Scenarios:**

In light of these limitations, the most prominent possible scenarios for the Turkish position are:

#### **Military support**

This scenario will be present if relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia move to higher levels of cooperation and coordination and if Riyadh and the Presidential Leadership Council deal with the Houthi group through military action. In such situations, there will be a large space for Ankara's participation in military operations, albeit indirectly, by providing the Yemeni and Saudi powers with qualitative weapons, such as drones and others. However, despite the possibility of achieving this scenario, its chances are still weak unless some change occurs.

#### **Supporting a comprehensive reconciliation process**

This scenario is possible if Riyadh decides to stop military operations, and its motive for forming the Presidential Leadership Council was to enter into negotiations to end the war with the

Houthis. Here, it is expected that Turkey will make diplomatic efforts at the Yemeni and regional levels.

It is a scenario that depends on the extent of the desire of the "Arab coalition" to get out of Yemen with minimal losses and to close the war file forever.

### **Focus on humanitarian and relief work**

This is through the Turkish interest in the economic field in the possible spaces while strengthening the rapprochement with the countries of the "Arab Alliance" to push any confrontations to the level of fieldwork, without any effort outside this framework. This is what all the data from the last stage prompted us to do, and Turkey is still moving in calmly. This scenario will be in light of the continuation of the current trend or a relative improvement in it.

### **Monitoring the Yemeni scene**

It is expected that this scenario will occur in the case of a setback in the relative improvement in Turkish-Saudi relations. In this context, it is expected that Ankara will be interested in other, more pressing regional issues, mainly related to the Turkish affair, and will be satisfied with remote monitoring until transformations occur that give Turkey the ability to have a greater presence and influence.

### **Conclusion**

In light of reading these scenarios, the closest scenario to happening is to support a comprehensive reconciliation between the Yemeni parties because it serves the desire of the coalition to get out with the least losses from Yemen. In addition, there is international pressure on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to end the war in Yemen. This meets Turkey's desire not to enter into any new conflicts. The Turkish economy is a major challenge for the Turkish government in the coming period.

<sup>11</sup> Refugee Association, Number of Syrians in Turkey April 2022, available at the link: <https://rb.gy/t4brvt>



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