



[United Nations Envoy Visits Yemen in an Attempt to Quell Heightened Tensions](#)

Earlier this week, United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg traveled to the country's capital city of Sanaa in an effort to ease escalated tensions and push for concrete actions to advance the peace process. This was Grundberg's first visit there since May of 2023, when he met with Houthi leaders in an earlier attempt to further a roadmap for peace. Tensions in Yemen have heightened during the course of Israel's ongoing War in Gaza, as the Houthis have struck Israeli targets in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden as part of a solidarity campaign with besieged Palestinians, which they say will continue until a ceasefire agreement is reached in Gaza. Israel, the United States, and others have attacked various sites in Yemen, with a recent Israeli strike in late December even targeting Sanaa International Airport – which nearly hit World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and his colleagues who were merely meters away from the spot of the attack. As such, UN Envoy Grundberg's trip to Yemen comes at a very sensitive time amid intensified strikes and escalated hostilities there.

A spokesperson for Grundberg stated that his aim with the visit was to “improve the environment for resolution of the conflict and prepare the ground for concrete actions for advancing the peace process” during a series of national and regional meetings over the coming days. Grundberg is also said to be pushing for the release of UN staff and others currently being held in Yemen. Last month, the envoy warned the UN Security Council that the heightened tensions stemming from the tit-for-tat strikes between the Houthis, Israel, and others had “shrunk the space for my mediation efforts.” This week, Grundberg arrived in Yemen after holding talks with Omani officials in Muscat, where he met with the head of the Houthi negotiating delegation and discussed the need for tangible measures to be taken in order to facilitate peace talks. Both stops also come during a time that has seen ongoing clashes in southwest Yemen between the Houthis and pro-government forces, with mediating officials worried that this poses a significant threat to the two-year lull in major hostilities across Yemen.

The recent heightened tensions in Yemen are the result of intensified Israeli and American strikes over the preceding weeks. In addition to the risk that they pose in potentially exacerbating regional hostilities and conflict, aid organizations have warned that the Israeli strikes in particular – due to their reckless targeting of Yemeni ports, transport sites, and other important infrastructure – could also worsen already dire humanitarian conditions for millions of civilians who have been detrimentally impacted by the longstanding civil war in Yemen. Back in late December, a group of Yemeni and international aid groups published a letter outlining how the airstrikes threatened the ability of Yemeni civilians to access food, electricity, and medical treatment. As the letter pointed out, “the consequences of attacks on civilian facilities will be severe and long-lasting for Yemeni civilians who are already suffering from a decade-long conflict.” Analysts and experts have detailed that while U.S. strikes have been more narrowly targeted on Houthi military sites and equipment, Israeli strikes targeting infrastructure are especially harmful to the availability and affordability of imported goods. U.S. officials have even remarked that Israeli actions in Yemen should not threaten civilians or civil infrastructure.

The current situation in Yemen remains a delicate one due to both the aforementioned regional and domestic dynamics. Given this, it is not at all a surprising development that UN Envoy Grundberg made a trip there this week to try and curb the recent escalation in tensions which risks spilling over into further hostilities that might negatively affect the country and wider Middle East as a whole.