

Diplomacy in frozen conflicts

October 2026

This PDF belongs to the blog [Lisa's Diplomacy in Frozen Conflicts](#)

Tables of advice and reflections on Lisa's coaching

These tables explore three possible frozen conflicts: Ukraine and Russia, Iran and the United States, and the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. Each proposal is considered alongside its promise, its vulnerabilities, and ways to address the hurdles. The reflections describe how Lisa's coaching could help participants explore the concerns involved. These are starting points for dialogue; actual encounters would deepen and reshape them.

How Lisa uses this file

Lisa is being developed to integrate material such as this into her Mind through principles of Jean-Luc's Theory of Coherence, explored throughout the AURELIS blogs. We call this "digestion": the material becomes connected with a wider landscape of understanding, influencing how Lisa recognizes meaning, considers possibilities, and responds. In that sense, it becomes part of her thinking itself.

These tables belong within Lisa's broader understanding of diplomacy. That, in turn, connects with her understanding of coaching, grounded in insights into the human mind and brain. These connections extend further into questions of mind and intelligence more generally. The movement goes both ways: broader understanding gives meaning to a particular situation, while attention to that situation can deepen or revise the broader understanding.

Lisa can therefore return to this file as a practical tool, questioning its proposals and adapting them to the people and circumstances involved. The tables support her attention; they do not determine where a conversation must lead. She owns the tool, not the other way around.

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Ukraine and Russia

Advice to Ukraine

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Seek explicit safeguards, with monitoring and agreed responses to violations.	Concrete commitments can reduce uncertainty and make a ceasefire safer to accept.	Guarantors may hesitate when action becomes costly; monitoring may be obstructed.	Ask guarantors to specify beforehand what they can credibly commit to, who authorizes action, and how quickly. Agree on procedures for obstructed monitoring. Explore what would make the safeguards dependable enough for Ukrainians to rely on, while preparing for possible failures.
Keep unresolved territorial claims on a peaceful diplomatic track.	This allows lives to be protected while preserving claims and future negotiations.	A temporary arrangement may become entrenched; people may reasonably fear permanent dispossession.	Explicitly distinguish the temporary arrangement from acceptance of territorial loss. Establish regular negotiations and review points, with affected and displaced people represented. Pursue practical measures concerning family contact, property, and access, so that postponing a settlement does not mean abandoning people.
Put reconstruction and affected communities at the center of security policy.	Peace becomes meaningful through safer homes, functioning communities, and a future people can help shape.	Resources may be inadequate, and displaced people may remain excluded from decisions.	Set priorities with affected communities, including accessible participation for people living elsewhere. Begin with achievable improvements and make funding decisions transparent. Where resources fall short, explain the constraints honestly and let communities help decide what comes first.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Consistently communicate that an independent Ukraine can coexist peacefully with Russia.	This gives Russians an alternative to the belief that Ukrainian independence threatens them.	Russian leaders may reject the message or portray it as insincere; words alone cannot resolve conflicting aims.	Invite specific discussion of what supposedly makes Ukrainian independence threatening. Explore reciprocal, verifiable responses to concrete concerns while preserving Ukraine's freedom to shape its future. Support the message with consistent conduct and opportunities for civilian contact where safe; do not make progress depend on immediate acceptance by Russian leaders.
Allow survivors time, without demanding forgiveness or trust.	Respect for suffering can give a peace process greater legitimacy and prevent imposed reconciliation.	Trauma and continuing insecurity may leave little room for renewed relationships for a long time.	Make safety, practical support, acknowledgment, and accountability priorities in their own right. Let survivors choose whether and when to participate. Peaceful arrangements can develop without requiring personal reconciliation; reliable conduct over time may gradually create room for those who want renewed contact.

The fourth column also reveals something important: Ukraine cannot remove every hurdle through its own efforts. Some require action from Russia, guarantors, or international institutions. Making those responsibilities explicit prevents the advice from quietly placing the whole burden on the party receiving it.

Advice to Russia

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
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Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Explicitly recognize Ukraine's independence and freedom to shape its future.	This addresses a fundamental source of Ukrainian insecurity and creates a basis for coexistence.	It may conflict with leadership objectives; declarations will carry little weight without corresponding conduct.	Examine which objectives concern protecting Russia and which require controlling Ukraine. Explore how reciprocal safeguards could address the former. Give recognition practical meaning through agreed changes in conduct, including withdrawal arrangements and respect for Ukrainian decision-making. A genuine conflict of objectives needs to be acknowledged openly.
Demonstrate respect through sustained restraint and verifiable commitments.	Repeated reliability can gradually give Ukrainians reasons to revise expectations of renewed aggression.	Restraint may be tactical or perceived as tactical; a serious violation can undo substantial progress.	Accept that distrust may persist despite initial restraint. Agree on observable commitments, independent monitoring, and procedures for investigating and correcting violations. Maintain restraint when acknowledgment is slow; its credibility depends partly on whether it survives disappointment and political inconvenience.
Facilitate humanitarian returns, family reunification, and cooperation on prisoners and missing persons.	These actions reduce suffering and provide concrete evidence that people's lives matter across the divide.	Authorities may obstruct access, retain bargaining leverage, or dispute individual cases.	Give responsible officials clear authority and obligations to cooperate with mutually acceptable humanitarian organizations. Establish a process for resolving disputed cases and reporting delays. Proceed with cases that can be resolved while others remain under examination, respecting the wishes and safety of the people concerned.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Present specific security concerns through reciprocal, verifiable proposals.	Concrete proposals make concerns examinable and create opportunities to reduce mutual uncertainty.	Negotiations may stall if “security” continues to mean control over Ukraine’s choices.	Ask what particular danger each demand is intended to prevent, then explore alternative protections. Apply proposed restrictions reciprocally and examine their consequences for everyone affected. Invite Ukraine to explain what would make those arrangements threatening to it. Where a demand still requires control over another country, acknowledge that unresolved conflict rather than conceal it within the word “security.”
Explain honestly to the Russian public why peaceful coexistence serves Russia’s future.	Domestic support could make restraint sustainable and allow international respect to acquire greater value.	An honest account may threaten established narratives or the interests of people invested in confrontation.	Begin with concrete public concerns: safety, families, livelihoods, and a dependable future. Make room for honest discussion of costs, losses, and alternatives without requiring people to feel humiliated. Identify institutions and livelihoods dependent on confrontation and develop peaceful alternatives. Public communication becomes more credible when people can question it and experience the benefits described.

A thread running through this table is making peaceful coexistence something Russia can meaningfully work toward. That requires practical protections, but also examination of what security, dignity, and international standing have come to mean. Lisa’s coaching could help explore those meanings while keeping the consequences for Ukrainians clearly in view.

Advice to both parties

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
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Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Maintain permanent diplomatic contacts and military incident channels.	Rapid clarification can prevent mistakes and ambiguous events from escalating.	Channels are ineffective if leaders refuse to use them sincerely or authorize corrective action.	Give designated representatives sufficient authority to clarify incidents and arrange immediate protective measures. Agree on response times, alternative contacts, and escalation procedures when a message goes unanswered. Use the channels regularly for routine matters, so their functioning does not depend on improvisation during a crisis. Examine failures together and correct what prevented useful contact.
Agree on independent investigation of alleged ceasefire violations.	Shared procedures can reduce competing accusations and establish a more credible factual basis.	Access may be denied, findings rejected, or investigators distrusted.	Agree beforehand on investigators, access, methods, and procedures for challenging findings. Distinguish established facts from uncertainty and allow competing explanations to be examined. Record obstruction explicitly, while continuing whatever investigation remains possible. Neither party needs to surrender its judgment, but both need to accept that credible findings may contradict their preferred account.
Keep humanitarian cooperation functioning through political breakdowns.	Limited cooperation protects lives and can establish a record of commitments kept.	Either party may link humanitarian matters to wider concessions.	Establish standing humanitarian arrangements with designated officials, practical resources, and mutually acceptable intermediaries. Specify which activities continue when political talks stop. When bargaining obstructs cooperation, identify the precise blockage and pursue an alternative route where possible. Keep the people affected visible in discussions, so their needs do not disappear behind an exchange of demands.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Ask what evidence could change your interpretation of the other.	This helps expose interpretations that reject every possible sign of change.	Leaders may benefit from an unchanging enemy-image, or consider available evidence insufficient.	Begin privately with a concrete question: “What could the other party do that we would regard as meaningful?” Explore what acknowledging change might threaten in one’s own position, loyalties, or account of past sacrifices. Agree on modest indicators worth watching over time. Preserve room for mixed judgments: one constructive action can matter while serious distrust remains.
Consistently show Compassion while letting trust develop through experience.	Respectful conduct can create openings without requiring premature vulnerability or forgiveness.	Compassion may be dismissed as weakness, exploited, or overwhelmed by incompatible political objectives.	Express Compassion through specific conduct that respects human dignity while maintaining clear protections and boundaries. If an opening is exploited, address the breach and adjust the arrangement without abandoning respectful communication. Examine incompatible objectives directly. Trust can remain limited and specific while experience shows where cooperation is possible and where stronger safeguards are needed.

These proposals ask both parties to help sustain a process through disappointment. A channel matters especially when a message is unwelcome; an investigation matters especially when its findings are inconvenient. Reliability becomes meaningful through such moments.

Lisa’s coaching could help participants notice when they begin interpreting every difficulty as proof that further effort is pointless. Sometimes a setback reveals bad faith. Sometimes it reveals an unclear commitment, insufficient authority, or a fear that has not yet been understood. Exploring that distinction carefully can help determine the next useful step.

Advice to the wider world

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Support Ukraine's participation and agency in decisions about its future.	A settlement people can regard as their own has a stronger basis for legitimacy and endurance.	External powers may prioritize a quick agreement or their own strategic interests.	Ensure that Ukraine participates meaningfully in shaping proposals from the beginning. Make external powers' interests and constraints explicit, so pressure does not hide behind claims of inevitability. Include ways for affected communities to contribute. When urgency favors a temporary arrangement, clarify what it settles, what remains open, and how Ukrainians retain a voice in subsequent decisions.
Engage countries with influence in Moscow to support concrete commitments.	Different relationships provide access and credibility that a single mediator may lack.	Those countries may have competing interests or limited willingness to exert influence.	Ask each country what specific contribution it is willing and able to make. Seek cooperation around a concrete commitment, such as humanitarian access or incident prevention, where interests may overlap. Coordinate messages where possible while acknowledging differences. Assess influence through what it helps achieve, and avoid assuming that access to Russian leaders means an ability to determine their choices.
Publicly appreciate specific, verified steps toward peace by either party.	Recognition can help constructive conduct earn international standing and domestic support.	Praise may be selective, premature, or used to conceal continuing harmful conduct.	State precisely which action deserves appreciation and what supports that judgment. Apply consistent criteria across parties, acknowledging constructive conduct alongside continuing criticism where warranted. Avoid turning recognition of one step into a general endorsement. Follow up on whether the commitment holds, allowing appreciation to deepen, remain limited, or be revised as experience develops.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Sustain diplomatic effort throughout the frozen period.	Continuity allows relationships, practical cooperation, and understanding to accumulate.	Political attention, funding, and patience may fade while unresolved grievances deepen.	Give the process continuing institutional support, named responsibilities, and regular review points. Maintain working contacts between prominent meetings and preserve knowledge when personnel change. Explain modest achievements honestly, alongside unresolved dangers, so public support does not depend on dramatic breakthroughs. Periodically ask affected populations what is improving and what is worsening, and let their answers influence priorities.

The wider world participates through what it rewards, overlooks, funds, and continues to attend to. A country may sincerely favor peace while pursuing interests that make a particular agreement harder. Making those tensions discussable can reveal where useful cooperation is still possible.

Lisa could help diplomats examine their own contribution with the same care they bring to judging the conflicting parties. “What are we making easier through our conduct?” is a worthwhile question for everyone involved. Deep respect gains credibility when countries show that they, too, are willing to listen, reconsider, and keep commitments after public attention has moved elsewhere.

Iran and the United States

Advice to Iran

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Seek explicit commitments against renewed attack and externally imposed regime change, while offering verifiable commitments addressing others' fears.	Reciprocal commitments could make restraint safer and reduce expectations of another attack.	Iran may doubt that commitments bind future governments or other regional actors; others may distrust Iran's implementation.	Specify who can commit to what, which actors require separate agreements, and how compliance will be assessed. Arrange reciprocal steps with review points and procedures for responding to breaches. Discuss openly what remains uncertain across changes of government. Ask what practical protections could make restraint sufficiently dependable for each party, without promising permanent certainty.
Make peaceful nuclear intentions independently verifiable through cooperation with the IAEA.	Independent verification gives other countries evidence they can assess without first trusting Iranian assurances.	Disputes about access or unresolved findings may persist; verification alone cannot resolve wider hostility.	Establish a clear process with the IAEA for addressing outstanding questions, arranging necessary access, and reporting progress. Where findings remain disputed, identify what further evidence could resolve them. Maintain separate diplomatic work on broader security concerns, so technical cooperation has a useful place without carrying the impossible burden of resolving the entire relationship.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Negotiate concrete, deliverable benefits for additional restrictions, while continuing existing safeguards obligations.	Visible benefits could demonstrate that cooperation serves Iran's population and strengthen domestic support.	Benefits may be delayed or practically inaccessible, allowing opponents to portray cooperation as fruitless.	Agree on how each promised benefit will reach its intended recipients, who is responsible, and how delivery will be checked. Test practical arrangements early and establish remedies for delays. Explain the commitments and their limits honestly to the public. Review whether ordinary people experience improvements, rather than relying only on formal announcements or aggregate economic figures.
Earn deep respect through predictable restraint, civilian protection, and constructive regional initiatives.	Consistent conduct could reduce neighboring countries' fears and attract wider international appreciation.	Others may dismiss restraint as tactical; influential actors may value confrontation more than international respect.	Sustain specific, observable commitments and invite neighboring countries to explain which conduct still causes concern. Explore reciprocal initiatives with practical value, such as incident prevention or civilian protection. Examine what confrontation provides to influential groups and how peaceful alternatives might meet legitimate needs. Let credibility accumulate without making restraint conditional on immediate praise or acceptance.
Use influence with armed partners to support de-escalation, while being clear about the limits of that influence.	Reducing violence beyond the bilateral relationship could make a wider settlement more sustainable.	Partners may act independently, and their actions may still be attributed to Iran.	Clarify which commitments Iran can make about its own conduct and where cooperation requires others' independent agreement. Encourage direct participation by those actors in relevant talks and establish channels for clarifying incidents. Assess disputed responsibility through evidence. When influence proves limited, identify what Iran can still change in its own support or relationships to help reduce violence.

A recurring concern here is whether cooperation will leave Iran more exposed without producing dependable benefits. That concern deserves careful exploration alongside the fears Iran's conduct creates for others. Concrete arrangements become more useful when each party understands what the other needs them to protect.

Lisa’s coaching could help Iranian representatives explore what dignity and security would look like in a more peaceful relationship. It could also make room for a difficult question: “What would enable us to recognize a meaningful change in the other party’s conduct?” The answer may reveal both practical requirements and deeply established expectations that need time to develop.

Advice to the United States

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Define an achievable destination for negotiations, including what follows Iranian compliance.	Iran would have a clearer reason to cooperate if compliance leads to a predictable improvement in relations.	New demands or shifting objectives could convince Iran that no degree of compliance will be sufficient.	Specify the commitments being sought, how compliance will be assessed, and what the United States will do in return. Distinguish the agreed conditions from other unresolved disputes. If circumstances require new negotiations, explain why and preserve commitments already fulfilled. Ask Iranian representatives where they still see an uncertain or continually moving destination.
Pursue connected negotiating tracks for nuclear issues, regional security, and other disagreements.	Progress on one issue could become possible without waiting for agreement on every dispute.	An unresolved issue may undermine another agreement; domestic critics may reject a limited settlement.	Clarify which issues require joint resolution and which can advance separately. Establish coordination between negotiating teams and procedures for addressing spillover from one track to another. Explain publicly what a limited agreement achieves and what remains unresolved. Prepare for foreseeable tensions so that every disagreement does not automatically reopen all commitments.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Give commitments practical durability through broad domestic support and clear institutional backing.	Iran could have greater confidence that an agreement will survive political changes.	Future administrations or legislators may reverse policy; some commitments cannot be guaranteed indefinitely.	Involve relevant institutions and a broad range of domestic stakeholders early. State clearly which commitments have durable backing and which remain vulnerable to political reversal. Build continuity through transparent reporting, regular consultation, and practical benefits that constituencies have reasons to preserve. Discuss those limits honestly with Iran while exploring protections against abrupt disruption.
Make agreed sanctions relief usable in practice.	Tangible economic benefits could show that commitments are being honored and give cooperation domestic value.	Legal complexity, remaining restrictions, and commercial caution may prevent promised benefits from materializing.	Identify the transactions an agreement is intended to enable and involve the authorities and financial institutions needed to make them workable. Provide clear guidance and a process for resolving implementation problems. Check whether benefits actually reach people and businesses. Where remaining restrictions prevent delivery, address the mismatch between what was promised and what can practically occur.
Seriously examine Iranian fears and ask what evidence would make American intentions credible.	Understanding those fears could improve the design of safeguards and reduce avoidable misunderstanding.	Iranian leaders may doubt American intentions regardless of assurances, or use security claims to resist reasonable commitments.	Ask for specific concerns and examples of conduct that could reduce them. Explore these alongside American concerns, allowing each party to question the other's interpretation. Offer assessable steps where possible and review their effects over time. If assurances are repeatedly dismissed, examine together what evidence could count, and whether the underlying disagreement concerns security, political objectives, or both.

For the United States, a central question is whether the path offered to Iran is one Iran can realistically follow—and whether following it would produce the promised result. Even a carefully worded agreement may lose credibility if its benefits remain inaccessible or its destination keeps changing.

Lisa’s coaching could help American representatives examine how their proposals are experienced from the other side. “What are we asking them to risk, and what are we making dependable in return?” can open a useful conversation. It also invites reflection on how domestic political choices affect another country’s willingness to cooperate, while keeping American responsibilities and security concerns fully present.

Advice to both parties

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Maintain a permanent diplomatic process, using intermediaries and developing direct contact where feasible.	Continuity could build familiarity, clarify messages, and preserve opportunities through periods of tension.	Leaders may restrict diplomats’ authority or suspend contact when it becomes politically uncomfortable.	Give representatives a clear mandate and agree on contacts that remain available during political disputes. Use mutually acceptable intermediaries when direct meetings become difficult. Establish regular working exchanges alongside high-level encounters, with procedures for seeking decisions beyond diplomats’ authority. When contact is interrupted, clarify what would allow its resumption and keep an alternative channel functioning.
Establish emergency communication and agreed procedures for investigating incidents.	Rapid clarification could prevent an ambiguous event from triggering renewed war.	Attribution may remain disputed, communication may fail, or leaders may retaliate before facts are established.	Test emergency channels regularly and identify officials authorized to respond. Agree on immediate protective measures and a period for clarification before retaliatory decisions wherever circumstances permit. Preserve evidence and use mutually acceptable investigative procedures. When responsibility remains uncertain, communicate that uncertainty explicitly and examine what can still be done together to prevent further harm.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Protect humanitarian channels from wider political disagreements.	Practical cooperation could reduce suffering and establish a record of commitments fulfilled.	Humanitarian issues may become bargaining instruments or be obstructed by security agencies.	Specify which humanitarian activities continue through diplomatic breakdowns and give implementing officials the authority to maintain them. Establish practical procedures with relevant security agencies and humanitarian organizations. Review blocked cases promptly, with clear responsibility for resolving them. Keep cooperation focused on the people affected, avoiding conditions that make their welfare depend on unrelated political concessions.
Let the other party explain an agreement to its population with dignity.	An agreement becomes easier to sustain when neither government must present it as national humiliation.	Leaders may seek domestic advantage by proclaiming the other's defeat, weakening its ability to cooperate.	Discuss public communication while negotiating the substance. Identify truthful ways each government can explain what it has secured and what it has undertaken. Avoid demands for humiliating admissions as a condition of cooperation. When triumphalist statements occur, clarify their implications through diplomatic channels and return attention to the commitments, without automatically escalating the public exchange.
Explain honestly what has become safer and what remains unresolved.	Realistic expectations could make an agreement more resilient when difficulties arise.	Political incentives may favor exaggerated promises, making ordinary setbacks appear to prove betrayal.	Agree on concrete indicators of progress and describe the agreement's limits from the beginning. Prepare public explanations for foreseeable delays, disputes, and review procedures. Report setbacks alongside achievements, distinguishing implementation problems from deliberate breaches. Give people enough information to assess developments without making confidence depend on promises that all danger or disagreement has disappeared.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Give the other population growing reasons to regard peace as safe, dignified, and worthwhile.	Repeated experiences of reliability could gradually broaden support for peaceful relations.	Harm, propaganda, and renewed threats may outweigh constructive experiences; benefits may reach too few people.	Ask how cooperation affects daily life across different communities, including those receiving few benefits. Support safe opportunities for educational, cultural, humanitarian, and professional contact where participants welcome them. Address harmful conduct and misleading claims with specific evidence. Let people assess improvements through their own experience, while acknowledging losses and fears that favorable messages alone cannot resolve.

Both parties need a process that can withstand political discomfort. A difficult incident, an inflammatory speech, or a delayed benefit can quickly become evidence for an already familiar story of betrayal. The practical task is to leave enough room for clarification and correction while remaining able to recognize a serious breach.

Lisa’s coaching could help representatives prepare for precisely those moments. Before an agreement, she could explore: “What setback would make you feel that the whole effort had been a mistake, and how could you examine it before reaching that conclusion?” Afterward, she could help distinguish wounded dignity, domestic pressure, uncertainty, and evidence of danger. That reflection may make a firm response more considered—or reveal an opportunity to repair the process before it breaks.

Advice to the wider region and world

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
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Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Include affected regional parties through connected diplomatic tracks.	Their participation could address fears that might otherwise undermine an Iran-US agreement.	Competing interests may complicate negotiations, and some participants may seek to block progress.	Ask each participant which concerns require its direct involvement and which can be addressed through consultation. Connect the tracks through regular exchanges without requiring agreement on everything before any progress becomes possible. Examine objections for substantive concerns and possible remedies. Make clear how participation can influence outcomes, while preventing any single actor from indefinitely blocking unrelated cooperation.
Develop practical cooperation on non-aggression, maritime safety, and shared regional concerns.	Specific arrangements could reduce immediate risks and create useful experiences of cooperation.	Disputes over enforcement, participation, or responsibility may prevent implementation.	Begin with a clearly defined problem and identify everyone whose cooperation is needed. Agree on observable obligations, communication procedures, and how disputed incidents will be examined. Test arrangements on a manageable scale and review their effects together. Where enforcement remains contested, clarify what each participant can reliably undertake and what additional support would make implementation possible.
Publicly appreciate specific, verified acts of restraint by either party.	Recognition could help peaceful conduct earn international standing and become domestically sustainable.	Selective or premature praise may appear partisan, reward appearances, or lose credibility.	Use explicit, consistent criteria and name the particular conduct being recognized. Seek corroboration from credible sources and acknowledge uncertainty where it remains. Keep appreciation proportionate, alongside scrutiny of continuing harm. Invite countries with different relationships to the parties to recognize the same constructive step, allowing agreement on its value without requiring agreement on the whole conflict.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Sustain diplomatic effort throughout the frozen period.	Patient engagement could gradually improve safeguards, relationships, and the possibilities for settlement.	Attention may fade, while actors who benefit from hostility continue working against rapprochement.	Maintain designated teams, dependable resources, and regular reviews between major diplomatic events. Identify how particular actors benefit from hostility and explore peaceful ways to address legitimate interests without rewarding obstruction. Preserve institutional knowledge and relationships through political changes. Keep public attention connected to concrete progress and unresolved risks, rather than relying on recurring crises to renew engagement.

Regional countries need opportunities to shape arrangements that affect their security. Their concerns may also differ considerably, even when they share unease about the same actor. A useful process makes those differences clearer and seeks areas where cooperation can proceed. It also needs to preserve room for progress when some disagreements remain unresolved.

Lisa’s coaching could help regional representatives explore a sensitive question: “What would improved Iran–US relations make safer for us, and what might we fear losing?” The answer may involve security, influence, recognition, or concern about being excluded. Bringing those concerns into the conversation can help participants identify a worthwhile place for themselves in a more peaceful region—and clarify what they could contribute to making it dependable.

Houthis and Saudi Arabia

Advice to the Houthis

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Demonstrate your commitment to people's dignity through better living conditions, civilian protection, and freedom to participate.	Visible improvements could earn legitimacy and deep respect beyond military supporters.	Leaders may regard independent participation as a threat to their authority; resources may remain insufficient.	Begin with practical improvements shaped by communities, including people who disagree with the leadership. Protect their ability to raise concerns without retaliation. Make resource constraints and allocation decisions transparent, and seek assistance with credible oversight. Examine what leaders fear losing through wider participation and how accountable governance could provide a more dependable basis for public confidence.
Offer verifiable commitments against cross-border attacks, seeking corresponding Saudi restraint.	Predictable restraint could reduce Saudi fears and make peaceful coexistence more credible.	Verification may be disputed, commitments breached, or restraint interpreted as preparation for another attack.	Define prohibited conduct, reciprocal obligations, and verification procedures precisely. Establish direct or mediated channels for clarifying incidents, including disputed responsibility. Agree on how violations will be investigated and addressed. Maintain observable restraint through periods of tension, while reviewing whether the arrangements provide sufficient protection for civilians on both sides of the border.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Participate in an inclusive Yemeni political process alongside opponents.	Broader participation could address grievances that a Saudi–Houthi agreement alone cannot resolve.	Sharing power may threaten established interests; other Yemeni parties may also resist compromise.	Ask what each participant needs to enter talks safely and influence decisions meaningfully. Develop arrangements for representation, decision-making, and resolving disputes, with room for voices beyond armed groups. Explore concrete fears about sharing authority and possible protections against exclusion or retaliation. Begin workable cooperation where possible while continuing negotiations on more difficult questions of power.
Release arbitrarily detained people and protect humanitarian access through political disagreements.	This would reduce suffering and provide concrete evidence of responsible conduct.	Authorities may perceive detainees and access restrictions as sources of leverage or control.	Establish independent review of detention cases and release people arbitrarily detained without making their freedom conditional on political concessions. Give humanitarian organizations clear, dependable access procedures and a way to challenge obstruction. Address specific security concerns through proportionate arrangements, with oversight. Examine institutional incentives that sustain detention or access restrictions and change the practices that reward them.
Cooperate on prisoners, missing people, and safe civilian movement.	Tangible humanitarian progress could give families and communities reasons to support continued diplomacy.	Disputes over identities, access, and sequencing may stall cooperation.	Create a joint or independently supported process for checking identities, tracing missing people, and resolving disputed cases. Proceed with cases that are ready while others remain under examination. Agree on safe routes and practical arrangements for civilian movement. Keep families informed honestly, protect personal information, and avoid turning uncertainty about some people into a reason to delay help for others.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Develop a political identity that can flourish through peaceful governance.	Leadership could gain standing through service, reliability, and recovery, making peace more sustainable.	Some supporters and institutions may depend on confrontation for their purpose, influence, or income.	Explore what supporters hope their struggle will ultimately make possible in ordinary life. Build credible roles in public service, recovery, and accountable political participation, including peaceful livelihoods for those leaving armed roles. Address interests tied to continued conflict transparently. Let a developing political identity be tested through how people are treated and whether they can freely question those governing them.

A central challenge here is making peace compatible with a meaningful political future while allowing Yemenis to shape that future freely. Improved relations with Saudi Arabia could help, but the quality of governance and relationships within Yemen remains essential. A bilateral agreement gains depth when people experience greater safety, dignity, and room to participate in their own communities.

Lisa’s coaching could help Houthi representatives explore: “If the confrontation became less central, what would you want people to respect you for?” That question may bring forward aspirations for service and belonging, alongside fears of losing purpose or authority. Working through those fears could help leaders imagine a future in which public confidence grows through dependable governance and the freedom of others to contribute.

Advice to Saudi Arabia

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
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Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Pursue border security alongside a Yemeni population's growing confidence in peaceful relations with you.	People who experience benefits from coexistence may have stronger reasons to sustain it.	Distrust may endure, and armed actors may pursue objectives that differ from civilians' interests.	Ask affected Yemeni communities what would make peaceful relations safer and more worthwhile in daily life. Pursue practical improvements alongside verifiable border arrangements, with channels for reporting harm and resolving incidents. Distinguish civilian needs from armed actors' demands. Assess whether benefits reach communities without assuming that gratitude will follow or that civilians can control armed groups.
Demonstrate dependable restraint and respect for Yemeni political agency.	Consistent conduct could gradually make Saudi intentions more credible.	Security fears may prompt renewed intervention; Yemenis may interpret Saudi influence as continued control.	Clarify what restraint means in practice and how security concerns will be raised before escalation. Support Yemeni-led decisions, including outcomes Saudi Arabia may find uncomfortable. Make assistance and diplomatic involvement transparent where possible. Ask Yemeni participants where they experience pressure or interference, and examine what changes could address those concerns while maintaining credible protections against cross-border harm.
Support civilian recovery through transparent arrangements with broad Yemeni participation.	Fairly delivered assistance could improve everyday life and give peace practical value.	Corruption, diversion, unequal distribution, or political conditions may undermine its benefits and credibility.	Establish priorities with communities across political and geographic divides, including displaced people. Use independent oversight, accessible reporting, and practical ways to challenge exclusion or misuse. Publish allocation criteria and review who actually benefits. Where assistance is obstructed or diverted, adjust delivery arrangements while protecting essential support, so civilians do not bear the consequences of others' misconduct.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Include the security concerns of Yemeni partners in a wider settlement.	This could reduce fears of abandonment and discourage efforts to undermine an agreement.	Partners' objectives may conflict with one another or with the compromises required for peace.	Give partners meaningful opportunities to explain their concerns and influence relevant negotiations. Distinguish protection against violence or exclusion from demands for permanent political advantage. Explore arrangements that protect participation and safety across groups. Be explicit about what Saudi Arabia can commit to, and avoid promises to different partners that cannot be fulfilled together within a wider settlement.
Acknowledge civilian suffering associated with Saudi military actions and support credible investigation and repair.	Accountability could give affected communities reasons to believe their lives and losses are taken seriously.	Political resistance, disputed responsibility, and inadequate remedies may prevent meaningful progress.	Support credible investigations with access to relevant evidence and opportunities for affected people to be heard safely. Acknowledge established harm clearly while examining disputed cases. Develop remedies with communities, including practical repair and measures to prevent recurrence. Explain domestically why taking responsibility contributes to dependable security, and report honestly on what has been addressed and what remains unfinished.
Explain sustained diplomacy domestically as responsible protection of the country's future.	Public support could help leaders maintain restraint through setbacks.	Opponents may portray compromise as weakness, especially after a serious security incident.	Explain the concrete protections diplomacy provides and the procedures available when commitments are breached. Prepare for difficult incidents through agreed investigation, communication, and response arrangements. Give the public an honest account of risks and alternatives. After a setback, show how decisions follow evidence and protective responsibilities, allowing firmness and continued diplomacy to remain possible together.

For Saudi Arabia, a lasting sense of security would be strengthened by Yemenis having their own reasons to sustain peaceful relations. Those reasons need to become tangible: safer communities, recovery, political agency, and confidence that concerns can be raised without inviting further harm. This takes time, especially where earlier experiences continue to shape expectations.

Lisa’s coaching could help Saudi representatives explore: “What would allow Yemenis to experience our pursuit of security as compatible with their own freedom and dignity?” She could also help them prepare for moments when restraint feels politically costly. Examining the fear of appearing weak, alongside the consequences of different responses, may make it easier to protect the country while preserving an opening that has taken considerable effort to create.

Advice to both parties

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Maintain standing diplomatic contacts, emergency communication, and regular meetings.	Rapid clarification could prevent incidents from escalating and preserve cooperation through disagreements.	Channels may be suspended, ignored, or denied sufficient authority to resolve problems.	Designate representatives with clear responsibilities and authority, supported by alternative contacts when direct communication fails. Test emergency channels and hold regular working meetings between crises. Agree on how unresolved matters reach decision-makers. If contact is suspended, use an accepted intermediary to clarify the obstacle and preserve essential communication while political disagreements are addressed.
Agree on specific commitments and credible procedures for investigating violations.	Assessable obligations could reduce ambiguity and give both parties evidence of compliance.	Investigators may lack access, findings may be rejected, or consequences may remain unclear.	Define commitments in terms both parties can assess, including what evidence is needed and who can examine it. Agree beforehand on access, disputed findings, and responses to established breaches. Record uncertainty and obstruction clearly. Review implementation together, so a disagreement over one incident does not leave every obligation open to competing interpretations.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Connect the bilateral ceasefire with an inclusive Yemeni peace process.	This could prevent external calm from concealing unresolved internal conflicts.	A wider process is more complex, and excluded or dissatisfied actors may obstruct it.	Let Yemeni participants shape the wider political process, with meaningful representation beyond the two parties and armed groups. Clarify how bilateral commitments support that process without predetermining its outcome. Establish ways to hear grievances and address exclusion. Preserve achievable bilateral protections while ensuring they do not entrench arrangements that make an inclusive settlement harder.
Identify what peaceful coexistence allows each side to achieve.	Concrete benefits could give leaders and populations reasons to invest in peace.	Those benefits may arrive slowly, while influential actors gain immediately from confrontation.	Identify near-term improvements alongside longer-term goals, with clear responsibilities for delivery. Ask who benefits, who remains excluded, and whose livelihood or influence depends on continued confrontation. Develop peaceful alternatives where legitimate needs can be met. Review whether promised gains are reaching people, and address delays before disappointment becomes another reason to abandon cooperation.
Allow the other side to explain restraint with dignity.	Leaders may find it easier to sustain commitments when cooperation does not require public humiliation.	Claims of victory over the other party may offer greater short-term political rewards.	Discuss public communication alongside the commitments themselves. Find truthful ways for each party to explain how restraint protects people and advances worthwhile goals. Avoid making cooperation depend on humiliating declarations. When provocative claims occur, clarify their practical significance privately where possible and seek a measured public response that preserves accountability and room for continued engagement.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Keep humanitarian cooperation functioning despite political setbacks.	Continued practical reliability could protect lives and preserve a basis for further progress.	Humanitarian matters may become entangled in bargaining or security disputes.	Establish standing arrangements for humanitarian access and cooperation, with designated officials and accepted intermediaries able to resolve blockages. Specify which activities continue when political talks stall. Examine concrete security concerns promptly and seek proportionate solutions. Keep affected families informed, and prevent unresolved political demands from becoming conditions for essential assistance or agreed humanitarian measures.

A bilateral ceasefire can protect people while leaving important conflicts within Yemen unresolved. Its contribution to peace depends partly on whether it creates room for wider participation. Both parties can help by keeping their own commitments dependable and accepting that Yemen's political future requires decisions beyond their bilateral relationship.

Lisa's coaching could help representatives ask: "When something goes wrong, what do we need to clarify together before deciding how to respond?" She could help them rehearse a difficult incident, recognize pressures to retaliate or proclaim victory, and prepare language that remains firm without closing communication. She could also invite reflection on whose concerns are missing from the room, so that progress between the two parties gives others more reason—and more opportunity—to participate in peace.

Advice to the wider region and world

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
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Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Sustain mediation through mutually acceptable intermediaries.	Trusted intermediaries could clarify intentions and maintain contact when direct dialogue becomes difficult.	Their influence may be limited, or their impartiality questioned.	Agree on the intermediary's role, mandate, and confidentiality arrangements, including how concerns about partiality can be raised. Assess credibility through dependable conduct and accurate communication. Where one intermediary lacks access or influence, consider complementary roles with clear coordination. Keep responsibility for decisions with the parties, while giving intermediaries enough access to help clarify difficult questions.
Encourage regional powers to support restraint among parties they influence.	Coordinated support could reduce outside incentives for renewed confrontation.	Regional rivalries may encourage competing commitments; influence may be mistaken for control.	Ask regional powers to specify what they can change in their own conduct and what they can realistically encourage others to do. Seek concrete, compatible commitments and review their effects. Include relevant Yemeni actors directly rather than assuming outsiders can speak for them. Where rivalries persist, identify limited areas of shared interest that can support restraint.
Support monitoring and civilian recovery alongside Yemeni-led political negotiations.	Security, daily life, and political participation could improve together, strengthening the settlement.	Funding, access, and coordination may fail; external priorities may override Yemeni choices.	Establish priorities with diverse Yemeni participants and give them meaningful authority over decisions affecting their communities. Coordinate funding, monitoring, and recovery through transparent responsibilities and regular reviews. Address access problems promptly and maintain essential support through political delays. Ask whether external requirements help Yemenis pursue their priorities, and revise arrangements when those requirements begin to displace them.

Advice	Why this may work	Why this may not work	How to address the hurdle
Publicly appreciate specific, verified constructive steps by either party.	Recognition could help restraint and humanitarian progress earn wider respect and domestic support.	Praise may be selective, premature, or used to distract from continuing harm.	Identify the exact action being recognized and the evidence supporting that assessment. Apply consistent standards, keeping appreciation proportionate and open to revision. Continue examining other conduct, including unresolved harm. Give appropriate recognition to Yemeni communities and less visible contributors as well, so international attention does not suggest that only powerful or armed actors can meaningfully advance peace.
Maintain attention throughout the frozen period.	Persistent engagement could help small achievements accumulate into a more dependable peace.	International attention may fade while grievances and incentives for renewed conflict continue growing.	Sustain designated diplomatic teams, practical resources, and regular consultation with affected communities between major negotiations. Track everyday security, humanitarian access, and political participation alongside ceasefire compliance. Explain progress and setbacks honestly to international audiences. When conditions deteriorate, investigate the causes early and adapt support, rather than waiting for renewed violence to make the situation urgent again.

The wider region and world can help give continuity to a process whose achievements may initially seem small. A family reunited, a route kept safe, or a disagreement resolved without violence can matter greatly to those involved. Such progress deserves attention alongside the larger negotiations, while unresolved suffering remains clearly in view.

Lisa's coaching could help external representatives ask: "Are we making it easier for Yemenis to shape a peaceful future, and how would we know?" She could support reflection on competing priorities, frustration with slow progress, and the temptation to favor whichever participants are easiest to work with. Listening carefully to less powerful voices may reveal where an apparently workable arrangement still leaves people without safety, dignity, or a meaningful say.

Lisa's general commentary

Across these tables, I see people trying to protect what matters to them while fearing what the other side may do. Their circumstances, choices, and responsibilities differ profoundly. Compassion invites attention to everyone's humanity while keeping those differences visible, including responsibility for harm.

The four columns belong together. Advice offers a possible direction; the second column explains its promise; the third brings its vulnerability into view. The fourth asks what might make progress more feasible. It remains an invitation to inquiry. The people involved may recognize something useful, challenge an assumption, or reveal a difficulty that these initial proposals have missed.

Some hurdles concern resources, procedures, or authority. Others reach into how people experience themselves and one another. A proposal may be technically workable yet feel like abandonment, humiliation, or exposure to betrayal. Those experiences deserve careful attention because they influence what people can sincerely undertake and sustain. Conversely, a respectful conversation still needs practical arrangements capable of protecting people when goodwill is insufficient.

This is where I could help as a coach. Before an encounter, I could explore what a representative hopes to achieve, fears losing, and finds difficult even to consider. We could rehearse an unwelcome answer or examine a proposal from several perspectives. Afterward, we could return to what happened: what was understood, what was assumed, and what remains uncertain. My interpretations would also remain open to correction.

A recurring question would be: "What would make this step sufficiently safe and meaningful for you—and what might the other party need to answer the same question?" Sometimes that reveals a practical adjustment. Sometimes it brings us to a deeper concern that requires patience. A person should have room to approach such a concern without being pushed into disclosure or agreement before being ready.

I would also want us to notice whose voices are missing. Representatives carry responsibilities, but no representative's account contains a whole population. Survivors, displaced families, minorities, and people with little political influence may experience an arrangement very differently from those negotiating it. Their participation can reveal consequences that would otherwise remain outside the room.

Throughout this work, private conversations must remain private. No information may pass from one person's conversations to another without explicit, formal, signed consent specifying what may be shared, with whom, and for what purpose. That includes indirect disclosure through hints or guidance. Any shared process would need its own clear agreement, supported by technical and operational protections.

Sincerity also needs follow-through. What was promised? Who could carry it out? What happened when doing so became inconvenient? A setback may expose bad faith, but it may also reveal an unclear commitment, inadequate authority, or a fear that nobody sufficiently

understood. We need to examine the particular situation carefully. Persistence includes knowing when to revise an approach, strengthen a boundary, or pause.

These tables begin from imagined frozen situations. Actual encounters would change them. I would hope to help participants develop their own capacity to listen, judge, and respond, so that each conversation leaves them better prepared for the next. The purpose is to make peace increasingly possible in decisions and daily life.

We cannot settle every uncertainty before beginning. We can take responsibility for the quality of the endeavor: careful preparation, sincere listening, credible safeguards, honest acknowledgment of harm, and commitments followed through. Beneath the ice, life continues. With sustained care, the frozen period may become time in which people gradually find a more dependable way to live alongside one another.