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REVIVING THE PEACE PROCESS IN YEMEN

May 2018



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Introduction

It has been more than three years since the coup of September 2014 that resulted in the takeover of the capital city of Sanaa. And despite the Government's sincere efforts and the international community's backing and support for the United Nations-led peace process, a political settlement to end the war has yet to be reached.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen has also been exacerbated ever since, and is, without a doubt, linked to the current political stalemate. It is true that there is no military solution to the Yemeni crisis; but it is also true that without any military pressure, the Houthis will never genuinely accept a peaceful sustainable political settlement, which is the only option for peace.

Things have changed dramatically in Yemen since 2014. And it is imperative to examine what had happened since then to avoid mistakes and revive the peace process.

More Than Three Years Since the Coup

Soon after the Houthis and their erstwhile ally, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, had perpetrated a coup d'etat in September 2014, they hastily rushed to consolidate their grip on Yemen by advancing to take over state institutions and invade the rest of Yemen's governorates including the south.

The Houthis believed that they could achieve by force what they have failed to do through dialogue during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). They knew quite well that a democratic system in Yemen will not serve

their interests, and that fair elections will not make them rule. They thought that if they, with the help of Saleh (who, back then, was willing to do anything to return to power), could succeed in overpowering their opponents by force, overthrow the democratically elected government, and maintain a de facto control over state institutions in the capital, then they would be able to derail the transitional period and maintain the status quo thereafter.

They only needed to find a way to legitimize this process and they will be set, or so they thought!

So, they tried at first to coerce President Abdorabbo Mansour Hadi to issue presidential decrees to appoint members of their movement to prominent level posts, including to the office of the vice president, without regards to the political process as per the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative that started



the transitional period. But President Hadi refused and insisted that they adhere to the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) and its security annex signed right after the coup. After a new government was formed in November 2014 as per the PNPA, the Houthis refused to fulfil their part of the deal as stated in the agreement's annex which basically called for the "re-establishment of state authority and the restoration of control over all the ter-

ritory in line with the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference."¹ Soon after that, the President and the newly formed government were under house arrest.

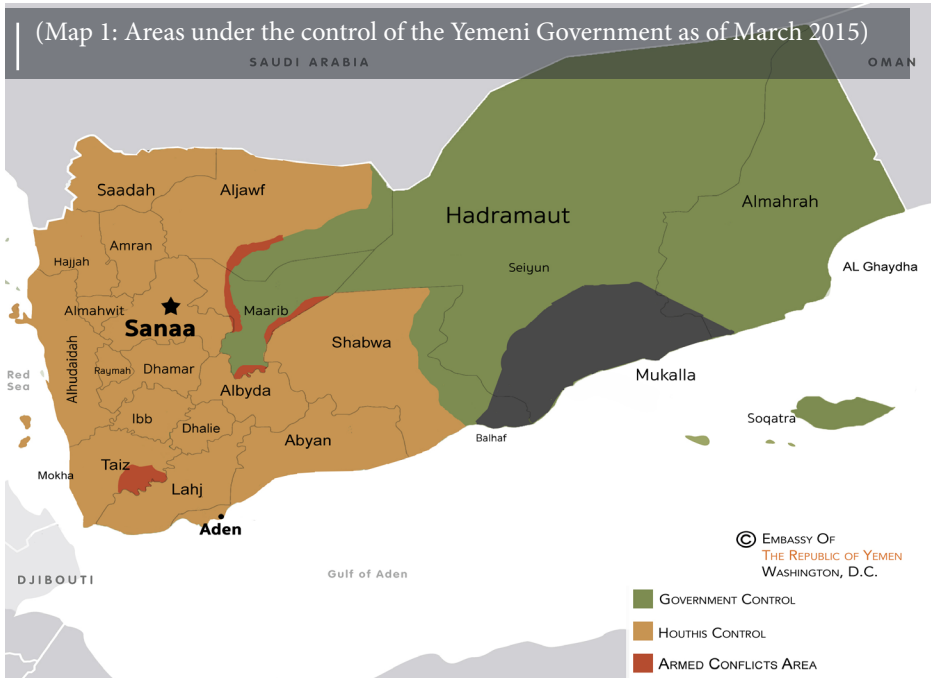
The Houthis, then, resorted to a more desperate measure. They, on February 6, 2015, announced what they called a "constitutional proclamation", abolished parliament, and empowered a revolutionary committee to re-



1. Article 1 of the Annex of The Peace and National Partnership Agreement dated 21 September 2014: < <https://peacemaker.un.org/yemen-national-partnership-2014> >

place the government. Later that month, President Hadi managed to escape to Aden. Not long after that, the Houthis initiated their descent towards the south, and started bombing their political opponents including the residence of the President in Aden using Yemen's air force. By that time, the internationally supported transitional period (2012-2014) had come to a complete

halt.² And by March 2015, the Houthis were inside the city of Aden at the southernmost tip of Yemen. (As shown in Map 1) On March 26, 2015, the Arab Coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intervened, as requested by President Hadi in accordance with international law; and a couple of weeks later, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution



2. Yemen Embassy in Washington DC paper: "Yemen's Crisis and Threatened Transition", Feb 2017, <<http://www.yemen-embassy.org/news/newreports/final-pol/>>

2216 in which it reaffirmed the international community's support for the legitimacy of President Hadi, condemned in the strongest terms the Houthis' actions, and called for the implementation of the NDC's outcomes and the return to the GCC Initiative's process.

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), seizing the moment, managed in April 2015 to take control of the major port city of al-Mukalla in Hadhramaut governorate—the largest governorate in Yemen. AQAP was able to maintain its control of the city for one year and managed to put its hands on substantial amounts of resources by looting banks and illegally collecting taxes and fees from the city's port.

It wasn't until April 2016 that the Government, supported by the Arab Coalition forces, was able to liberate al-Mukalla city and drive al-Qaeda militants out.³

The UN-led peace process started in 2015 with a clear objective and mandate: to support "Yemen's return to a peaceful political transition in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue; and Security Council Resolutions."⁴

However, all three rounds of peace talks, including the 115-day session in Kuwait in 2016, failed to achieve peace.⁵ This is unfortunate, because Yemen, unlike other conflict areas in the region, has all the components needed

3. Yemen Embassy in Washington DC paper: "Yemen Efforts in the Fight Against terrorism", July 2017, <<http://www.yemenembassy.org/public/>>

4. Office of the Special Envoy of the UN SECRETARY-GENERAL for Yemen official website, "Mandate": <<https://ocesgy.unmissions.org/mandate>>

5. Yemen Embassy in Washington DC paper: "Yemen's Crisis and Threatened Transition", Feb 2017, <<http://www.yemenembassy.org/news/newreports/final-pol/>>

to achieve a peaceful settlement. It enjoys undivided international support, has no Sunni-Shia divide, and has three agreed upon references for peace.

The Houthis in Kuwait during the last peace consultation round refused to accept any initiatives presented by the UN envoy. In fact, they announced the formation of what they called “the Supreme Political Council” in Sanaa, while their delegation was still at the negotiating table in Kuwait. This step made it clear that they were not ready for peace. A few days later, the last peace round collapsed.

The former UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, stated in his last briefing before the UN Security Council

early 2018 that “[i]n the end of the consultations, it became clear that the Houthis were not prepared to make concessions on the proposed security arrangements. This has been a major stumbling block towards reaching a negotiated solution.”⁶

So yes, things have changed dramatically in Yemen since 2014. But to fully understand how these changes affect the future peace process, and how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, it is important to examine thoroughly and understand fully certain developments and issues in order to be able to revive the UN-led peace process.

The Houthis and Zaidiah⁷

Most of the Houthis are Zaidis but not all Zaidis are Houthis.

6. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, “THE UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL”, (Speech, NYC, February 27, 2018): < <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/un-special-envoy-yemen-briefs-security-council-0> >

7. Zaidiah or Zaidism is one of the Shia sects and is considered to be one of the closest Shia sects to Sunni Islam.

The Houthis have been described by many international media outlets to be many things; a religious sect, a tribe, and even a persecuted indigenous population in Yemen! And all these descriptions are not accurate, and some are just simply wrong. Almost all Yemenis are indigenous to Yemen; and the Houthis are no different. The Houthis are a military and ideological movement led by Hussein al-Houthi and inspired by his father Badreddin al-Houthi. The Houthis identify themselves as Zaidis but so do many others in Yemen who oppose the Houthi movement and what it stands for.

Furthermore, the Zaidiah in Yemen is only one of the last surviving subsects of the original Zaidi sect attributed to Imam Zaid bin Ali (died 740 CE). In fact, the Zaidiah in Yemen is more

accurately called al-Hadawiya (or Zaidi-Hadawiya) which is a version of the original Zaidi sect introduced to Yemen by Yahya bin Hussein al-Rassi (known as al-Hadi ila Alhaq who died 911 CE). Some scholars argue that

“Most of the Houthis are Zaidis but not all Zaidis are Houthis”

the Zaidiah original doctrines and jurisprudence, which could be found in various old literature, differ from that of al-Hadawiya—the Zaidi version practiced in Yemen today.⁸ Others argued that the Houthis, in particular, are more lenient towards yet another subsect of Zaidiah called Jaroudiah which is closer in some of its practices and beliefs to the more radical Twelver Shia sect practiced in Iran.⁹

8. Ismail al-Akwa, “al-Zaidia: Its Founding and Doctrines” second edition, Aljel Aljadeed library, 2007.

9. Ahmed al-Dagshi, “The Houthis: A Comprehensive Methodical Study”, Arabic House for Science, Lebanon 2010.

In any case, one needs to be very careful not to blindly use general labels or simply portray the conflict in Yemen as one between Zaidis, on the one hand, and Shafias (Sunni sect practice by the majority of Yemenis) on the other.

The Origin of the Houthis

In 1990, a movement called “al-Shabab al-Momen” (the Believing Youth) was founded in Saadah governorate. The goals of this movement at its early stage, according to Mohammed Azzan (one of the founders of the movement at that time), were educational, cultural, and religious in nature. But it was also founded in part to counter the presence of a Sunni Salafi center established in Saadah by Muqbil al-Wadai—a Salafi scholar from Saadah who founded the Salafi Dar al-Hadith center in Dammaj back in

1979. However, the movement was transformed after a dispute between Hussein al-Houthi and Mohammed Azzan. Azzan wanted to keep the movement moderate and as open to others as possible, whereas Hussein al-Houthi wanted to transform the movement to a more radical and ideological one.

Hussein al-Houthi had previously traveled to both Iran and Lebanon in 1994 with his father (the spiritual leader of the movement) and was captivated by the Iranian model under Khomeini and by Hizballah. So, by 1999, the movement was split into two groups a moderate one under Azzan and a more radical one under Hussein al-Houthi. And by 2001, according to Azzan, the two groups were completely separated, and later that year Hussein al-Houthi dominated the movement.¹⁰

¹⁰.Ibid

By 2004, the movement under al-Houthi had been transformed so radically that a group of Zaidi prominent scholars, in a statement, warned against following him and stated that his teachings have deviated from the doctrines of the Zaidi sect in Yemen.¹¹

The Houthis-Saleh Relationship

The Houthis and Saleh have always had a very peculiar relationship. From archenemies (2004-2010) to unscrupulous allies (2014-2017).

In 2004, Saleh and the Houthis started the first of six wars after the Houthis by that time had already been transformed to a military movement and started a rebellion in the northern province of Saadah. Hussein al-Houthi, as the leader of the movement, and after returning to Yemen from

Iran, started embracing anti-government and anti-American rhetoric. Not long after that, the first war between Saleh and the Houthis broke out. Hussein al-Houthi was then killed in 2004 during the first war; and his brother Abdulmalik al-Houthi, the current leader, took over and continued the fighting against Saleh.

The Houthi-Saleh wars ended in February 2010 after six years and six rounds of gruesome fighting. Many accused Saleh of not genuinely wanting to end the Saadah's wars. On the one hand, he wanted to wear out the First Armored Brigade, which was in charge of fighting the Houthis, to weaken its commander General Ali Muhsen al-Ahmar¹² (whom he perceived as a potential rival); and on the other, he wanted to keep the Houthis at bay.

¹¹. Ibid

¹². General Ali Muhsen al-Ahmar is currently the Vice President of the Republic of Yemen

In 2011, the Houthis joined the Youth Revolution and later joined the NDC process. However, they refused to change to a political party and maintained their military capabilities. During the transitional period, the Houthis kept advancing methodically towards the capital, even though their representatives were in the NDC.

Sometime in 2014, the Houthis and Saleh formed their alliance for the purpose of derailing the transitional period, among other things. Saleh wanted to return to power so he lent his support to them and paved the way to the capital. Not surprisingly, the First Armored Brigade Headquarters was one of their first targets in Sanaa in September 2014.

The Houthis and Saleh kept a

shaky alliance of convenience for the better parts of 2016 and 2017. After the August 24, 2017, GPC's huge rally in the capital, the Houthis were infuriated. They started to openly accuse Saleh of wanting to jump ship and switch sides. And during the December 2017 Sanaa's short-lived uprising, the Houthis executed Saleh and a number of GPC leaders and members, including GPC Secretary General Arif Alzuka.¹³

Sanaa's Uprising

People in Yemen knew that the Houthis and Saleh alliance was doomed from the very beginning and destined to collapse. The question was: How? And, most importantly, when?

After tensions were building between the Houthis and Saleh in the so called supreme council and the salvation government in 2017 over procedural issues at first,

13. United Nations, Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen, S/RES/2402 (26 February 2018)

the two sides started to openly criticize one another later that year. On August 19, 2017, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis, officially accused the GPC leadership of stabbing them in the back, among other things.¹⁴ The following day in a rally, Arif Alzuka, the Secretary General of the GPC, openly accused the Houthis' leadership

of corruption, committing arbitrary arrests, unlawfully changing schools' curriculums, hijacking state media outlets, and draining the central bank's reserves.^{15 16} And this was what the legitimate government was saying all along.

On August 24, 2017, the GPC decided to escalate and show their power and successfully or-



14.Abdulmalik al-Houthi, the Houthi leader, "Televised Statement in front of Houthis Supporters", (speech, Yemen, August 19, 2017).

15.Arif Alzuka, Secretary General of the GPC, "Statement in a GPC Rally", (speech, Yemen, August 20, 2017).

16.Please also see Embassy Report: "The Houthis Legacy in Yemen: Lasting Damage Internally and Looming Danger Internationally", May 2018.

ganized a massive GPC-only¹⁷ rally to commemorate the GPC's 35th anniversary. Although Saleh backed down and did not, as expected, denounce the Houthis publicly in the rally, tensions between the Houthis and Saleh, nevertheless, were still high.

In late November and early December 2017, and especially when Saleh openly declared his intentions to switch sides and called for a popular uprising against the Houthis, fierce fighting erupted

between the two sides. At first, amidst the commotion, people in Sanaa did not know who is winning and who is losing. And after a short break in the fighting, people believed that Saleh has won.

This news sent shockwaves across Yemen. In Sana'a, people took to the street and celebrated the end of the Houthis by burning Houthi slogans and posters. In other governorates, GPC leaders organized take overs and controlled city halls and security of-



17. In the past the Houthis and Saleh would jointly organize rallies to show solidarity and dispel any rumors of frictions between them.

fices. Sanaa's uprising was real, or so many Yemenis thought!



Anti-Houthis protests in Sanaa
December 2017 : alarabiya.net

Two days later, after using tanks and shutting down many neighborhoods, videos of Saleh's body started to surface in social media and the Sanaa's uprising was over.

Houthis' Retaliations

Sanaa's uprising made it clear for

the Houthis that perception is reality in Yemen, and that when they are perceived to be weak, the wind of change could blow them away in a matter of days. They also realized that they have lost the GPC political cover.

So, the Houthis decided to project their power by all means necessary. From blowing up GPC leaders residential houses, to publicly committing extrajudicial executions of GPC leaders (and in some occasions along with their family members including children), to shutting down all GPC

“Sanaa's uprising made it clear for the Houthis that perception is reality in Yemen...”

media outlets and newspapers, to massive arbitrary arrests. While these repressive measures helped the Houthis show strength and

crack down on any potential dissent after Sanaa's uprising, it left many GPC members and supporters, whom otherwise were supportive of the Saleh-Houthi alliance, totally enraged.

Therefore, the Houthis attempted to salvage their image and cover for Saleh's death and other atrocities committed against his supporters. They refrained from abolishing, officially at least, the GPC party, and bullied the remaining GPC leaders and members to hold superficial meetings and pretend nothing had happened to the alliance.

They also wanted to maintain the GPC, for now, to portray to the outside world that they are still part of "a national partnership front in Yemen."¹⁸ However, many GPC leaders and members left Sanaa leaving the question of

the GPC's future hanging.

The GPC's Role and Future

The General People's Congress party is the largest political party in Yemen. It was established on August 24, 1982 and dominated Yemen's politics and governments until 2011. The GPC played a major role as a national party that does not exclude any one based on specific ideologies, certain geographical locations, or tribal and/or social affiliations. In short, the GPC for a very long time was seen as an umbrella party that covers a wide range of constituencies and the only ticket for many to be influential in the public domain before 2011.

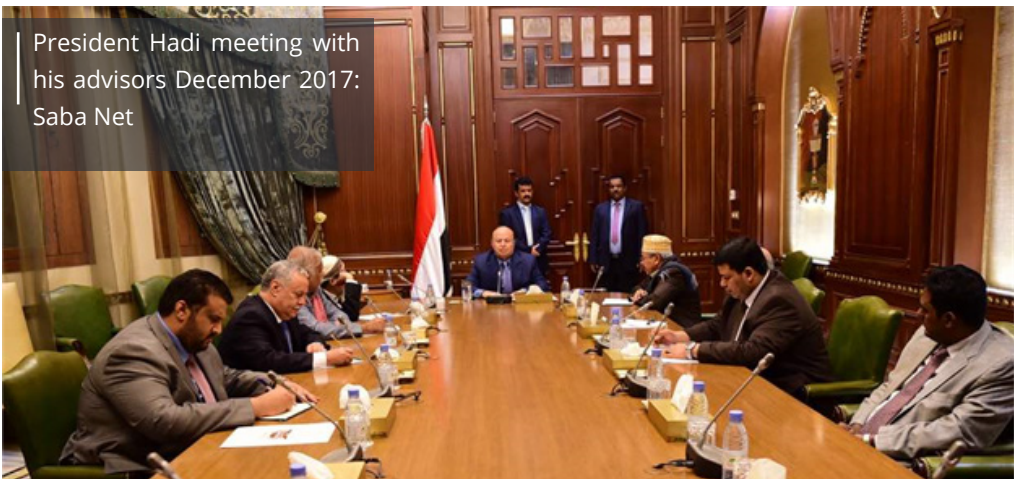
With the demise of the most influential person in the GPC—Saleh—the party's future and role are at jeopardy. The Government knows this, and the

18. Saleh Alsamad, Houthi president of the so called the "supreme political council" (was killed on April 19, 2018), "Televised Statement after Sanaa Uprising", (speech, Yemen, December 5, 2018).

Houthis know this as well. For the Government, preserving the GPC's unity is essential to ensure a healthy balanced democratic system after the transitional period. That is why the Government is calling for all leaders and members of the GPC to unite and preserve their party. For the Houthis, the GPC is needed as a political cover especially after the killing of Saleh and the rising level of resentments against them in many areas under their control. For now, a Houthi-version of the GPC is kept in Sanaa by the Houthis merely as a façade

to conceal their atrocities against its members from the international community and to appease the rising tension amongst the GPC's many supporters in their areas particularly in Sanaa.

President Hadi, as President of the Republic and as Vice Chairman of the GPC, on December 2 and 4, 2017, called upon all leaders and members of the GPC to unite and join other political parties to form a comprehensive national coalition against the Houthis. The Prime Minister, Dr. Ahmed Obeid bin Daghr, who





also is one of the leaders of the GPC party, is reaching out to all GPC leaders and members and is calling for consultations to be held within the party to choose a new leadership in accordance with the party's internal rules and procedures.

The Houthis and Al-Qaeda are Losing Ground

The Houthis ever since the intervention of the Arab Coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

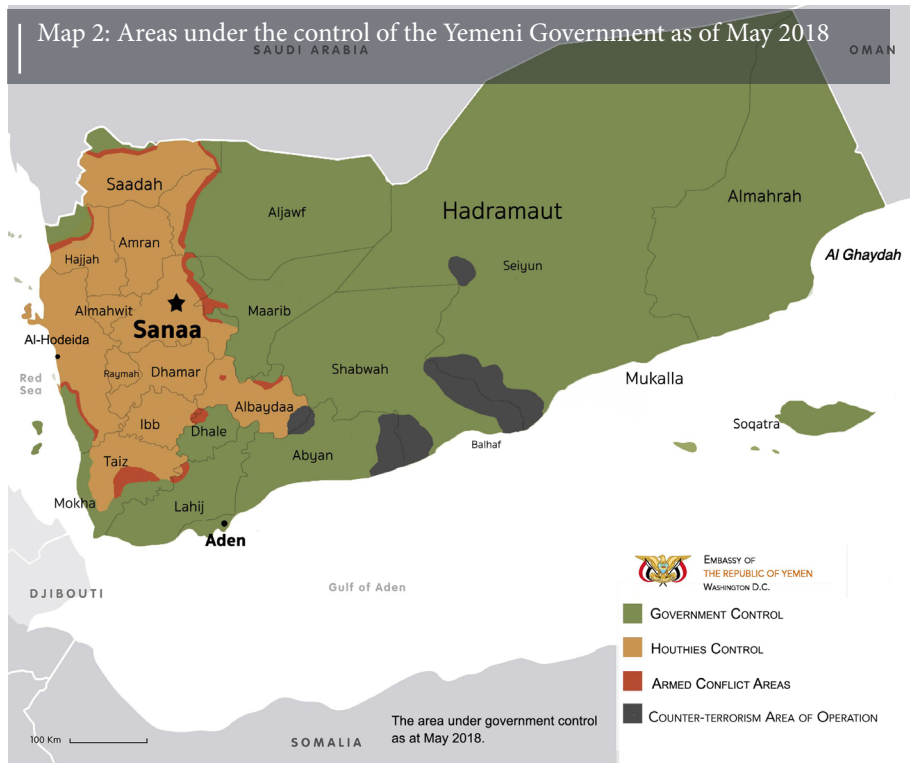
in March 2015 are losing ground (As shown in map 2). They were pushed out of Aden and other southern governorates a few months after the intervention. The strategic Bab-el-Mandeb strait at the Red Sea was fully liberated by the end of 2015 and the city and port of al-Mocha in the western coast of Yemen was also liberated by early 2017.

By December 2017, the Houthis fronts were crumbling almost ev-

everywhere. At the southeast front, the district of Bayhan—an important smuggling hub for the Houthis—was liberated. And at the western coast al Khokha and Hays districts were all freed, which are the first two districts of al-Hodeida governorate. At the northern front, Yemen Armed Forces, supported by the Arab Coalition, were able to liberate a major military camp between

the governorates of Saadah (the Houthis stronghold) and al-Jawf, which paved the way for more advances towards the first district of Saadah from the east and secured a major highway road.

The Government, supported by the Arab Coalition, also initiated a wide-scale military operation to liberate the city and governorate of Taiz in January 2018. In April





2018, the Government forces have also managed to liberate Medi seaport and city—a major smuggling point for the Houthis in Haja governorate at the Red Sea—and made major advances in al-Bayda governorate, which is in the center of Yemen and borders eight other governorates. And by the end of May 2018, Yemen Armed Forces, supported by the Arab Coalition, were able to liberate several new districts at the western coast and are now at the doorsteps of al-Hodeida city and port.

Al-Qaeda was also targeted and chased out of many areas in Hadramout by Yemeni spe-

cial units (Hadrami Elite forces) supported by the Arab Coalition (Map 2). On February 17, 2018, these special units launched a successful military operation called “Alfaisal” (the decisive) against the AQAP remaining pockets about 100 km west of al-Mukalla city in al-Misini valley. The special forces first staged a siege on the valley and then launched a massive attack supported by Arab Coalition’s airstrikes. In two days al-Misini valley was under the control of the special forces. About 30 al-Qaeda militants were killed in the operation and large caches of explosives and weapons were recovered.

The Southern Question

The southern question was the most critical issue discussed and debated during the NDC process in 2013-2014 with the participation of representatives from all political parties and movements including the Yemeni Socialist Party (the ruling party in the south before the unification of 1990) and representatives from the Southern Movement (al-Hirak) (formed in 2007 and called for the secession of the south).¹⁹

During the national dialogue 2013-2014, and as stated in the NDC's outcomes document²⁰, it was agreed to resolve all the southern grievances, as raised in the NDC, during the transitional period of the new Federal State of Yemen. It was also agreed that local governance within the new proposed regions of the federal

state will enjoy greater autonomy and decentralization; and that during the first election cycle, after adopting the new constitution, the south will be represented by 50 percent in all leadership positions in the executive legislative and judicial branches of the government. In addition, it was also agreed that the south vital interests will be preserved after the first election cycle by adopting a mechanism to ensure that the south will have a veto power and a say over issues that involved, among other things, the status of the south region or state. Accordingly, all these agreed proposals were in fact enshrined in the draft constitution that took months to prepare and was presented to President Hadi in January 2015.²¹ But the adoption of the draft constitution along with the transitional period pro-

19. The Southern Movement has many factions and is not a homogenous entity with a unified leadership.

20. The National Dialogue Conference outcomes document: <http://www.ndc.ye/ndc_document.pdf>

21. The new draft of Yemen constitution document: <http://www.ndc.ye/constitution_draft.pdf>

cess was stopped as mentioned earlier due to the coup of September 2014 and the events that followed it.

The so-called “Southern Transitional Council”

After pushing the Houthis’ forces out of the southern provinces in mid-2015, President Hadi, in October 2015, appointed Major General Jaafar Mohammed Saad, who was assassinated two months later, as governor of Aden. Then, President Hadi appointed Major General Aidarus al-Zoubaidi as governor of Aden in December 2015.

In April 2017, President Hadi appointed Mr. Abdulaziz al-Maflahi, a technocrat, as a new governor for Aden, to help facilitate the recovery process and the return of the much-needed public services to the city. Al-Zoubaidi

rejected the appointment and planned with others to form the so called “Southern Transitional Council” (STC). So, on May 4, 2017, al-Zoubaidi and others organized a rally in Aden. After the rally, a document emerged, which they called “the Aden historical declaration”, by which they claimed to receive a mandate from the people of the south to form a new political entity to “manage and represent the south.”²²

Later the Government, in May 2017, issued a statement reaffirming the constitutional rights of all Yemenis to form and engage in the political process including forming new parties and entities; however, it categorically rejected the formation of the STC which was tasked unconstitutionally to manage and represent the south.

22. The “Aden historical declaration” text: <<http://yafa-news.net/archives/249371>>

The Government stated that the formation of this entity contradicts not only Yemen's constitution and laws but also the three references for peace agreed upon locally, regionally and internationally; i.e. the GCC Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the NDC's outcomes, and the UNSC Resolution 2216. Furthermore, many leaders of the Southern Movement have also rejected and questioned the legitimacy of the STC.

STC Attempted Coup in Aden

In January 2018, the STC issued an ultimatum to President Hadi to force him to change the government. President Hadi refused to yield to such measures against the government by an illegitimate entity. On January 28 and 29, 2018, the STC launched an attack against government presidential brigades stationed in

Aden. The next day, January 30, 2018, the presidential brigades' forces were able to stop the STC forces and overtake some of their bases in Aden. Later that day, President Hadi ordered all forces to adhere to a ceasefire and to end all hostilities. The Government forces complied and withdrew from previously controlled STC locations. However, the STC, with external support, launched yet another attack against the retreating government forces.

Eventually the Arab Coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intervened and ended the violence. The Government forces returned to all their bases in Aden; nevertheless, the root cause of the problem is still not resolved for the STC forces, to this day, still operate outside the legitimacy of the government of Yemen.

However, Aden unfortunate events in January 2018 proved that the STC is not the sole representative of the south as it claims to be. The majority of the STC's leadership members were not members of the Southern Movement to begin with. And many people in Aden are not

“The majority of the STC’s leadership members were not members of the Southern Movement to begin with.”

happy with having an entity representing them, which is not representative of the south, is not a political party, and is externally funded and influenced.

President Hadi, back in March 2015, invoked his right, as the

democratically elected president of Yemen, and made a hard decision to call for help from Yemen's brotherly neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council to intervene militarily and restore state institutions and prevent Iran from taking over Yemen after the Houthis' coup. The Government holds firmly these objectives and appreciates the Arab Coalition's commitment and support thus far. It also hopes that the issue of Aden is resolved and that it won't affect the coalition's noble objectives.

Reviving the Peace Process and Supporting the New UN Envoy

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Mr. Martin Griffiths of the United Kingdom as his Special Envoy for Yemen on February 16, 2018. Mr. Griffiths has vast experience in conflict resolu-



tion and mediation as he served as the Executive Director of the European Institute of Peace, in 2014, and as an adviser to three Special Envoys of the Secretary-General for Syria between 2012 and 2014.²³

The new UN envoy has visited the region and met with most of the stakeholders of the Yemeni conflict. He stated in his preliminary briefing before the UNSC on April 17, 2018, that he plans “to put to this Council within the next two months a framework for negotiations.”²⁴ He further stated that “a political solution to end this war is indeed available. Its outlines are no secret: the end of fighting, withdrawal of forces

and handover of heavy weapons in key locations together, together, with an agreement on the establishment of an inclusive Government, one which brings the parties together in a consensus to build peace.”²⁵

The envoy has also raised the issue of the southern question and stated that “there will be no peace in Yemen if we do not also listen to the voices of the south and make sure they are included in the political arrangements that end this war.”²⁶ He further pointed out that “stopping a war is not at all the same as building peace” and that “[w]e must first turn our energies to the business of stopping the war.”²⁷

23. Office of the Special Envoy of the UN SECRETARY-GENERAL for Yemen official website, “SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS MARTIN GRIFFITHS OF UNITED KINGDOM AS HIS SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN”, NYC, February 16, 2018: < <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/secretary-general-appoints-martin-griffiths-united-kingdom-his-special-envoy-yemen> >

24. Martin Griffiths, “MARTIN GRIFFITHS, SPECIAL ENVOY FOR YEMEN MAKES HIS FIRST BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL”, (Speech, NYC, April 17, 2018): < <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/martin-griffiths-special-envoy-yemen-makes-his-first-briefing-security-council> >

25. Ibid

26. Ibid

27. Ibid

The Government fully supports the UN envoy and hopes that he would be successful in bringing a lasting peace in Yemen. And it will spare no efforts in facilitating his work to end the war and reach a political settlement.

However, we need not to repeat the mistakes of the past. For instance, the Government and the Houthis have already in September 2014 signed an agreement (the PNPA) detailing the same steps Mr. Griffiths was alluding to in his remarks that included withdrawals, handing over weapons and forming an inclusive government. But, as mentioned earlier in this paper, all these steps, except for the formation of the unity government, were never implemented by the Houthis. Since then, the Houthis had never agreed to commit to withdrawing or handing over weap-

ons even though it was clearly mandated by the UNSC Resolution 2216 under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

In short, the Government cannot simply agree to legitimize the coup and form a unity government with the Houthis, like in 2014, without first making sure that the Houthis will not once again renege on their commitments. This time, the Government will need more than just the Houthis' word.

As for the southern question and realizing the aspirations of the south, the Government, as mentioned in previous sections, is keen on addressing all the grievances of the south as per the NDC outcomes. The southern question, and many other critical issues, should and will be raised and dealt with during the build-

ing peace phase the envoy very eloquently articulated. Otherwise, we risk transforming the UN-led peace process into a second version of the National Dialogue Conference, only this time we won't have the time, the capacity, or even the mandate to do it.

Therefore, to reach a political solution to the conflict these steps should be implemented:

- 1) Focus on restarting the peace talks by engaging the parties “whose decisions can contribute to bringing an end to this war”²⁸; i.e. the government delegation on one side and the Houthis on the other;
- 2) Agree on confidence building measures including the reactivation of the De-escalation and Coordination Committee, the release of all political prisoners including journalists and activists,

and the assurances of unfettered humanitarian access to all areas in Yemen;

- 3) Preserve the three references for peace;
- 4) Address the fragmentation issue of the GPC, especially after the killing of Saleh, through encouraging the remaining GPC leaders outside the Houthis' control to gather and preserve the party's unity; and
- 5) Make sure the UN-led peace process is to achieve its clear mandate to end the war and return to the transitional process during which all critical issues, including the southern question, will be addressed.

The task before Mr. Griffiths will likely prove to be a tough row to hoe. But with the international community's backing and support and given the current Houthi po-

²⁸.Ibid

sition, the UN envoy has a chance to succeed this time. In the past, the Houthis' false illusions of power were fed by their misperception of the sincere efforts and signals sent by the previous US Administration when they met them at a very high level. However, the UN envoy, now, giving the strong positive position and signals sent by the current US Administration should be able to convince the Houthis that committing to peace through negotiation is the only way out of this war.

Yemenis everywhere have the most to lose and are the first to suffer from prolonging the war. And hopefully, the year 2018 will be the year to mark the end of the conflict and the beginning of the much tougher work ahead—the rebuilding of the new Yemen and preserving peace.





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