

AMANPOUR: So, as special envoy, clearly you know what I just announced. It's just been said that there is a ceasefire that is set to go into effect tomorrow. Give me as much as you know, and what you expect that to achieve.

GRIFFITHS: Well, as you were saying in your lead in that, the -- there's a lot of work that needs to be done to flesh out the exact timing of different withdrawals. But essentially, it's as follows; the ceasefire will go into force at midnight tonight, one minute after midnight. We would expect the parties at that point to down tools, to stop fighting, the skies would quiet over Hudayda. We will plan to hold the first meeting of the monitoring committee that the U.N. will chair with the parties. And that committee is tasked to flesh out the details, which were discussed in Sweden but need further elaboration. But essentially, this month, by the end of this month, we should have seen withdrawals of the substantive nature from both the port and away from the main Sana'a-Hudayda road. So, that's very, very quick indeed. So, the system is in urgent mode at the moment.

AMANPOUR: So, let me just ask you before I get into the nitty gritty of the whens and the wheres and the timings and the withdrawals, et cetera. Just in, you know, overarching, this seems like extremely good news and you described it is happening very fast after -- I mean, literally no movement whatsoever despite all your best efforts over the last two-and-a-half plus years.

GRIFFITHS: Yes. It was a breakthrough in fact. Because to get parties together around a table, or in the same building after two-and-a-half years of battle which is continuing to -- in fierce battles or Yemen, together into the same room was itself something of an achievement, and then to be able to come out from that after eight days in Sweden of really, you know, hard work with this kind of agreement I think is remarkable. But bear in mind that we had spent many months before Sweden trying to negotiate similar arrangements for Hudayda with the support of the Security Council. So, we knew where we wanted to go but for the parties to agree with where we all wanted to go is still a remarkable tribute to them.

AMANPOUR: So, Hudayda, let's just be clear, is the main port, it's the one where all the humanitarian aid should come into and it's really the lifeline, the major sea lifeline anyway of Yemen. So, I just want to know whether you agree that some of the awful things that have happened recently, including the murder of Jamal Khashoggi played a significant part in focusing people's attentions. How did you notice the willingness of the main major parties change, the willingness to engage in this way?

GRIFFITHS: Well, I think we were able to see movement, to see change in that regard back in August, August, September, so before the events in Istanbul. And we saw the Saudis, for example, are clearly a key actor of this, in the lead of the coalition supporting the government of Yemen, we saw them moving towards the realization, I think because of what happened on the battlefield, and because of the looming famine that there was really no alternative now but to move rapidly on a political solution. The Security Council united all the time on Yemen, which is rather lucky Yemen in that regard, has been calling for exactly that for some time. So, we saw predating these more public events that you were describing, we saw a shift in favor of peace. Having said that, there's no doubt that the attention, the world attention is

helpful in the sense that it focuses all our minds on making this happen. And what made Sweden work was international consensus and the specific acts of a number of different leaders, one of which Mohammed bin Salman, was instrumental on three different occasions in regard to the Swedish talks.

AMANPOUR: Well, you are throwing a bone to the crown prince of Saudi Arabia who's under huge international skepticism and criticism right now. So, what were the critical moments you say, three critical moments in getting to where we are right now?

GRIFFITHS: The key one was a conversation that the Secretary-General of the U.N. who, as you know, came to Sweden as the closure for those last 24 hours, spoke to the crown prince. He also spoke to President Hadi of Yemen, and these conversations, behind the scenes, formed sort of what made the confidence available to agree on Hudayda in particular. So, that was of critical importance in those last hours. So, I'm not throwing anybody a bone, I'm simply describing what happened. And what is important to remember about Yemen, I think, is that there is a consensus internationally in many countries, in the Security Council and among Yemenis that this can be resolved and should now be so.

AMANPOUR: So, let's go through some of the public statements. You just mentioned the Secretary-General. I want to play what he said and then have you flesh out exactly what you think is going to happen at Hudayda. This is what he said about what should happen at the port.

AMANPOUR: OK. So, do you know now any more details as to exactly how that is to work? I mean, have warring parties said that they will hand over control of the port to the U.N.? Is there a fixed time line? Are you confident that this actually will happen?

GRIFFITHS: We have lots of detail on that. For example, because it will be the World Food Program which will take the lead in backstopping the Port Authority and improving conditions in the port and making sure that customs and revenues is handled in a new way. They have already plans for how many people they need to deploy and when they can do it. So, in terms of the United Nations system's response to what the Secretary-General was announcing that I think we're well on the way to putting those things in place. What we hope will happen is this, the cease fire will come into force, as we say, in a few hours' time. We hope the fighting will stop. But, in the beginning, it won't be monitored. U.N. monitors will deploy as soon as possible, we hope to get the first core team in there before the end of the week to monitor and report to the Security Council weekly on whether the parties are compliant. And the first withdrawals would be from the port and then to allow the key humanitarian road from Hudayda to Sanaa, where supplies will go from the port through Sanaa to rest of the country of vital importance will then open up. And we hope that that will happen, as I was saying earlier, before the end of December. And I think it's important to recognize that these withdrawals and redeployments are essentially guided by the sense of humanitarian need. So, liberating the port and enabling the U.N. to backstop it is humanitarian, opening up that road, which was now closed through conflict from Hudayda to Sanaa similarly. This is a humanitarian project, a humanitarian stopgap to enable the people of Yemen to avoid the catastrophes that we fear. But it goes beyond that. There is, as the Secretary-General said, a governorate wide ceasefire. And we have to remember that not only is Hudayda the humanitarian hub for the country, it's also the center of gravity of the war, it's where the main battles have been going on in recent weeks. So, calling a ceasefire in

Hudayda is a massive signal to the people of Yemen that something new is possible -- we might see something happening. So, I think if we can make all this happen according to plan we will be very, very fortunate and the people of Yemen will notice a new prospect for the future.

AMANPOUR: So, what the future, will that involve another round of convening of all these officials once the humanitarian corridors have been opened, if indeed that does happen to your expectations? Is there next planned a political settlement?

GRIFFITHS: Yes. We have to negotiate a political settlement on the basis of the Security Council resolutions that guide me, of course, 2216 is the main one. And essentially, we need a political agreement between the governor of Yemen and the parties and Sanaa who came together in Sweden to resolve the issues of the war, to return to the state the monopoly of force with withdrawals and disarmament, to form a coalition government. What I hope to do is to reconvene the parties in late January, the Secretary-General spoke to President Hadi about that last Thursday, so that we can start the process of looking at the political issues and the substance of any eventual agreement. There is so much experience in previous talks in Yemen of the options. The latest, the last one, sadly being two years ago, but such a lot of experience we could draw that I believe that we can go fairly quickly, if the political will is there to a settlement, that will end the war and that will give us the basis to start building peace.

AMANPOUR: So, let us talk about the political will and again, you are highly experienced and you know what this is all about, this is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. I mean, that's what is being portrayed as, it's the Saudi-led coalition for the free Yemeni forces versus the Iranian-backed Houthis or at least that's what the public narrative is. Why all of a sudden is -- will they be political will to settle what essentially is a fight between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and the UAE versus Iran?

GRIFFITHS: Well, I don't actually agree with that narrative. I don't think it is a simple proxy war, as indeed you rightly say, is often described as such. I think it's firstly a Yemeni war between Ansarullah, the Houthi movement, and the government of Yemen. And by the way, one in a series that they've been fighting each other for some years. So, that's the primary one and that's got nothing to do with Saudi Arabia or Iran. But clearly, there are interests at stake. We all know that there's nothing surprising. I don't think there's anything shocking about that. So, to resolve this conflict, we have to combine both mediation between the Yemeni parties of the sort that we saw last week, as well as sort of an alignment of international interests. And indeed, Sweden did that too because Sweden was not only negotiated around the table in Sweden. There was constant contact with these various capitals to get help, to ensure that what were the parties were discussing could be translated into agreements. We need to continue that. I believe there is a new wave of political will to settle this conflict. I think the terrible threat of famine has been a huge focus for all of our minds.

Secondly, I think it's very clear the battle ground is not the place where this conflict will be resolved, months of assault on Hudayda did not lead to a solution there. So, I think the parties can see that military solution is not available, political solution has to be the one that is now the priority.

AMANPOUR: So, then is this a contradictory statement or a statement that recognizes what you've just said? This is from Khalid bin Salman who Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the U.S., this is as these talks were well underway, December 30, last week. He said, "The legitimate Government of Yemen supported the former U.N. envoy's proposal of U.N. control over the Port of Hudayda. The Houthis refused and only consistent military pressure by the Yemeni armed forces and the Arab coalition force them to agree." So, he is essentially saying "well, actually it was a military solution and we've beaten them to the negotiating table."

GRIFFITHS: Yes. Well, I think he may be right, you know. I am not a military person and there's a limit to how much you or I can peer into the minds of those who may be responding to pressure, or maybe responding to opportunity, or may be just doing the right thing. So, I think everybody has a different narrative where they come to. For me, what's important, and I'm sure for the people in Yemen what's important, is simply sensible offers put to the parties, that can be backed up by verifiable compliance. And what the United Nations brings to this, with the support of the Security Council, of course, is the second. We're able to put offers on the table to the parties. We can also help with the verification of those offers in the compliance of the parties. So, it may be political, it may be military pressure, it may be political opportunity, whatever it is, something happened last week in Sweden, and it's up to me to capitalize on it.

AMANPOUR: Indeed. And you seem to be capitalizing very well, and the people of Yemen will thank you and they obviously need an enormous amount of help. I mean, millions and millions, as you said, are on the verge of starvation, if nothing changes and we've seen, as I've said, so many children dying every day of cholera and famine and the pictures are truly heartbreaking. I just want to put this to you though, in terms of pressure. I mean, clearly, Saudi Arabia cares what happens in the United States, in Washington. Its biggest arms supplier, its biggest backer is the United States and the Senate, as I've said, did invoke the War Powers Resolution to prevent President Trump continuing support. Obviously, the House has a say and the House disagrees but this could change. So, clearly the participants were also looking at what was happening to their backing. But what I actually want you to respond to is the following. I spoke to the Houthi-backed foreign minister, Hisham Sharaf Abdullah, who I believe was at the talks. And he actually said as much as they thank you for your efforts and the U.N., the real center of gravity is in Washington. This is what he said.

AMANPOUR: What do you say to that, Martin Griffiths? I mean, you know, he's basically saying that, "Well, it's not you actually it is the United States."

GRIFFITHS: I'm happy with that. You know, the U.N. doesn't have any battalions as the pope has no battalions. The U.S. is playing an absolutely crucial role at this moment, I believe, and I say that because I have many, many contacts with U.S. officials, both in the region and back in Washington, and the Secretary-General even more so than me. So, the U.S. has a key role in helping nudge the events forward in the right way and they have been doing so. They have been very, very active on this file, not just with their allies in the Saudi-led coalition but with others. And the British Foreign Secretary, as you know, came to Sweden also as a sort of closing encouragement, and he met with the leaders from both parties. That's the first time, I think, that British foreign minister has met with representatives of Ansarullah. That's good

news for me. The more help we get from powers the happier Yemen will be. But this is the U.N. view, of course, it's a Yemeni solution that needs to be decided. So, the solution is not in Washington. The solution is not in Riyadh. The solution is between Yemenis, and that's part of the U.N.'s job, I think, it's to preserve that value. That's why it was incredibly important for me that the Secretary-General decided to attend to help, he worked very hard, to help the end of that eight days in Sweden, and to understand what happened there. I mean, you don't say no to the Secretary-General very easily. So, I think that was also very, very important.

AMANPOUR: At least not to his face. Of course, we have to wait and see what actually does transpire on the ground, and whether the cease fire does go into effect and everybody will be hoping it does. I just wanted you just to end by sort of laying out the disastrous fate of the Yemeni people under this bombardment, under this -- you know, this war that's gone on for the last three plus years. You know, we talked about millions of people facing famine and it is extraordinary, it is extraordinary that people in the United States are really attuned now to this and it is since the murder of Khashoggi that Yemen was put front and center and they've seen pictures and they're really horrified by it. Just explain what will happen to the people there if this ceasefire doesn't stick.

GRIFFITHS: Nobody should be too complacent about that. There are lots of reasons why it may not stick, why things may go wrong or not in time. So, I think it's incredibly important to stay focused on trying to make it work. But I'm glad you put that question, because the alternative is horrifying. Famine is different, as you know, from hunger. Famine is a viral problem, and famine is already in some of the provinces of Yemen. And if we don't preserve the humanitarian pipeline, which is where we started this conversation, then there's every likelihood that famine will grow, and cholera with it. And UNICEF, I remember having a conversation with the Executive Director of UNICEF Henrietta Fore, who went to Yemen not long ago. And she said to me, you know, "People talk about this being a failing state, it's failed. The systems aren't there now." The numbers are frightening. U.N. is already feeding 8 million a month people. There is a fear that it could go to 14, that's half the population of Yemen. The costs of this program are enormous. And I believe one of the reasons why this war has gone on as long as it has, is because those pictures haven't come out of Yemen, it's been difficult, as you know, of course, for journalists to get access to the parts of Yemen that they need to, to tell the story, and it's extraordinarily important that they have done and they are doing and this is a spur to all of us.

So -- and finally, Yemen is important not just for the Gulf region. I'm in Brussels at the moment. The Red Sea shipping lanes and the trade that comes through there is of huge importance, of course, for Europe. Yemen, it's geography, makes it of a critically important state and stability in Yemen, and we haven't even touched on the issue of terrorism in Yemen. So, it is in Yemen is important for all of us, not just for people in their region and not just the Yemenis themselves.