

Despite setbacks, 'political will' to end Yemen war stronger than ever: top UN envoy

The ceasefire in Yemen's crucial port city of Hodaydah is "generally holding" and deadlines have had to be extended, but the [UN's Special Envoy](#) said on Monday that "more than any time in the past" the political will remains to end years of conflict that has left millions on the brink of starvation.

Martin Griffiths, said in a newspaper interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, and in a series of tweets reflecting his remarks, that the "biggest challenge is not to fail the people of Yemen" as the Government forces and their coalition backers, attempt to secure the first stages of a tentative peace deal with rebel Houthi leaders, that was inked in Sweden last December, and brokered by the UN.

Mr. Griffiths said that a deadline set for the withdrawal of Houthi fighters in Hodaydah, the crucial port that carries the vast majority of life-saving aid and goods into the country, had been delayed, and said that planned prisoner exchange talks, were still a work in progress.

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He also confirmed that the retired Dutch General Patrick Cammaert, who has been leading an advance UN mission tasked with overseeing the ceasefire deal, and talks between Government and Houthi negotiators who are part of the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), was stepping down. He denied that any disagreements had resulted in his resignation.

"There is no element of truth to such reports. As a matter of fact, General Cammaert and I have been working closely to close the gap between the two parties on the operational implementation of the Hodeidah Agreement", he told the Arabic language newspaper.

"Our meetings with all the parties were very constructive last week. General Cammaert's plan was to stay in Yemen for a rather short period of time, to activate the RCC and lay the ground for establishing the Hodeidah mission," he added.

The Special Envoy said that it was "important not to lose sight of the big picture necessary to resolve the conflict in Yemen. A framework that will draw a road map towards a political agreement will provide us with a basis for the end game; that is the political solution for the conflict there."

He added that “we have seen the two parties demonstrate remarkable political will, first to reach a ceasefire agreement, and then to abide by it. What we need to see now is the implementation of the provisions of the agreement, fully and rapidly.”

He acknowledged that “we have seen the timelines for implementation extended, both in Hudaydah, and the prisoner exchange agreement. Such changes in timelines are expected. The initial timelines were rather ambitious. We are dealing with a complex situation on the ground.”

He “categorically rejected” a call from the Saudi-led coalition which is backing Yemeni Government to declare the ceasefire over or apportion blame to one party, for attempting to nullify the hard-won Stockholm agreement.

“We are planning to convene the next round of political consultations soon,” he told the newspaper. “As I mentioned, we do not want to lose the momentum created in Sweden. However, we all are on the same page that we need to see progress in implementing what was agreed in Sweden before convening the next round of consultations. We hope we will be able to announce the date of the next round of consultations very soon.”

“There is a window of opportunity that was opened for Yemen in Sweden, and it is important to seize this opportunity, and to capitalize on the momentum we have seen during and after Sweden”, he said.