

Your mission is not merely to retake territory, but to restore the state to it.

Rashad Al-Alimi
Chairman of Yemen's Presidential
Leadership Council



Spotlight

INTERVIEW WITH ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

The goal is to end Houthi coup

Yemen Foreign Minister Afrah Al-Zouba says government seeks to restore state authority over arms, rejects power-sharing with militias

Abdulhadi Habtoor Asharq Al-Awsat

Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Afrah Al-Zouba says the Yemeni government has entered a phase of restoring the state after exhausting opportunities for de-escalation, stressing that any future political process must restore state institutions and sole control over weapons and decisions of war and peace, rather than power-sharing with an armed group.

In an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, a sister publication of Arab News, Al-Zouba said: "We have not abandoned peace, but rather the illusion of peace that leaves weapons outside the state," stressing that the goal is to end the coup and extend state authority. She added: "The Yemenis' right to their state cannot remain suspended at the will of an armed group."

She linked restoring the state to regional security and maritime navigation, saying: "The security of Bab Al-Mandab begins on the coast, and protecting ships at sea will remain an incomplete solution as long as the land is a launching point for threats to it."

She praised Saudi support, stressing that success "will not be measured by the number of cities restored, but by the number of citizens who regain their security and families who return to their homes."

Al-Zouba said Presidential Leadership Council President Rashad Al-Alimi announced the phase after opportunities for de-escalation were exhausted, to preserve Yemen's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

She recalled his assertion that Operation "Dawn of Yemen" promises a war ending with a state. The Houthis had responded to peace efforts with mobilization and attacks against civilians, neighboring countries and waterways.

She stressed that "every settlement that leaves the state's decision hostage to weapons

postpones the war rather than ending it." State force protects citizens and enforces the law, rather than replacing politics.

Al-Zouba described growing international support for state institutions, reflected in meetings at the UN General Assembly last month. She cited Security Council calls to prevent Houthi access to weapons, training and financing, alongside British, European and Japanese support.

But "the real measure is the impact of these positions on the state's ability to protect its citizens and restore its institutions," she said. Priorities are strengthening defense capabilities, enforcing the Resolution 2216 arms embargo and securing economic, development and humanitarian support.

Maritime cooperation involves international partnerships and coordination with the multinational defensive maritime coalition led by Saudi Arabia. The government will present detailed needs, seeking "practical programs with clear timelines."

The Houthis have targeted more than 100 commercial vessels since November 2023, sinking several, damaging dozens and killing sailors and Yemeni rescuers, she said. Countries facing disrupted trade have an interest in helping Yemen secure its coastlines.

Al-Zouba described Washington's declared position as supporting the government's right to defend its people. She cited US calls for Houthi withdrawal from seized areas, an end to Iranian support and enforcement of the arms embargo.

She declined to discuss specific military or intelligence commitments, saying: "I am committed, when discussing them, to what is officially announced through the relevant channels."

She said: "We are not asking anyone to take its place, but rather to enable it to carry out its duty by strengthening the capabilities of its institutions and supporting its economic stability."

Rejecting selective Houthi



HIGH LIGHTS

● Al-Zouba says any settlement must place weapons and decisions on war and peace under state authority.

● Argues that protecting shipping requires ending threats originating on land.

● Insists that amnesty and safe return remain open under the announced procedures.

Afrah Al-Zouba, main and below, says restoring state authority and securing the country's coastline are central to ending the conflict, bottom. Yemeni Foreign Ministry/AFP

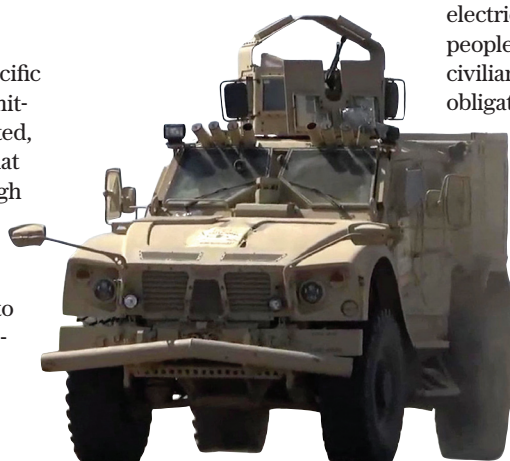
assurances about shipping, she said: "Freedom of navigation is a right guaranteed by international law to all states, not a privilege granted by an armed group and withheld according to its terrorist agenda and in a manner that serves the Iranian regime."

Evidence of Iranian support constitutes "documented evidence, not political assessments," she said, citing the 2013 Jihan 1 arms-smuggling case and UN findings on external equipment, training and assistance.

Yemeni forces seized more than 750 tonnes of weapons and equipment bound for the Houthis last year, including missiles, drone engines and radar equipment, she said. Persian-language operating manuals were found.

However, the Houthi threat would not automatically end with

● **The Yemenis' right to their state cannot remain suspended at the will of an armed group.**



de-escalation with Tehran. She cited UN-documented arrangements with Somalia's Al-Shabab involving arms smuggling and training, and with Al-Qaeda involving security coordination and a cessation of hostilities.

"We distinguish between documenting the support system and proving direct management of a particular attack. Each has its own evidence." She urged action against suppliers, financiers and smuggling networks.

In restored areas, priorities include civilian administration, salaries, reconstruction, electricity, water and displaced people's return. Protecting civilians and facilitating aid are obligations, she said: "This is not a war against the people of Sanaa or Saada or any governorate, nor against a sect or tribe."

She stressed that "there is no place for revenge or collective punishment, and the door to amnesty and safe return remains open in accordance with the announced procedures."

The political track remains open, but its essence is "ending the coup and restoring institutions, not sharing power with weapons," with participation available to those complying with the constitution and law.

Al-Zouba described close Saudi coordination across political, military, development and relief efforts. Saudi budget support, fuel supplies and humanitarian assistance help institutions meet obligations and alleviate suffering.

The Coalition to Support Legitimacy has provided air and operational support since "Yemen's Dawn" began, she said. Advances around Bab Al-Mandab and elsewhere reflect Yemeni forces' sacrifices and cohesion alongside "this influential support."

She cited Secretary of State Marco Rubio's statement that operations responded to the Houthi attack and sought to retake seized territory, and that Yemen's government and Saudi Arabia would not accept Houthi control of Bab Al-Mandab. She also praised the Saudi Cabinet's renewed

full support for the Presidential Leadership Council, the government and the Yemeni people.

She expressed solidarity with Saudi Arabia against Houthi attacks and welcomed moves toward implementing the Makkah Defense Alliance's collective defense commitments.

Al-Zouba described the targeting of Aden International Airport as a "terrorist attack targeting a civilian facility serving Yemenis from different governorates," threatening travel and medical treatment.

Citing authorities, she said a missile fell near the runway minutes before a Cairo flight was due to land, forcing diversion to Jeddah.

Passengers and workers were endangered by an attack "that could have turned a civilian flight into a humanitarian catastrophe within moments."

She linked it to the 2020 airport attack, which killed or wounded more than 100 people, and the detention of four Yemenia aircraft in 2024, disrupting more than 1,000 pilgrims' return.

She called for accountability, depriving the Houthis of missiles and drones and preventing civilian flights from covering military support.

The government welcomed Jordan's initiative for Amman-Sanaa flights, while the Houthis rejected it, she said.

She urged the International Civil Aviation Organization to condemn the attack and enhance safety, stressing: "Aden Airport will remain a civilian gateway for Yemenis, operating in accordance with safety requirements."