



EMBASSY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

Washington, DC



Yemen's Crisis and Threatened Transition

FEBRUARY 2017



Yemen is home to 27 million people. It shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman and overlooks the Bab-el-Mandeb strait — a strategic link between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through the Red Sea.

Yemen is facing a daunting challenge; one that threatens not only its political stability, unity and territorial integrity, but also its statehood and social cohesion. Ever since a military coup was orchestrated by a militia in September 2014, Yemen's peaceful transition has halted leading the country into a state of civil unrest and war, where thousands of people lost their lives including women and children. It also affected the government's fight against terrorism and violent extremism by creating a vacuum that allowed them to thrive.

The Youth Revolution and the Initiative

Four years after the unification of Yemen in 1990, the 1994 civil war erupted. For many in the South that marked the date they lost faith in the central government in Sana'a. In 2007, a movement in the south — al Hiraq — was formed. This movement was an expression against the many injustices and grievances left unaddressed by the central government.

Life was not any easier for many people in the north as well. The combination of corruption, bad governance and the lack of development left many in the north, as well as in the south, in a vicious circle of poverty.

In January 2011, shortly after the Arab Spring started in Tunisia, people (especially the youth) took to the streets to protest their grievances. People from everywhere in Yemen joined in (including the Houthis, among others). People at that time sympathized with the Houthis. They regarded them as a movement from the northern parts of Yemen which was targeted by the old regime for many years (from 2004 to 2010).

After months of sit-ins and many sacrifices, after the country was about to enter a civil war at that time, and with the help of our neighbors, the Yemeni people on the 23rd of November 2011 found a way out through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism (the Initiative). The final signing and acceptance of this Initiative was achieved despite the former president (Saleh) many attempts to delay it.

The Initiative was no mean achievement. People saw in it a way to a new beginning for Yemen that put an end to Saleh's 33-year rule. The Initiative superseded the constitution and provided for a transitional period of two phases. Phase one was forming a national unity government and electing a new president (something that no one has ever seen happen in Yemen before). And phase two consisted of conducting an all-inclusive National Dialogue Conference (NDC), drafting a new constitution, and finally setting the stage for general parliament and presidential elections in accordance with the new constitution.

The transition was going well. President Hadi was elected in February 2012. The NDC was successfully concluded in January 2014—after 10 months of deliberating—during which even the most vulnerable marginalized groups that had no say whatsoever in the past were included.

The conference eventually adopted 1800 outcomes in all major issues. 565 delegates (20% youth; 30% women; and 50% from the south) discussed and debated for months nine major issues including the southern question and the Sadaa issue (the Houthis' case). A new constitution was in the drafting process by an all-inclusive committee created in March 2014. Yemen's partners and cosponsoring countries referred to the Yemeni transition as a success story and cited the Initiative as an exemplary method to be followed by others in the region. Yemen was on the road to a new federal democratic state, one that not only would have fulfilled the people's aspirations for





change, but also would have safeguarded the principles of the 1962 and 1963 revolutions as well. Yemenis were so full of hope as they witnessed history in the making and discovered a future's silver lining worth fighting for.

The Coup

In July 2014, the Houthis, who have been receiving military and financial support from Iran, posed their most major threat against the capital Sana'a to that date by taking over the 310th Armored Brigade in Amran governorate (only 40 km north of the capital) after months of fighting. In the following month, the Houthis shifted their attention and focus towards the capital.

On September 21, 2014, the Houthis with the assistance of forces loyal to Saleh staged a military coup and took over the capital city of Sana'a. President Hadi (at that time) sought to deescalate at any cost to preserve the people's many achievements and sacrifices and agreed to form a new government with the consent of the Houthis to finish the successful transition period and forge a new Yemen as stipulated in the Initiative. However, the Houthis kept escalating and thwarting the transition process. They knew quite well that if a genuine political democratic process was to start, they would lose what they have gained by force.

On January 17, 2015, the Houthis kidnapped the Secretary General of the NDC along with the first draft of the long-awaited new constitution to prevent its consideration. Two days later, on January 19, 2015, the President and the new Cabinet were under house arrest by the Houthis. Three days later, the President and the Cabinet resigned in protest. The Houthis, then, besieged the Parliament because they knew that it would, by the virtue of the constitution, be in control of the country. After that, and in less than a month, the Houthis abolished the Parliament altogether and announced what they called a "constitutional declaration" that put a "revolutionary committee" in charge of the whole country; hence,

completely halting the transitional period.

On February 15, 2015, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2201 denounced the coup and "strongly deplore[d] actions taken by the Houthis to dissolve parliament and take over Yemen's government institutions, including acts of violence...." On February 21, 2015, President Hadi managed to escape from Sana'a to Aden where he later rescinded his resignation.

The Houthis and Saleh continued their aggression and ignored the call of the international community. In one year alone, from December 2014 until December 2015, there were 8458 people arbitrary detained including activists and journalists by the Houthis; 389 residential houses were demolished only because they belong to their opponents; 1077 cases of torture; and 2706 enforced disappearances perpetrated by the so called revolutionary committees. The Houthis and Saleh's forces even followed the President to Aden and used the national air force to target the presidential palace there.

In March 2015, President Hadi was forced to move to Saudi Arabia after he had formally called for assistance from the GCC leaders including through a military intervention as a last resort. The Arab coalition forces led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on March 26, 2015, came and responded to the President's plea.

Later in April 2015, the UNSC, acting under chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (UN), responded by adopting its landmark resolution 2216. The resolution demanded that the Houthis immediately and unconditionally end the use of violence, withdraw their forces including from the capital, relinquish arms seized from military and security institutions, and cease all actions that are exclusively within the authority of the legitimate Government. It further demanded that they refrain from any provocation or threats to neighboring States, release all political prisoners including the Minister of Defense, and end the recruitment and use of children.





The resolution imposed sanctions, including arms embargo, on Saleh and Abdulmalik al-Houthi (the Houthis' leader) and others. It also condemned the growing number and scale of the attacks by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and expressed concern at the ability of AQAP to benefit from the deterioration of the situation in Yemen.

Al-Qaeda's Exploitation of the Vacuum Created

Yemen is a strategic ally in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and has been fighting AQAP for many years with the assistance of the international community. In April 2014, the Government launched a massive military campaign against AQAP in both Shabwah and Abyan governorates.

However, those efforts were affected when the Houthis started escalating their aggression in Amran governorate leading to their military coup in September of the same year.

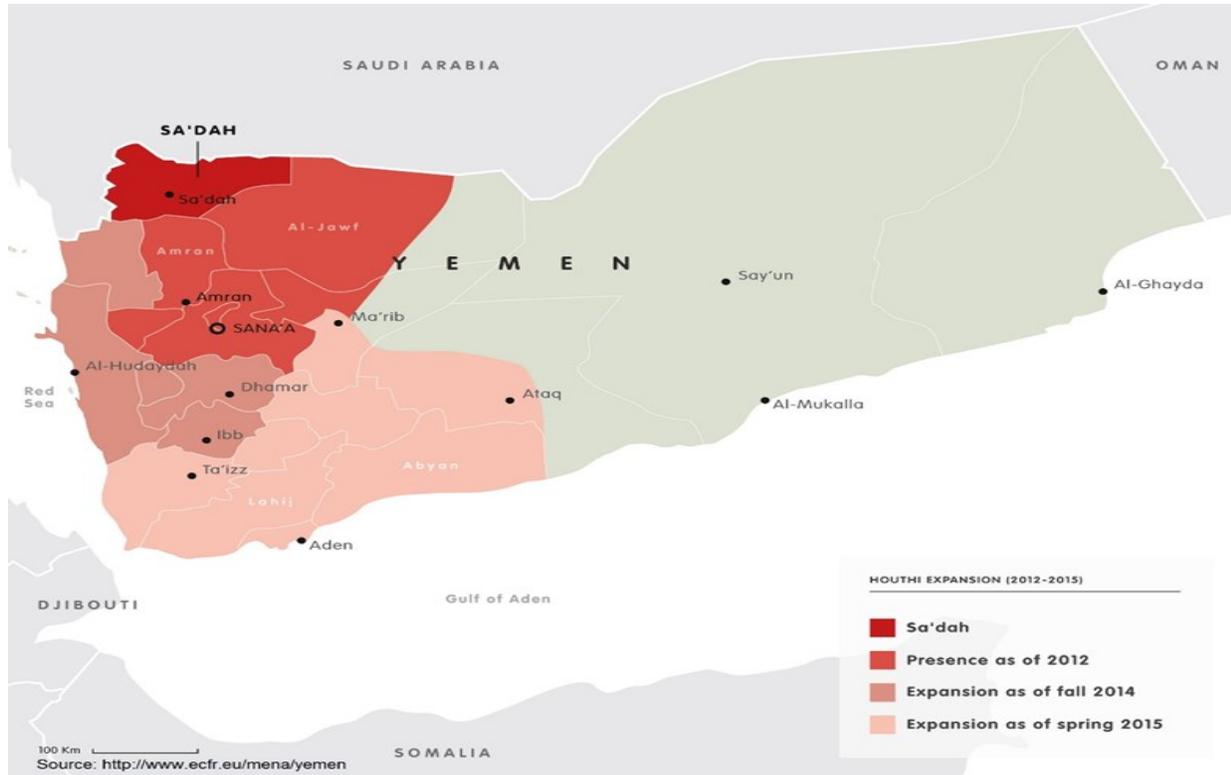
In April 2015, AQAP exploited the vacuum created by the coup and captured the major port city Al-Mukalla in Hadramaut governorate, as shown in Map1 (the largest governorate in Yemen). Al-Qaeda, at that time, was able to raise unprecedented levels of resources by looting banks and extorting fees at the city's port and in the governorate in general.

Nevertheless, in April 2016, the Government and the Arab coalition forces, within a week, were able to recapture Al-Mukalla and to defeat what was left of AQAP in the city. From then on, the Government has



Map 1





Map 2

been sweeping the remaining pockets of Al-Qaeda in many governorates (including Aden, Shabwah, and Abyan) and dismantling any other possible safe havens in Yemen.

The Shift in Power

During the initial stages of the coup, the Houthis and forces loyal to Saleh had held control over many governorates including in the south, as shown in Map2.

Now, the Government with the help of the coalition forces is in control of more than 80% of Yemen, including all the southern governorates, and at the doorsteps of the capital Sana'a. President Hadi, now in Aden (the temporary Capital), is overseeing and commanding Yemen's Armed Forces (more than 80 brigades) which is present in most of Yemen's gov-

ernorates. The Houthis and Saleh's forces are now surrounded in several governorates and are constantly losing their control even in some of their strongholds, such as Sadaa governorate, as shown in Map3

The Peace Process

The Government believes that a political solution is what will save Yemen and get it back on track to finish what had been accomplished since 2011. To this end, the Government agreed to participate (in good faith) in three rounds of peace talks, with the coup leaders, even though UNSC resolution 2216 specifically demanded, among other things as stated above, that the Houthis withdraw from the capital and cease taking actions that are exclusively within the authority of the legitimate Government.

In round one in Geneva (June 15-19, 2015), nothing





was accomplished. In the second round in Biel of Switzerland (December 15-20, 2015), the parties agreed to confidence-building measures including ceasefire and release of political and other prisoners; but the talks failed because the Houthi-Saleh delegations did not honor their commitments. The third round in Kuwait (from April to August 2016) lasted for 115 days and yielded no results simply because the Houthi and Saleh delegations refused every proposal presented by the UN Envoy.

The Government towards the end of the talks in Kuwait made a major concession for the sake of peace and accepted a UN plan in which the government agrees to allow the Houthis to withdraw from three initial governorates (Sana'a, Al Hudaydah, and Taiz) in return for a unity government to be formed after 35 days. The Houthis not only refused to accept this proposal, but also announced the formation of the so-called "political council" while their delegation was still participating in the peace talks. Later on, they also announced their illegitimate "salvation government" and attempted, with no quorum, to convene the Parliament in violation to the constitution.

Despite all that, the Government is still keen on peace and is ready to accept any proposed solutions which are in accordance with the three references; i.e. the Initiative, the NDC outcomes, and the relevant UNSC resolutions, especially resolution 2216.

The Way Forward

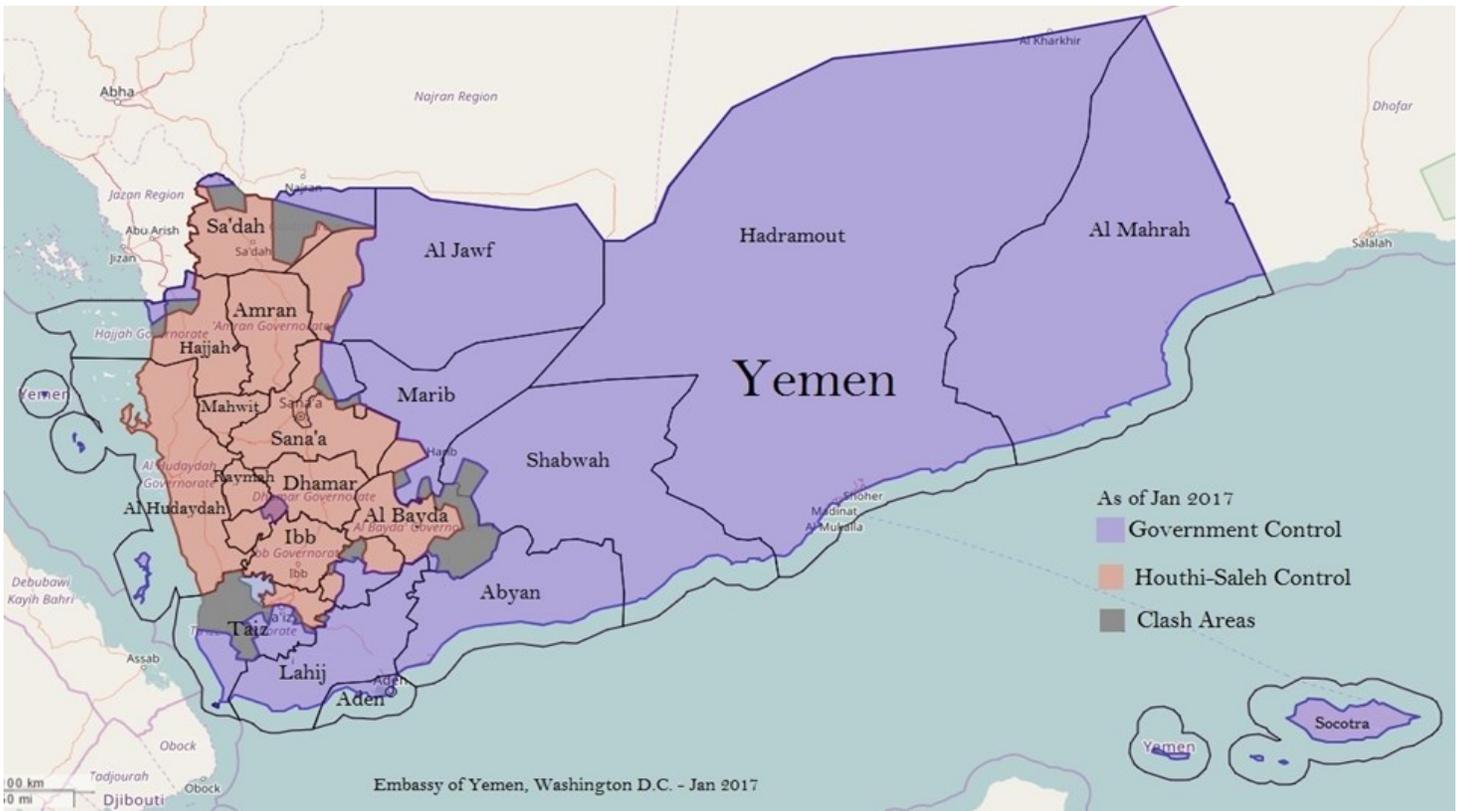
The Government is bound to defend the principles stated in the constitution and safeguard the accomplishments of the 2011 youth revolution. It will also continue to be committed to fighting terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations.

The Government stands ready to engage positively and work with the international community and the new United States Administration to reach a comprehensive sustainable solution for the Yemeni crisis. It further reaffirms its continued support for the efforts

of the UN Envoy in this regard.

Therefore, the Government will only accept a solution that adheres to the three references mentioned above. Any solution which is not based on these references would only prolong the crisis and result in legitimizing the coup. And that will destroy any hope for a new civil democratic state; one that could build the foundations of a just society where every citizen has the right to have a free and dignified life.





Map 3

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