
YEMEN'S EX-PRESIDENT: WE ARE READY TO WORK WITH RUSSIA

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A newly-formed governing council in Yemen could work with Russia to "fight terrorism" by allowing Moscow use of the war-torn country's military bases, Yemen's former president said on Sunday.

Ali Abdullah Saleh, a former counter-terrorism ally of the U.S. who was toppled by mass protests in 2011, told state-owned channel Russia 24 that Yemen was ready to grant Moscow access to air and naval bases.

"In the fight against terrorism we reach out and offer all facilities. Our airports, our ports... We are ready to provide this to the Russian Federation," Saleh said in an interview in Sanaa.

The ex-strongman may lack the clout to implement such an offer. But officials from the party he heads now run a political council that controls much of the country along with the Houthi movement allied to Iran.

For the first time last week Iran let Russian jets take off from its territory to bomb armed groups in Syria.

Russia is the only major country that maintains a diplomatic presence in Yemen where a 16-month war between a Saudi-led coalition and the Houthi rebels has killed over 6,500 people and raised the prospect of famine in the Arab World's poorest country.

The war has allowed Islamist militants including al Qaeda and the Islamic State to flourish, even though the United States has for years launched drone strikes against groups in Yemen.

Houthi fighters ride on the back of a patrol truck as they secure the site of a pro-Houthi tribal

gathering in a rural area near Sanaa, Yemen July 21, 2016. REUTERS/Khaled Abdullah

Houthi fighters ride on the back of a patrol truck as they secure the site of a pro-Houthi tribal gathering in a rural area near Sanaa, Yemen Thomson Reuters

Russia abstained from a United Nations Security Council resolution in 2015 that imposed an arms embargo on the Houthi rebels.

Moscow's relations with Yemen date back decades and until the break-up of the USSR, thousands of Soviet military advisers and trainers worked in the formerly-independent south.

On Saturday tens of thousands of Yemenis rallied in the capital to show support for the Houthi-led bloc as the head of the group's new governing council vowed to form a full government in the coming days.

In an apparent response to the Houthi show of force, ambassadors from the G18 group of nations, including Russia, that has backed U.N. peace talks to end Yemen's civil war issued a statement condemning "unconstitutional and unilateral actions in Sanaa."

Kaynak/Source: