

# Strategy Unit

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## UAE Influence in Yemen.. Pillars and Harvest



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## **Introduction:**

For many years, especially since the 1980s and 1990s, the UAE, led by its founder, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, has been pursuing an intermediate policy that puts regional issues at the center of its international relations. During the reign of Sheikh Zayed, which lasted from 1974 until his death in 2004, the UAE adopted a foreign policy based primarily on close relations with the Gulf states and then with the Arab and Islamic countries.

During the first years of the establishment of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed has emphasized on establishing friendly relations with all member states of the Arab League and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council that has been established in 1981. [1]

In the last few years, there have been two big changes at the level of power in the UAE. The two changes have had a clear impact on the level of the political decision-making circles and the UAE's foreign policy. There has been a shift in influence within the UAE's seven federations. The influence moved from Dubai to Abu Dhabi and from the hands of Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and UAE "figurehead" President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to the hands of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed. [2]

As a result, the focus shifted from the pursuit of excellence in economic and investment aspects to the pursuit of expansion in external influence, and from reliance on soft power to reliance on hard and tough power.

This change in UAE raises a question about the nature of factors that contributed to this radical transformation in the country, and the nature of motives behind the UAE intervention role in many countries, including Yemen.

This interventionist behavior of the UAE has not been limited to countries that have experienced popular revolts against authoritarian regimes, known as the "Arab Spring States": Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya and Yemen, but UAE has intervened even in more stable countries, some of which maybe have more capacities than UAE, including Turkey [3], Qatar [4], Somalia [5], Djibouti [6] and Malaysia. While some UAE officials have expressed their country's role in Saudi Arabia, some sources pointed to the possibility of extending this role to UAE attempts to influence the election of the current US president Donald Trump. [7]

In Yemen, with the announcement of a military operation in Yemen called "Decisive Storm," led by Saudi Arabia, to fight the Houthi rebels and restore the legitimacy of the Yemeni state, the United Arab Emirates found the opportunity to return to the ports of Yemen, but with arms this time, and it became the active force in the Arab Coalition in Yemen.

As far as UAE interventions represent opportunities for emerging Emirati politics, Yemen is the first and broad test of the new Emirati influence, which so far appeared to be distorted and convulsive due to its inability to bring about development that benefit the population of Yemeni areas under its control, let alone continued collision between UAE and the Yemeni legitimate authorities and the encouragement of groups outside the Yemeni state. This UAE behavior predicts the close end of UAE presence in Yemen.

This study intends to examine the most important reasons and motivations of UAE influence in Yemen, as well as the most important pillars of that influence and its future implications.

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## **UAE...from investment diplomacy to intervention**

The external role of the UAE, since its inception, has focused on how to exploit its geographical location and the revenues generated through its oil wealth to achieve an economic weight and ensure its excellence in the region and the world.

For this purpose, UAE has focused on the construction of ports and expansion in such ports, including Jebel Ali Port, Zayed Port and others, the transforming of Dubai into a free zone and an important transit gateway to many countries as well as expanding airports. Dubai Airport has become one of the largest airports in the world that provided UAE with huge economic revenues, in addition to its production of oil.

The UAE's most important economic arm, the DP World, was established in 2005 by merging Dubai Ports Authority (DPA) and Dubai Ports International (DPI). Within a few years, the company has become one of the largest ports operators around the world. It operates ports in Somalia, Djibouti and Indonesia. The list extends to 78 shipping stations in 40 countries across the six continents. A year later, the company controlled the right to manage six ports in North America, prompting congressional deputies, who considered Dubai Ports' control of such vital facilities to be US National Security bans.

After the Congress voted with majority against the DPI's control of the six ports, the company was forced to transfer the operation of the ports to a US company.

[<sup>8</sup>]

With the beginning of the second decade of the current century, the UAE has undergone a major shift in its external interests. The leadership of Abu Dhabi has adopted an interventionist approach that aimed at hindering the changes caused by the Arab Spring revolutions. So the UAE started to work on imposing a change in the political conditions and intellectual orientations, produced by the Arab Spring revolutions through confronting with the political forces that supported those revolutions and came up to the scene accordingly. The UAE fought against those forces using its financial, political, media, intelligence capacities.

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The UAE has become a base for countering the Arab revolutions through the perception of the political leadership in Abu Dhabi that their state has a major duty in hindering the transformations that took place in these countries and that they should provide the forces against the Arab Spring revolutions with material and moral support as well as providing those forces with a place for planning and coordination on the land of the UAE, in addition to strengthening the ideological orientation against those revolutions.

The UAE role is also crystallized to be against the Islamic trends. UAE has engaged in confrontations with the Islamic organizations and any political systems that are close to the Islamists or those who accept to deal with them, providing assistance to competitors and encouraging armed groups against those political forces. For this purpose, Abu Dhabi has used religious groups such as "al-Salafiyya al-Jamiyya" and "Sufism Al-Ja'fiya" to counter other Islamic trends.



The intervention role of the UAE in the region has led to the exclusion of political forces that used to be in power or participated in it and the coming of political leaders, who are loyal to UAE, to power in their countries, placing the leadership of those countries under the direct influence of the UAE.

One of those UAE interventions is the coup against the elected President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt (July 2013), the UAE intervention in the Tunisian elections, the support of rebellious leader Khalifa Haftar in Libya, the mixing of cards in the Syrian war. The leaks by the UAE ambassador to Washington, Yusuf Al-Otaiba, revealed clear UAE interventions in Riyadh. While UAE officials used to make fun of Saudi policy and talk about long hostility and wars between the UAE and the Kingdom because of Wahhabism, they claim that they have supported Prince Mohammed bin Salman to get power in Saudi. [9]

This role played by the UAE, which is characterized by the tendency of dominance and intensive intervention in other countries through planning and providing support to the removal of political forces and trends and replacing them with other forces, was a result of changes in the UAE's internal environment in conjunction with changes in the regional and international environments, as follows:

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### **First: Internal Transformations**

The shift in the UAE's external role is based on two main factors: the financial power of Abu Dhabi, specifically the oil wealth that is more than the other seven emirates. The financial power enable UAE to turn its wealth into political and military influence and represented influence tools. Without the economic and financial capacity, UAE will not be able to play such a big role due to several reasons, including the small size of UAE and its small population... etc.

The second factor is linked to the shift in the political leadership of the state through the assumption of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh "Mohammed bin Zayed" the power in practice in the UAE, following the disappearance of his brother, "Khalifa bin Zayed" for reasons that seem to be healthy. Many researchers attribute the big change in UAE to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, especially the position of UAE against the Arab Spring countries, UAE's desire to restore former regimes and building UAE domination in the region as well as playing roles in favor of international parties including the United States.

It is likely that this intervention role that has been played by the UAE since 2011, does not have the real support of all seven states of UAE as it is concentrated in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and in its current leadership (Mohammed and Abdullah Zayed). The exceptional construction of the UAE's governance system has helped in creating such a situation. Other emirates that make up the state do not show much enthusiasm to intervene in the affairs of other countries as much as in Abu Dhabi.

It is noteworthy that the financial crisis that hit the real estate and commercial market in Dubai in 2008 after the government of Dubai announced its inability to pay the debts of both the Dubai World and the Nakheel Company and demanded from creditors to grant them a new deadline for payment (rescheduling of debt), represented a golden opportunity for the rulers of Abu Dhabi as it prompted observers to raise questions not only about the financial crisis in the small emirate, but about the political tradeoffs between the rulers of Dubai and Abu Dhabi as well. [10]

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi intervened at the last minute and provided a valuable support, estimated at US 10 billion, to the Government of Dubai in order to enable the latter to pay off its debts. The Government of Dubai announced on December 14, 2009 that it would repay the Sukuk of the Real Estate Development Company "Nakheel" through the use of Abu Dhabi's support [11]. So, at what price did Abu Dhabi provide that financial support to its sister Dubai? Has Dubai become part of Abu Dhabi's expansion policies under the pretext of protecting its economic interests through preventing investments in some ports including Yemen's ports, ports in the Horn of Africa as well as the Suez Canal?

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## **Second: Regional Transformations**

In recent years, the Arab region has seen a number of transformations that have opened the way to an Emirati role and transformed it, including the outbreak of the Arab Spring Revolutions. which contributed to the emergence of the role of the Gulf Cooperation Council that has initially tried to take a unified position towards those revolutions, and then there was a different position for Qatar, and another position for Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The perceived risks of those revolutions, and their outcomes was a factor of rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which enabled the UAE to exercise interventions in the affairs of some countries in the region under the umbrella of Saudi Arabia, as what happened with Yemen and Qatar.

Among changes that accompanied the popular protests in 2011 included the weakness or collapse of power in a number of Arab countries and the increasing role of informal actors in the political and social life, many of them based on ethnic divisions. Such a situation is often ideal for countries that wish to intervene in the affairs of other countries, an opportunity that Abu Dhabi has not lost.

It is noticeable that the power rupture in a number of Arab countries and the competition between the social and political forces on the power, like what happen in Libya, Yemen and Somalia, allowed the intervention role of the UAE through buying the allegiance of some political and social forces and turning them into subordinate forces and employing them to implement the UAE's agenda and policies in those countries.

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The changes in the region in the past decade have led to the decline of some regional powers that can compete with the UAE and limit the UAE influence. Egypt's external role has been greatly reduced by internal divisions. This decline has exacerbated the economic and security challenges it faces. The role of Egypt turned to a subordinate of the role of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Muslim Brotherhood movement suffered a lot of consequences after its removal from power in Egypt. It was subjected to violent cases of exclusion, media distortion and political maltreatment. The Qatari role in supporting the Arab Spring has been declined and Qatar has been put it in the corner trying to lift the siege against it and reduce the international blackmail. The Syrian opposition has lost the political and military gains following the Russian military intervention in favor of the Syrian regime. The US position from Turkey changed into negative,

and developments in northern Iraq weakened the Turkish role in the region, so Turkey focused on the security risks surrounding it.

The escalation of the Iranian influence and its expansion in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, and the escalation of conflict and sectarian division have provided the UAE with an important pretext to intervene in certain areas - specifically Yemen - alongside with Saudi Arabia under the banner of countering the Iranian influence and preventing Yemen from falling under the influence of the Iranian-backed Houthi group.

The Decisive Storm (March 2015) was a regional event that changed the map of international alliances and the balance of power on the ground. Abu Dhabi has invested the event to control strategic points that would enhance its geopolitical role and protect its economic interests, such as Aden's strategic port, which is under the UAE control and it is intentionally frozen.



## Transformation of Gulf Policies in Yemen

Saudi Arabia is the leading country within the GCC because of its economic, geographic, demographic and military capabilities and its symbolic status in the Islamic world because of its embrace of the Holy places. Despite the leadership role exercised by the Kingdom within the GCC, there is always some tension in relations between Saudi and other GCC countries, because of the contradiction between the desire of the Kingdom to lead the Gulf states and the position of some GCC countries against the Saudi decision.

Prior to King Salman's accession to power in January 2015, the kingdom was in a state of decline and contraction. The vacuum that resulted from that decline of the Saudi role and helped in rising a dynamic regional role for the State of Qatar and its attempts to rebel against the Saudi Arabia.

The Qatari role reached its climax during the Arab Spring revolutions, through the media, political and financial support of the forces that led to these revolutions. In turn, the UAE adopted a strong and aggressive stance in the face of these revolutions on one hand and to thwart Qatari and Turkish efforts in supporting those revolutions on the other hand.

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Abu Dhabi spearheaded efforts to abort the regimes created by the spring revolutions, and put all its financial and political weight to support the so-called deep state powers to restore old regimes to power, with former faces or new ones. For Yemen, the Saudi and Gulf presence played a major role in the transfer of power through the Gulf Initiative and its Executive Mechanism (signed in November 2011). This role was central to the transfer of power, but the arrangements for the transitional period were one of the main reasons for the slide of Yemen to chaos and instability, especially after granting former President "Ali Abdullah Saleh" an immunity and allowing him to stay in the country and the participation of his party in a semi-government alongside with the opposition forces.

The Saudi leadership's attention to the situation in Yemen has declined following pressure to partly transfer power to President Hadi. This decline is due to its unwillingness to support the new authority that includes the Yemeni Islah party, which is close to the intellectual line of the Muslim Brotherhood, because Saudi Arabia, at that time, was concerned over threat of the Muslim Brotherhood or "the phobia of the Muslim Brotherhood" – as expressed by the leader of the Al Haq Party, which supported the Houthis after their coup [12]- more than the risk of the Iranian influence expansion. At that point, news emerged of an agreement between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia whereby the Houthis would play a part in securing the southern border of the kingdom in return for Saudi financial and material support to the Houthis.

At the same time, the UAE was active in supporting and mobilizing opponents of the Islah Party and the National Reconciliation Government, including former President Ali Saleh, who was putting a lot of obstacles against President Hadi, betting on Hadi's failure in leading the country so that he can return to power. Saleh exerted efforts to prevent Hadi from making real changes in the structure of the regime and in the military and security institutions, which were in a state of division between the legitimate authority of "Hadi" and the influence of "Saleh."

These conditions represented a conducive environment for the military,

political and intellectual expansion of the Houthis group, which created pretexts to control the capital and set out to take control of Taiz and Aden after President Hadi and members of the government of Khaled Bahah were placed under house arrest. [13]

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The Houthis' control of power in Yemen has raised fears of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi concerns have been reinforced by the Houthis' military maneuvers on the Saudi border, its public threat to the kingdom, and daily flights to and from Tehran, and the intellectual, political and media harmony with the forces of Shiites in the region. [14]



### **Third: International Transformations**

In turn, some international transformations have contributed, in one way or another, to a change in the nature of the role played by the UAE on the external level, and in the motivations of this role. At the top of these transformations is the withdrawal of the United States from the region and the retreatment of US attention to developments in the region except security threats represented by both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Organization (Daesh), and the US tendency to deal with those threats through regional parties (subcontractors) that fight those threats on behalf of US.

The changes also include the coming of a populist US figure, Doland Trump, to power. Trump has a commercial background and reports say that he is a partner with the UAE in a number of economic interests.

Many questions and doubts spread about the international parties that contributed to Trump's candidacy and helped him come to power. Trump seeks to achieve breakthrough successes distinguished from former presidents, but he tends to use proxies in the region to do so. So Trump launched his first term, with the participation of the UAE, with planning and implementing a military landing in areas of Al-Bayda in Yemen where a large number of civilians have been killed. [15]

These international transformations have given Abu Dhabi an opportunity to align itself with the American approach by presenting itself as a regional ally that is full of enthusiasm to confront terrorism and extremist organizations. Therefore, as we shall see later, the UAE is intensifying links between its presence in Yemen and participation in the Arab Coalition, and its allegations of fighting against Al-Qaeda and Daesh in a country that is plagued with social and political rupture, resources scarcity and hardline religious leanings.



## **Decisive Storm—An entrance for UAE influence in Yemen**

Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily in Yemen came as a surprise [16]. It was an exceptional decision because of dangers it entails and because it differs from the pattern of Saudi policy in previous decades, which was depended upon financial, diplomatic and intelligence tools. Saudi officials pointed out that this decision came after the exhaustion of all peaceful means to prevent the coup in Yemen, and that what forced Saudi to do [the Decisive Storm] was the insistence of the Houthis and "Saleh" to control the political power by force. [17]

Saudi Arabia worked to prepare the military intervention in secrecy and speed. The first step was to release President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi from his place of detention in Sana'a. He was under house arrest under heavy guard, imposed by the Houthis, [18] and indeed he was taken out to Aden. When Saleh forces and the Houthis militias attacked Hadi in Aden, he was transferred to Oman and then to Riyadh.

During preparations for military intervention, the Saudi leadership had two main options: to carry out a military action individually, in the way it adopted to support the regime of Imam Mohamed al-Badr, who was overthrown by the Army in the revolution of 26 September 1962, or to mobilize a coalition of a number of states to its side. It seems that the Saudi decision maker preferred the second option for its benefits, including showing the Iran-backed Houthis that their coup faces a general state of rejection by the countries of the region, in addition that the idea of the coalition reduces responsibilities that Saudi would have borne alone if it chose the first option. The coalition is also consistent with the Kingdom's tendency in dealing with the crises of the region and the Arab Spring revolutions under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In addition, the coalition is generally more suitable for military intervention cases, as in the case of the international coalition to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, and the international coalition to hit the military capabilities of the organization of "Daesh" in Syria and Iraq.



However, this option is not free of negatives and perhaps risks, including the possibility of competition by the major forces participating in the coalition, or behaving out of the declared goals and specific objectives of the intervention, which will lead that process to a certain failure and may result in catastrophic adverse consequences and destructive returns that are often against the state to be intervened for, and the leading state of the coalition.

In addition to Saudi Arabia, which is the leader of the Arab Coalition, in terms of military, political, financial and economic aspects, the Arab Coalition included the rest of the GCC countries (except the Sultanate of Oman), Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco, etc.

The United Arab Emirates participated in the Decisive Storm, which was the name given to the military operation to intervene in Yemen before it later changed to "Restore Hope" operation, out of UAE solidarity with Saudi Arabia towards the security risks that threaten it and may reach UAE one day, according to official statements.



The participation of the UAE was the biggest among other countries of the Arab Coalition. It participated in the first air strike, which aimed at controlling the Yemeni airspace and destroying the ground defenses and radars by about 30 warplanes, compared to 100 aircrafts that belong to Saudi Arabia. Other countries participated with the fewest number of aircrafts.

The UAE was the most enthusiastic because of its alliance with Saudi Arabia to counter challenges resulted from the Arab Spring revolutions and to confront what it calls the expansion of the Iranian influence. And strongly due to UAE's desire to intervene in the region's issues and crises and to use its huge economic and financial potential to build a political influence and play a regional role, especially as regional transformations served and facilitated that intervention, as we have already pointed out.

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After a while since the launch of the "Decisive Storm", the enthusiasm of the participating countries in the Arab Coalition decreased. Qatar was expelled following its crisis with a number of Gulf states and Egypt. Thus, Saudi Arabia and the UAE remained the two main forces in the coalition with support from Sudanese troops on the ground.

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### **Drives of UAE influence in Yemen**

"The UAE has an ambition to be a regional power with influence in the region and the world. This ambition has no place to be ideally implemented on the ground except in Yemen. The UAE does not have the ability to compete with Iran in the Gulf region, and it cannot exert power in Libya and Syria.

Otherwise Yemen and the South Red Sea are the available and appropriate space for UAE to demonstrate its power [19]", and exercise interventions in a way that is not available in other countries. The way that former President "Ali Abdullah Saleh" led the county has weakened both the state and society, and the comprehensive crisis in the country has created a number of informal actors who have ambitions to change the regime and the state. Some of them have power on the ground, so the UAE got the opportunity to employ them to achieve their intervention goals.

The conflict that has followed demands for change caused a split in the state institutions that have not had a chance to recover. Finally, the coup d'état by the Houthis has torn the society and the state's institutions. They have destroyed the rest of the state's resources leaving the Yemeni society in a state of weakness and need. They have made Yemen an appropriate environment for "political mercenary" and buying proxy loyalties and fighting forces. It is also an opportunity for UAE to invest the humanitarian and development work in building political and possibly military influence.

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On the other hand, the intervention role of the UAE will be under the cloak of the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia. This will reduce the burdens and tasks that may lie on shoulders of the UAE, and will exempt them from many responsibilities, while the main responsible will be Saudi Arabia, and even if the intervention fails, it is Riyadh that will pay the price of that failure from its vital and strategic interests.

Finally, the expansion of UAE influence comes at a time when regional competition over Yemen is declining. With the exception of Iran, the regional competition over Yemen is only limited, at the present time, to Saudi Arabia and UAE.

The Qatari role has been reduced due to the Gulf crisis. Saudi Arabia and UAE have excluded Qatar from the Arab Coalition to support the legitimacy in Yemen.

Qatar was previously excluded from participating in the political settlement contained in the Gulf Initiative for Yemen.

Qatar can undermine the role of the UAE but not to exceed the available margin. Qatar campaign against the UAE role in Yemen is likely to be limited to media, which addressed the level of deviation in the UAE role in Yemen and could mobilize a segment of the Yemeni, Arab and even international community against it.

This is also applied to the Turkish role, which had no vested influence in Yemen in the past. In addition, Turkey has been preoccupied with serious developments in Syria and Iraq, and its main aim is to publicly criticize the UAE's behavior in Yemen, like what happened during the crisis between the legitimate authority of Yemen and the United Arab Emirates over the island of Socotra in May 2018. The Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement demanding "all players to respect the Yemeni legitimate government ..." [20] in a clear reference to the UAE.

The Sultanate of Oman is an exceptional case. It has local allies and has influence on the ground, in a certain part of Yemen, specifically in Mahra governorate and less in the Socotra archipelago. This influence was responsible, among other factors, for preventing the spread of the UAE domination in Al-Mahra. Which is also one of the factors that have created big difficulties for the Saudi military deployment in Al-Mahra, which indicates that the absence of regional parties that have local allies who have power on the ground, is one of the factors that enhanced the UAE individual presence in southern Yemen and to a lesser extent in the West Coast.

The UAE has a military presence in east Africa, specifically in Eritrea and the Republic of Somaliland. Abu Dhabi opened its military base in the heart of Eritrea in 2015 and began operating at Berbera base in the Republic of Somalia in February 2017. This presence will be greatly enhanced by the UAE military presence in Yemen. UAE will complement the military bases it has built in the region. Abu Dhabi will be able to exert influence in the southern Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab and the Arabian Sea, and it will gain an international importance in terms of protecting the international shipping line, beginning with the island of Socotra and passing through the island of Miyun to Eritrea.

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The political and military influence of the UAE in southern Yemen and its western coasts will also give it superiority over other countries that compete it in the southern Red Sea and East Africa, particularly Turkey, Iran, Qatar and even Saudi Arabia. Moreover, Abu Dhabi's leadership envisages that its military presence in the Yemeni islands and coasts, including Socotra, Mukalla, Aden, Makha and perhaps Hodeidah, will strengthen its position in the region and the world and ensure a strong and extended alliance between UAE and the international powers. Accordingly, UAE will be assigned to play an important role in protecting economic interests through securing trade and oil routes via this important international corridor.

As demonstrated in UAE practical performs, the goal of controlling the Yemeni western and eastern coasts and related islands and corridors and placing them under the direct military and political influence of the UAE is one of the main motives for its participation in the Arab Coalition, and one of the fundamental determinants of its role in the Decisive Storm [21] in Yemen as well as its position towards the main forces in Yemen and in the Arab Coalition to support the legitimacy.

### Pillars of UAE Influence in Yemen

In addition to the internal, regional and international transformations and the drives of the UAE's behavior, which contributed to the escalation of its role in Yemen and giving it an interference and conflict dimension, the influence of the UAE in Yemen was based on a number of political, logistical and human pillars, which in turn have contributed to increasing this role and giving it a wide area to move on without any restrictions. Those pillars included the Saudi-led Arab Coalition that provided a legal cover to UAE's intervention, and the existence of local forces that have turned into a kind of human devices of this role.

Those local forces were employed for humanitarian aid work and development needs and services as a facilitator of this role in a society that suffers from war disasters and widespread poverty and deprivation as well as the presence of the UAE military troops on the Yemeni territory. For more details, we present the following pillars:

### First: the legal pillar "Arab Coalition Cover"

The cover of the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia, is one of the most important pillars of the UAE role in the war in Yemen. The UAE is moving under this cover and is keen - at least verbally - to work within it. Without this cover, opportunities for the UAE will inevitably diminish.

In this context, many questions arise: Why did Saudi Arabia choose to support the UAE in the military intervention in Yemen? What value could the UAE presence have in the Arab Coalition? How did the UAE employ Saudi Arabia to achieve its own objectives? Why did Saudi leave a large area in Yemen for the UAE in contrary with the announced goals of the Arab Coalition and with the interests of Yemen and Saudi Arabia alike?

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Saudi Arabia announced the "Decisive Storm" operation on March 26, 2015 and established a military coalition comprising the GCC, with the exception of Oman, as well as Pakistan and four other Arab countries - Egypt, Sudan, Morocco and Jordan. The coalition, which has a cover from the Arab League, has set its sights on restoring the legitimacy and disarming the Houthis after they withdraw from the capital Sana'a.

The Arab Coalition forces gave the liberation of Aden and the southern regions a military priority and it succeeded, after the landing of its trained forces on the coasts of Aden, to expel the Houthis from the city and took it as a base for military operations to liberate the rest of the southern governorates. After the return of President Hadi and members of his government to Aden, and the transfer of the Central Bank from Sana'a to Aden,

there was optimism among large segments of the Yemeni people that the overthrow of the Houthi coup has become close. However, the reality proved to be disappointing. It was found, through various factors, that the Yemeni legitimacy was impotent and it lacked sufficient support to ensure security and political stability in the city, let alone putting obstacles in front of the government to repair itself. [22]

After the departure of the Houthi gunmen and Saleh forces from the city of Aden in July 2015 and within the framework of coordination and sharing of missions among the coalition countries, the UAE was responsible for the supervision of Aden and the rest of the southern cities. Its military contribution was the largest. But Abu Dhabi has been careful to shape the landscape in line with its political and ideological orientations, and it has proposed policies that contradict with general trends and the announced goals of the "Decisive Storm." The UAE deliberately excluded the Yemeni Islah Party as it is accused to be close to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the party's official denials of any foreign affiliation. UAE has initially sought to attract Salafis to use them, outside the formal military frameworks, to form the so-called "security belt forces," whose task is to secure Aden and neighborhoods. UAE followed the same approach in Hadramout, Taiz and Shabwa by forming its own "elite battalions" [23], and has repeatedly refused to include these formations in the National Army.

Abu Dhabi succeeded in imposing Aidaros al-Zubaidi as governor of Aden after the killing of its former governor Jaafar Mohamed Saad on December 6, 2015, and then it appointed Shalal Shaye, who is loyal to UAE, as the director of Aden Security. The UAE then tightened its grip on the city's security and military installations and opened training camps away from the eyes of the legitimate government and the National Army. UAE has controlled the movement of President Hadi himself to and from Aden through controlling the security of Aden airport and other facilities. Moreover, UAE has opened torture prisons in Aden under direct supervision of the UAE. Interior Minister in President Hadi's government said in an interview with the Egyptian newspaper Al-Yawm Al-Sabe that an Emirati officer prevented the entry of about 170 billion Yemeni riyals to Aden [24], and that President Hadi failed to do anything about it. This means that Abu Dhabi has been able to restrict the legitimate government on one hand, and support armed groups on the ground on the other hand, but was this done in full coordination with Riyadh?

## **Explanations to the ambiguity of Saudi position:**

The ambiguity is still surrounding Saudi Arabia's position towards the UAE's behavior in Yemen as its position is sometimes absent and in some cases weak. Saudi has little to do with the conflict between the UAE and its local proxies in Yemen and the legitimate authority in order to calm down the conflict and prevent the escalation. Solutions are often limited to keeping the situation as it was in the past, not to build up to radical solutions to end the conflict, or to build understandings that prevent the occurrence in the future. This raises many questions about the reasons that prevent Saudi Arabia from intervening to rationalize the UAE's behavior and restrict and prevent its excesses.

It must be recognized in advance that an ambiguity surrounds the nature of relations between Saudi Arabia and the UAE and the position of Saudi towards the practices of the UAE in Yemen. So, many researchers build multiple hypothetical guesses that go in four directions as follows:

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**The UAE has tightened its grip on the city's security and military installations and opened training camps away from the eyes of the legitimate government and the National Army**  
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**The first explanation:** The ambiguity of the Saudi position towards the role of the UAE in Yemen reinforces the existing coordination and understanding between them on many issues and developments, a trend that is far away, but it cannot be completely excluded from the circle of interpretation of the Saudi position.

**The second explanation:** stems from Saudi dissatisfaction with the deviation of the UAE role in Yemen. However, the Saudi leadership is preoccupied with completing the procedures of transferring power, arranging the Saudi house from inside, and on the other side being involved in military operations on its southern border. The fighting is raging there, and the rockets reach deep into their territories. [25]

**Third explanation:** The silence of Saudi Arabia towards the behavior of the UAE in southern Yemen is because of the Saudi need for the UAE to effect the positions of the US administration, which has a special relationship with the UAE at this stage, opposite to the cold US-Saudi relations and the lack of confidence between the two countries.

**The fourth explanation:** to the Saudi position towards the actions and policies of the UAE that perpetuate chaos and mischief in Yemen, is the state of disability of the Kingdom due to the UAE penetration and influence in the Saudi government circles and its impact on the Saudi internal agenda

and external positions of Saudi Arabia. Some sources have evidence of the UAE influence within the Kingdom, including: [26]

1-The huge economic projects announced by Saudi Arabia in its economic vision until 2030, which aims to move away from the power of oil just as the UAE did a while ago.

2- Liberal political and social reforms in a way that makes Saudi Arabia approach the UAE's most open model in terms of women and religion.

3- Riyadh position against the political Islam with enthusiasm that simulates the UAE experience.

Whatever explanations to the nature of the Saudi position towards the behavior of Abu Dhabi in southern Yemen, Saudi Arabia remains the best party to control and rationalize that behavior. It is responsible. Saudi Arabia led the military intervention on the pretext of supporting the Yemeni people against the coup and vowed to keep Yemen's unity, security and stability.

A considerable number of Yemenis have turned their attention to the direction of the Kingdom and placed their trust on its leadership, and built great hopes and aspirations, which put it before a moral and political responsibility and even unprecedented legal responsibility.

If the Saudi leadership is able to rationalize the UAE's intervention in Yemen and direct it to the stated objectives of the intervention, or even restrict it and help the Yemenis to get rid of the coup while at the same time exerting its influence and resources to maintain unity and build a cohesive authority, it will be a precious role by the Kingdom similar to its pivotal role during the liberation of Kuwait from the forces of Saddam Hussein in 1991, and the rescue of Yemen in 2011 from pitfalls of a critical political crisis and an imminent civil war.

In addition to Yemen, Saudi Arabia is also the hardest hit by the UAE's uncontrolled behavior against the objectives of the Arab Coalition and the interests of Yemen and Saudi Arabia. If Yemen is pushed towards the option of rupture, chaos and prolonged entanglement, Riyadh will not be isolated from the security and strategic repercussions that will occur in its southern confines. It will be the hardest hit after Yemen. With the need to point out that the UAE is the most in need for the Saudi umbrella, and it will not be able to derive a path in Yemen out of the Saudi umbrella and away from it. And even if UAE tried to do, the opportunity to overcome or exceed it remains limited, and the maximum the UAE can do is to threaten to stop its participation in military operations in Yemen.

This is what actually happened when a number of UAE planes were mysteriously dropped in Aden (June 2016)<sup>[27]</sup>. "The UAE has been monitoring the political arrangements and our main role is to empower Yemenis in the liberated areas," the UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash said in a press conference in Abu Dhabi, "The military intervention has done all that is required and the political détente remains, which is the responsibility of the Yemenis themselves." The official account of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan quickly conveyed that comments on his Twitter in a clear indication of adopting such comments<sup>[28]</sup>. But the UAE has retreated from the decision to withdraw its forces from Yemen in a signal that it was a paper of pressure and possibly blackmail.



## Second: The human pillar "armed groups"

The UAE is present in Yemen through many armed military forces. It has forces in Yemen and relies on a multinational force to fight and train local forces in Yemen. Figure (1) displays the classification of these forces and their numbers.

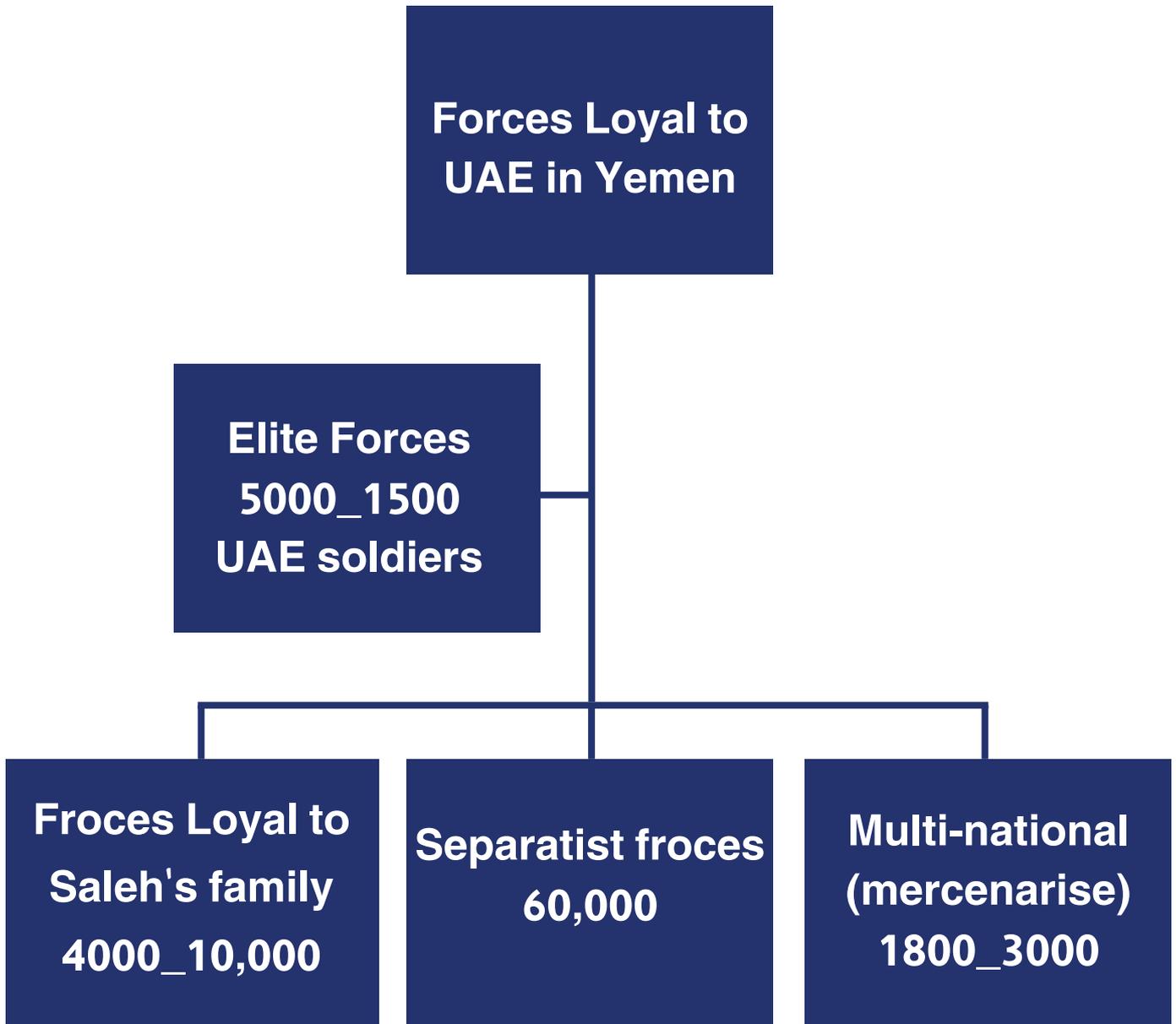


Figure (1)

## 1. UAE-backed elite and multinational forces

During the three-year civil war in Yemen, UAE forces have been on the ground since the liberation of Aden from the Houthis in July 2015, and the UAE built elite forces in Yemen (1500) soldiers and officers [29]. These soldiers and officers are joined by mercenaries where they all work on related missions, including more specific operations or the training of Yemeni militants (the separatist forces / loyalists of "Saleh"). The UAE has reduced the number of troops from 5,000 to 1,500 after training secessionist forces.

The UAE Army forces and special multinational forces, estimated at 1800- 3000 soldiers, known as the UAE Presidential Guard, are fighting in the country. They operate above the law and are outside the scope of the UAE Ministry of Defense. They subject to the administration and orders of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed . The multinational force is led by Mike Hindmarsh, an Australian general who has fought in many wars in the Middle East. General Hindmarsh and his multinational forces began to emerge in the torn Yemen in mid-2015. These efforts appear to be continuing in special operations in the liberated areas. In addition, they have a significant role in training Yemeni forces in the UAE base located in the "Assab" of Eritrea. [30]

Experts believe that there is a role for the Palestinian general Mohammed Dahlan, who is an adviser to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, in overseeing the security belts established by the UAE in Yemen.

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**The UAE Army forces and special multinational forces, estimated at 1800-3000 soldiers, known as the UAE Presidential Guard, are fighting in the country,**  
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## 2. Yemeni Forces and Entities

The influence of the UAE in Yemen is largely based on Yemeni trends and entities that are acting as its local agents that implement practices on its behalf. The most prominent of these is the separation movement in the so-called Southern Movement. The Salafi trend under the umbrella of the so-called "Transitional Council" and to a lesser extent, supporters of the late President 'Ali Abdullah Saleh' in the General People's Congress Party, where these components serve as the pillars and human concentrations of the local role of the UAE in Yemen.

### **(A) The separatist movement within the Southern Movement:**

The influence of the United Arab Emirates in the southern Yemen is based specifically on the movements that adopt anti-Yemeni Unity positions and seek to impose secession in southern Yemen with support from UAE that employed them to undermine the legitimate authority and the national unity. The UAE role in Yemen raise dangers and threats that stimulate fears of a large part of the Yemeni and Arab nations.

The factions formed what is known as the Southern Movement in 2007, as a result of the policies of exclusion and errors accumulated by the regime of former President "Ali Abdullah Saleh" towards the homeland in general and the southern and eastern governorates in particular. Those factions represented a form of community resistance to those policies that have been based on the seizing of power and wealth and the excluding of geographical, political and social components.

In the context of the interaction with the southern issue and the movement of the community towards it, the Southern Movement was divided into three streams. The first one demands a re-correction of the status of the southern governorates in the framework of preserving the national unity. The second one demands a federal system as a possible solution to the southern issue. The third one demands separation and return to the borders of what was known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south. [31]

The wrong policies adopted by Saleh's regime in dealing with the southern issue have contributed to fueling this crisis of the southern people and pushed many people to sympathize with their demands and join the trend that has the voice and the highest demands on this issue, the separatist movement, which had strong relations with Iran that provided the movement with financial, media and political support before being adopted by the UAE, which raises an additional question.. Does the secessionist movement now serve the UAE or Iran or both in return for achieving the separation?

**The influence of the United Arab Emirates in the southern Yemen is based specifically on the movements that adopt anti-Yemeni Unity positions,**

There were increasing hopes of solving the southern issue after the youth revolution in 2011, and this revolution indeed brought the first southern president to power since the unification in 1990. President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi adopted a number of policies and procedures that aimed at addressing the southern issue, including the appointment of a large number of southerners in senior positions in the administrative apparatus of the state and in the Army and security institutions. He also held a national dialogue conference that issued a historic decision to change the form of the state from a simple state to a federal state of six regions and the adoption of the principle of parity between the south and the north at the top positions in the state during the preparatory stage to move to the federal state and beyond in an effort to find a radical and final solution to this issue. Despite the difficulties in resolving the southern issue, these policies and treatments were likely to bear fruit not in a long time, but that did not happen due to the collapse of the political process following the control of the Houthis on the capital Sana'a, on 21 September 2014.

## Three UAE Strategies in the South:

**First: Turning the southern issue from a popular demand to an international swaps**

Following the participation in the liberation of Aden from forces loyal to the Houthis and Saleh, the UAE took over the city of Aden and some southern regions, and since then UAE has been keen to enforce its supervision according to its own agenda, often inconsistent with the declared goal of the Decisive Storm, ending the coup and restoring the state.

To achieve its own goals, Abu Dhabi dealt with the resistance forces that fought the Houthis in the southern governorates with selectivity and bias, and sorted them according to whether they are with or against its own project. The UAE merged with the separatist factions and supported them to take over the southern governorates.

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UAE put pressure on President Hadi to dismiss Governor of Aden, Nayef al-Bakri, on the pretext of his affiliation with the Islah Party, although he announced his abandonment of any party affiliation. After the assassination of former governor of Aden, Jaafar Mohammed Saad, who replaced Nayef al-Bakri, the UAE succeeded in imposing Aidaros al-Zubaidi, as governor of Aden, and appointed Shalal Shaye as Aden security chief, in a move to enable separatists to tighten their grip on the administrative, security and military facilities in the city, and to facilitate the opening of camps to recruit and train elements from the governorate of Dhala and Salafis away from the eyes of the legitimacy and the National Army.

In an additional step, these camps were linked to the UAE military leadership in Aden, which oversees the recruitment, training and payment of salaries, and the deployment and distribution of these forces in various areas. This has enabled the UAE to control almost completely the security outlets and vital facilities in the city of Aden, including port, airport, oil refinery and others, and to control the entry of any person to and from Aden, including the president himself, and members of the government through controlling Aden airport security.

In the same direction, the UAE pushed for appointing governors from the separatist movement in a number of southern governorates. It also established security camps and elites in those governorates.

It managed to control the security and administrative aspects of it by linking the governors and the security and administrative leaders with the UAE military leadership rather than the legitimate authority.

### **Second: the formation of "Transitional Council" to guarantee the movement of the southern street**

Abu Dhabi is aware that it cannot communicate directly with the southern street because of its limited experience in this type of influence as a state of sheikhs, where the public opinion is not exist as it is in the democratic countries, so hastened to sort the southern resistance as opponents and loyalists and chose to support Aidaros Al-Zubaidi from the Popular Socialist Party and Hani bin Buraik from the Salafist Movement. The UAE publicly supported the formation of the Southern Transitional Council, which was announced on 11 May 2017. The council has become a state within the state and served as a parallel and alternative authority to the internationally recognized government and has a considerable influence due to the public support from the UAE, which oversees the council's work. Abu Dhabi often hosts many of its activities, especially when its relationship is tense with the legitimate authority.

On the occasion of the public crisis between the UAE and the Yemeni government on the island of Socotra, Abu Dhabi hosted meetings that gathered members of the Transitional Council and other southern personalities, in an effort to push the secession efforts.

In a significant reference, the media quoted an official source in the Southern Transition Council as saying that several meetings were held with the historical leaders of the "South State" and the presidency and members of the Council in the UAE to discuss the future of the South and draw a policy that includes all political factions, Ali Nasser Mohammed, former president of the south, Abdulrahman al-Jafri, head of the Free Union of the Arab South Sons, and leader of the southern resistance, Abdulaziz al-Jafri. [32]

In a subsequent step supporting the march towards secession, the Transitional Council announced on 30 November 2017 the names of 303 members of the so-called the "National Assembly," that represents the legislative authority of the secessionist entity.



The UAE procedures include the expel of everything related to the northern governorates, in Aden and other southern governorates, including government officials in the military units of the legitimate authority, and even ordinary citizens as UAE-related security points in Dhala governorate and other areas stop passengers traveling from the northern governorates and heading to Aden, and practice forms of restrictions on them. Many travelers were stopped and taken for investigations and some others returned to governorates they came from.

In addition to armed attacks on the government forces in order to take control their military positions and push them out of Aden. The clashes between the Presidential Protection Brigades and the UAE-backed forces were followed by the intervention of the UAE forces, many of which were resolved in favor of the security belt forces.



The most violent of those clashes was the fighting in Aden on Sunday, 28 January 2018, between the Presidential Protection Forces and the forces loyal to UAE, which lasted for three days and ended with the control of the UAE-backed security forces over the city of Aden, except Al-Ma'asheeq Palace where Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Daghr was staying at that time.

Media sources quoted the commander of the fourth brigade of the Presidential Protection, Mahran al-Qubati, that "this [the attack] was with vehicles and machines owned only by the UAE"<sup>[33]</sup> and that the headquarters of his camp was hit by Emirati aircrafts. At the same time, the spokesman of the Arab Coalition Colonel Turki al-Maliki denied that the coalition air force targeted any camps or sites in Aden. <sup>[34]</sup>

The crisis ended with a Saudi initiative- in the name of the Arab Coalition, to restore the situation to the pre-confrontations, but that does not mean that the clashes will not be renewed.

### **Third: undermining the legitimacy**

Abu Dhabi has adopted a reprisal policy against President Hadi and his government and followed clear and open policies to undermine the legitimate authority and to marginalize it and weaken its presence, and even to remove it from Aden and the other southern governorates. UAE has instructed its followers in the separatist movement not to recognize the legitimacy of President Hadi and to reject his decisions, even that decisions to change some officials who are not from the first row. For example, President Hadi issued a decision to change the Aden airport security officer, "Saleh al-Amiri," and with a direction from the UAE, al-Amiri rejected the decision causing a crisis that was resolved only by Saudi intervention.

The UAE intervention reached a limit not in perception, the security of Aden airport prevented the landing of President Hadi's plane at the airport after his return from Saudi Arabia in February 2017. This forced him to change the plane's route to Socotra Island and he was allowed to land only after Riyadh intervention.

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With the failure of Hadi's visit to the United Arab Emirates to resolve the dispute, Saudi Arabia was forced to ask Hadi to remain in Riyadh fearing from any military clash that would undermine the military and political gains made by the Decisive Storm, and lead to the failure of the war against the Houthis and Saleh's supporters.

Although the president remained "quiet" in Riyadh as one of the measures taken by Saudi Arabia to ensure that there was no tension between his authority and the Southern Transitional Council, the UAE and its local parties continued to impose restrictions on the government of Bin Daghr, a kind of unannounced blockade. In a move to expel it from Aden, the Southern Transitional Council launched a campaign against the government of Ahmed Obaid Bin Dagher in January 2018, accusing it of corruption and mismanagement. It announced on 22 January that it intends to overthrow the government if Hadi did not dismiss it within a week. This was the cause of the bloody clashes that took place in January 2018 between the Presidential Protection Forces and the security forces of the Transitional Council, supported by the UAE. The clashes forced the government to move to Riyadh before its recent return to Aden.

As President Hadi remained in Riyadh, the voices that held the UAE responsible for the president's stay outside the country increased, and officials in the government continued to object the way the UAE deals with the legitimate authority, and some already resigned in protest.

In its struggle with the legitimate authority, the UAE pushed the separatist movement's factions to attack the legitimate authority and threaten to confuse the scene and mix the papers in Aden and the south in general. When the Yemeni government clashed with the UAE politically over Socotra Island, the separatist movement attacked the government and defended Abu Dhabi. Aidaros al-Zubaidi said, "They (the UAE) have all the possibilities to impose a different reality" in Aden.

On 7 May 2018, the Transitional Council issued a statement in which it attacked the Yemeni government, describing its statement as containing false allegations about the issue of "sovereignty" in a desperate attempt to conceal the real causes of the crisis. It welcomed the development role of the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi and UAE, in the liberated governorates, stressing the need to "secure the regional waters and maritime routes from any infiltration attempts by terrorist forces." It also thanked the people of Socotra Island "for their popular support to the Arab Coalition in the face of misleading media campaigns." [35]

## **(B) Employing the al-Jamiya Salafism Trend**

The origin of Salafi trend in Yemen dates back to the late seventies of the last century, following the establishment of Dar al-Hadith in Damaj district of Saada by "Hadi bin Muqbel al-Wadai." From this center, the Salafi faith spread in various areas of Yemen. The factors that helped in spreading the Salafi faith is that a large number of Yemenis expatriated in Saudi Arabia and were influenced by Salafi thought and practices there.

In the southern governorates, the Salafist movement started late in the second half of the 1980s after the end of the security grip of the Yemeni Socialist Party, which was torn by the bloody conflict between its wings in the events of January 13, 1986. Many people lost their families in the bloody events, which have caused many citizens to be frustrated, so they quit the political parties and preferred the religious isolationism, like the Salafi trend.

They support from Salafi religious associations in the Gulf that gave a big priority to the southern Yemen to remove the case of "religious ignorance" in the south due to the policy of the Yemeni Socialist Party.

The Salafi trend expanded in the southern governorates in the 1990s, especially in the second half, following the end of the Socialist Party's control of the southern governorates,

and due to support from the Salafi religious organizations in the Gulf States that gave priority to the southern Yemen in order to erase what they called "religious ignorance" during the rule of the Yemeni Socialist Party that adopted Marxist ideology and fought religious trends throughout its rule in the south. During the third millennium, the spread of Salafism and its thoughts in the southern and eastern governorates continued, perhaps exceeding the size of its spread in the other governorates. This may be due to the fact that Salafi thought is closer to the psyche of the southerner than any other religious trends, except the tendency of some people in Hadramout to the Sufism. Within the Salafi trend in the southern governorates - as in Yemen in general - the largest presence is for Al-Jami trend, which represents the largest body of Salafism that was established by "Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadai", and the idea of this trend is based on the obedience of the ruler and bullying against those who oppose or criticize him, as well as stabbing and disobeying those who violate these ideas from other Islamic groups. [36]

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**The Salafi trend expanded in the southern governorates in the 1990s, especially in the second half, following the end of the Socialist Party's control of the southern governorates,**  
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In contrary to this Salafist trend, which is the most closed and hardened trend, there are other Salafist tendencies that are more flexible and moderate, such as the followers of Al-Ihsan Charity Association, which is spread in the governorate of Hadramout and slightly spread in other governorates. The Al-Ihsan Charity used to be linked to Al-Hikmah Association that is spread in Ibb, Taiz and Sana'a before they separated from each other over intellectual and personal differences.

The Salafist trend continued to grow and expand in the southern governorates via its religious, charitable and educational activities. On the political side, although it always confirms its rejection of the political action, in practice, much of this trend was active among citizens – especially during the general elections - to emphasize the importance of obedience to the ruler and the prohibition of elections. Some of them issued fatwas that if it is necessary to choose one of the candidates, you should vote for the candidates nominated by the ruler. This activity represents a practical exercise of the political and partisan action that aimed at preventing people from voting for candidates of the opposition parties, especially the Islah Party, but they indirectly support the candidates of the GPC.

With escalation of the dispute over the southern issue and the emergence of the so-called the Southern Movement in 2007,

new changes have emerged in the Salafist trend in terms of the involvement of many of its components in the political action. Many Salafist preachers have joined the Southern Movement. In May 2012, the Salafis formed a Southern legislative body, and "many Salafist factions have adopted the option of separating the south from the north, and the establishment of a civil state in the south. They argued that there is no any legal obstacle to prevent it [separation], in a clear opposition to those who see that the persistence of the unity is a religious duty,"<sup>[37]</sup> like supporters of the Yemeni Islah Party.

The positions of the Southern Salafist Movement varied during the Youth Revolution of 2011 as some of them showed sympathy with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Al-Ihsan Charity Association headed to form a political party in the north, the Rashad Party, and Salafis in the south formed another party, "Al-Nahdah Movement" Party, while a large part of Salafis in the south supported the demand of the Southern Movement in terms of separation.



The biggest shift in the Salafist trend occurred during war that the Houthis launched beginning in Damaj to Aden and then in other southern governorates. In addition to the Islah Party fighters and independent citizens, who had to take up arms, Salafist groups formed the basic strength of the forces involved in the war against the Houthis, especially in the city of Aden, and became the most attractive group for resistance and support; this made it the horse of hope that the Arab Coalition bet <sup>[38]</sup> on in the war against the Houthis and their ally Saleh.

### **Hani bin Buraik... key of al-Jamiya Salafism**

After the liberation of Aden and due to the state of security vacuum, the UAE attracted a faction of the Salafi trend, led by "Hani bin Buraik." The faction belongs to the al-Madkhali Salafism. UAE worked to attract followers of this trend and trained them in camps that were set up and supervised by UAE in order to use those recruits in what has become known as the security belt forces. The UAE has made sure that this is done under the supervision of the UAE military leadership in Aden, away from the legitimate authority and the Ministry of Interior of the Yemeni government, as mentioned above.

The UAE gave the leadership of the security belt forces to "Hani bin Buraik" and pressed for his appointment as a member of the Council of Ministers.

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**After the liberation of Aden and due to the state of security vacuum, the UAE attracted a faction of the Salafi trend, led by "Hani bin Buraik." The faction belongs ,to the al-Madkhali Salafism**  
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After being dismissed by President Hadi, the UAE pushed both members of the separation movement and Salafis to form the southern Transitional Council and appointed bin Buraik as vice president of the council.

Human rights reports indicate that the pro-UAE security forces have committed many violations of human rights and the public freedoms. Those forces have deported simple workers from Taiz governorate and other northern governorates from the city of Aden. They have launched a campaign of harassment against those opponents to bin Buraik, especially members of the Islah Party that faces combined hostility from the UAE, the separatist movement and the al-Madkhali Salafist movement. Many headquarters of the Islah Party have been raided, some of them have been burned, a large number of its supporters and sympathizers have been arrested and placed in secret prisons, supervised by the UAE forces. <sup>[39]</sup>

In contrast to bin Buraik and his trend, the moderate Salafis did not have the same popularity with the Emiratis, although they (the moderate Salafis) had a significant presence during the war and the military confrontation with the Houthis in Aden. Moreover, those moderate Salafis who enjoy a popular acceptance have been assassinated or escape assassinations, especially imams and preachers, in a systematic and puzzling manner. Frequent reports indicate that since the liberation of Aden until July 2018, nearly 30 imams have been assassinated, while the rest have been forced to leave Aden and the southern governorates to other areas inside and outside Yemen.

The reports also indicate that the pro-UAE security forces have carried out a large-scale of arrests in the ranks of the Salafis who have not declared allegiance to the UAE. The arrest campaigns are often justified by counter-terrorism and militant groups.



### **(C) The legacy of President Saleh**

The General People's Congress Party (GPC) is the political arm of the regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. GPC is one of the ruling parties that are established by the rulers to carry out specific functions. With Saleh's long term, the expansion of the beneficiaries network that represent the power of the ruling party and the increasing contest between the GPC and the opposition parties, the GPC party turned into a political and social trend that resists change and tends to remain in power or return to it.

The supporters of Saleh and the GPC on the one hand and the UAE on the other hand are in favor of Saleh regime. They used to have positive relations, especially in the last years of Saleh's rule. The competition between the GPC and the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), led by the Islah Party, caused a rapprochement between Saleh and the UAE.

With the outbreak of the youth revolution in 2011, and with the UAE hostile ideology against the Arab Spring, Abu Dhabi sided more with Saleh, especially since Qatar, the political opponent of the UAE, supported the pro-revolution parties.

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**The positive relations  
between supporters of Saleh  
and the GPC on one hand,  
and the UAE on the other  
hand, date back to the period  
of Saleh's regime,**  
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The influence of Saudi Arabia was settled in favor of a political settlement through the Gulf initiative. Both the UAE and Qatar were forced to follow the line set by Saudi Arabia, and when the power was transferred to President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, Abu Dhabi intervened to facilitate the transfer of Saleh's money and properties to the UAE, where Saleh has huge investments.

After the transfer of power to President Hadi, the UAE was the most supportive of Saleh and his party in their efforts to thwart the spring revolutions. They were active in coordinating with Saleh and the Houthis to exclude the Islah Party from power. The UAE also funded plots to hinder the authority of President Hadi and the government of reconciliation in order to return Saleh to power again.

After the Houthis' takeover of power, the UAE joined Saudi Arabia in adopting the option of military action under the umbrella of the Arab Coalition, but it was driven by its vision to undermine everything related to the Arab Spring revolutions, so it maintained the lines of communication with Saleh, even if Saleh is one of the targets of the Arab Coalition military action in Yemen. The UAE policy went in two directions: not to enable the Islah Party to achieve any political or military gains through its participation in the war against the Houthis and Saleh, attributing any victory to the legitimacy and the coalition states, and striking the military capabilities of the Houthis to provide suitable conditions for the return of Saleh and the GPC to power. There are those who believe that the UAE has repeatedly tried to convince Saudi Arabia that the option of "Saleh" is the most effective option in eliminating the Houthis and ensuring post-war stability in Yemen. There are likely some understandings between the two sides, Saudi and UAE, to give a specific role for "Saleh" to defeat the Houthis and more later on.

In any case, the ambiguous relationship between Saleh and the UAE has contributed to the growing tension between Saleh and the Houthis. The latter have been suspicious of the relationship between Saleh and the UAE.

The year 2017 witnessed a stalemate in the dialogue between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia. It appeared that Riyadh had blocked the dialogue with them, and that it had handed over the entire Yemeni file to the UAE, which provided the conditions for imposing its political vision on the situation in Yemen through measures on the ground to weaken President Hadi via "supporting forces opposing him, and not to empower his authority in the liberated cities, and putting restrictions on the Islah Party and preventing the forces close to Islah to achieve any victory on the ground, especially in Taiz.

In the second half of 2017, the UAE has tried to impose a political initiative to end the war in Yemen basing on ending the political role of President Hadi and empowering the forces in Sana'a, especially the GPC, to play an important role in the post-war transition.

In the meantime, the Houthis felt the growing coordination between Saleh and the UAE, which led to the escalation of their dispute with GPC. The contacts between some leaders of the General People's Congress and the UAE raised the Houthis' fears, so they proceeded to impose an unspoken siege on Saleh and a number of leaders, and prevented them from communicating with external parties and placed their homes and means of communication under constant surveillance.

However, the Houthis continued to suspect that the secretary-general of the GPC, Aref Al-Zouka,

Assistant Secretary General Yasser Al-Awadhi and Tarek Mohamed Abdullah Saleh, are leading an escalation plan against them with support from the UAE. The Houthis accuse the UAE of pushing Saleh to fight in the capital Sana'a in December 2017. In response, they announced the launch of a ballistic missile towards the nuclear reactor in Abu Dhabi. After bloody clashes in Sana'a at the beginning of December 2017, the Houthis killed Saleh and Aref al-Zouka (Secretary-General of the Congress Party). The official spokesman of the Houthis, Mohamed AbdulSalam, said that the UAE is the one who brought former president Ali Saleh to his end.

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**The UAE has tried to impose a political initiative to end the war in Yemen basing on ending the political role of President Hadi,**  
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After the killing of Saleh, it was said that the UAE was forced to change its position towards the Islah Party. This was reflected in the public meeting between Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and leaders of the Islah Party in the presence of Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman. Saudi Arabia seems to have tried to persuade the UAE to accept the option of alliance with the Islah Party. However, the UAE's behavior later indicates the failure of these efforts. The Abu Dhabi leadership continued to act as a "family of Saleh," attempting to push Ahmed Ali - Saleh's elder son, who is residing in the UAE, and included in the list of international sanctions - to play a political role. When the UAE attempt did not receive a positive response, the UAE turned to Tarek Mohamed Abdullah Saleh, Saleh's nephew, who managed to leave Sana'a after the killing of Saleh. His first appearance was in Shabwa governorate with Emirati guards. He moved to Aden. In addition to Aden, "Tarek" opened training camps in Shabwa and another at the "Emirates base" in the port of Assab in Eritrea with Emirati support - and then he was transferred to the West Coast front to participate in the battles against the Houthis there.

Contrary to the media discourse of the supporters of Saleh and the Congress Party towards the UAE when they were under the pressure of the Houthis, they welcomed the intrusive role of the UAE in Yemen because they will benefit from this role and so - to a lesser extent - they represent one of the political pillars of the UAE role.

When the crisis between the legitimate government and the Emirates over the island of Socotra escalated, the performance of pro-Saleh activists in the social media was more favorable to the UAE. Many criticized the government's escalating behavior toward the UAE, and said that they are against any party that criticizes the UAE or opposes its intrusive behavior, and often "Ansar Saleh" media campaigns attack others under the pretext that they follow Qatar or are under the influence of the policies of Turkey and members of the Muslim Brotherhood, in reference to the Islah Party.

It is likely that in the future, there will be more harmony between "Ansar Saleh" and the UAE, especially in the stages where military action is declining and political action is involved. It is expected that the UAE may exert more efforts to revive the General People's Congress Party under the leadership of a member of Saleh's family or fanatics of his political line.

Thus, the existence of local parties that are loyal to the UAE contributes to creating a suitable environment for the existence of the UAE and its role that is deviant from the stated objectives of the Arab Coalition, as long as that agrees with its own objectives or provides it with material and financial benefits. These forces serve as the local leverage of the UAE presence and defending it like the separatist movement and a certain faction within the Salafi trend and some loyalists to former president Saleh in the General People's Congress.

With the absence of pro-UAE social and political forces, the possibility of deviation in the UAE role in Yemen or even its existence is getting less as it is in the governorate of Al-Mahra where the number of pro-UAE separatists and Salafis is limited. Al-Mahra people did not welcome any UAE presence or military role in their governorate, despite the UAE was keen to be present in this governorate for reasons related to UAE attempts to encircle its traditional rival, Oman. UAE tried to exist in Al-Mahrah through humanitarian and development work and training security forces, but it finally failed to exist in the governorate, because of the weakness of the presence of local forces affiliated to it and the strong presence of the Omani influence that oppose any role of the UAE.

The same is true in Marib governorate, despite the UAE's rush and its keenness to be present in this governorate. However, its practices of intervention in everything and dealing with the Yemeni forces and the local community as servants were met with rejection, resentment and resistance from the National Army and local forces who refuse dependency and penetration and insist on party-to-party dealing with the UAE and the coalition countries. So the UAE withdrew its military forces from Marib, especially after its forces were hit by a missile fired by supporters of Saleh and led to the death of a large number of them. The UAE kept a simple presence of its forces to train troops of the National Army in the town of Serwah, southern Marib.

This means that where UAE has loyal local forces that have influence and spread on the ground, UAE gets one of the most important foundations of its presence on the Yemeni soil, even if it is contrary to the interests of Yemen. And when such forces become weak, a community resistance generates against the deviation of the UAE behavior. This resistance may extend to a public objection of the UAE military presence.



### **Third: the subjective influence of soft power and coarse power**

#### **• Rough power "military and security"**

The influence of the UAE in southern Yemen is also based on the way in which it participated in the military intervention, led by the Arab Coalition forces. Abu Dhabi decided to join the ground military operations inside the Yemeni border, during the liberation of Aden and a number of southern governorates and a large part of Marib. It also joined military operations in the West Coast, from Thubab to the city of Hodeidah.

The subsequent presence on the ground included the establishment of military headquarters in Aden, Hadramout, Thubab and Makha; the tasks of planning and overseeing military operations; and the establishment of training camps for the local forces that are affiliated with UAE, and the management of operations room and controlling the deployment of security points and re-positioning..

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia adopted a different approach to military operations, which was based on "giving more priority to border security than military adventure to win the war," [40] focusing on protecting the southern borders of the Kingdom, and cautiously dealing with the battles within the Yemeni borders. So it relies instead on attacking the military gatherings of the Houthis inside Yemen through warplanes.

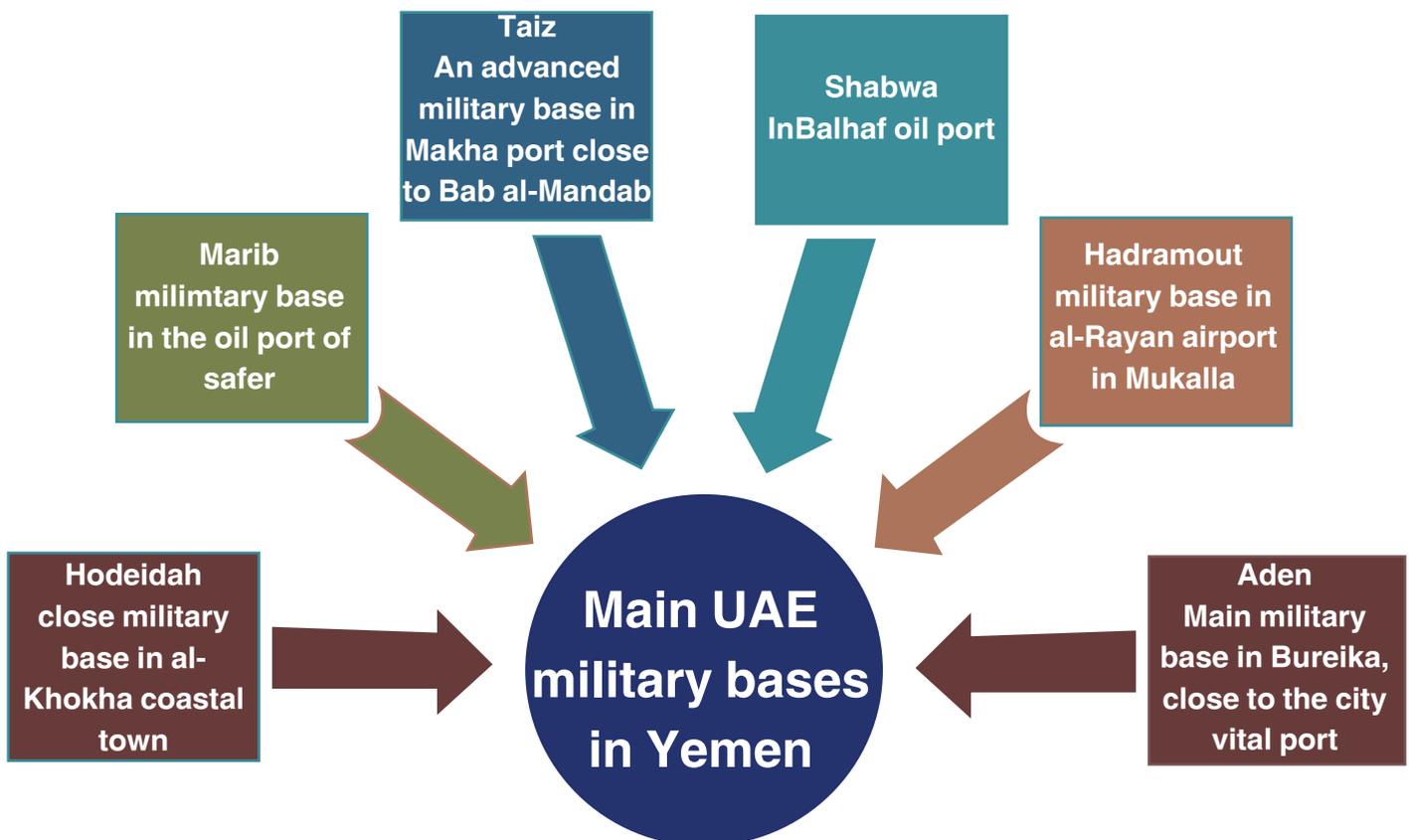
This method of participating in the military operations has given the UAE an influence in the southern Yemen and the west coast and made it the only dominant on the ground. This situation created an impression that the UAE is the main force in the military intervention in Yemen, and that Saudi is prepared to cross the Yemeni border only with limited numbers for the sole aim of defending Saudi territory and that it is unwilling to do so in order to assist in the fighting that is supposed to be common against the Houthis." [41]

In a related matter, the participation of UAE forces in the fighting, and their presence on the ground made them pay the cost of the dead and wounded who died in those battles, and the number of deaths of the UAE forces in Yemen, until June 2018, are 97 soldiers, including officers [42], in addition to dozens of wounded. This situation gave the UAE one of the pretexts of deviation from the Arab Coalition's goals and its supposed path, as it is often argued that it is fighting on the ground and that it has provided many martyrs. All this allows it to intervene as it sees it.

This issue is one of the signs raised by the UAE and its local forces against anyone who criticizes its behavior and opposes its presence in Yemen by claiming that such position against it is playing down its role in the military operations on the ground and defying its great sacrifices.

Therefore, the UAE has established several military bases in Yemen to manage its influence and forces. These bases are located near the strategic ports. It claims that it fights Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State to expel them from such strategic locations and to secure the neighboring towns.

Figure (2) shows the most prominent military bases run by UAE in Yemen.



**Figure (2)**

### Fighting terrorism and economic goals of UAE presence in Yemen

The United Arab Emirates is setting the war on terror as one of the declared priorities of its intervention in Yemen and the region in general. It uses these allegations to justify its presence in the Arab Coalition for "supporting the legitimacy" and excusing its deviation from its political and military role. It claims that all procedures and policies it adopts aim at fighting terrorism and serving the security interests in the region and the world.

Although the main and declared goal of the coalition-military operation is to end the insurgency and restore the legitimacy, adherence to this objective was not a priority for the Abu Dhabi leadership. The UAE and its allies, separatists movement and Salafis, have prevented the armed forces from liberating parts of Lahj and Taiz, under the pretext not to exceed the border of what was called the southern Yemen state and because the heavy presence of the Islah Party in the popular resistance in Taiz.

The military operations have been directed towards the governorates of Abyan, Hadramout and Shabwa to eliminate the cells of al Qaeda and extremist organizations in those areas, but the real motive of the UAE was just to market itself and make propaganda for its role in the fight against terrorism in Yemen, and to prove its ability to play this role before the United States and other western countries.

With regard to the reality, the UAE tries to market itself in media as a tool for fighting terrorism, but this seems to be a secondary objective why in reality it seeks to gain economic interests in the country by controlling vital sectors and public services. This is Abu Dhabi's new approach to boosting investment in non-oil sectors as oil prices collapse. In this context it is possible to refer to the following:

- Khalid Bahah, former Yemeni vice president, was reportedly trying to lease Socotra Island to the UAE for 100 years [43]. Bahah denied later these reports [44], but those voices were repeated over and over during the Yemeni government's crisis with the UAE on the island and the anger of UAE officials about the Yemeni government's visit to the island.
- The monopoly of the sales of oil to Yemen by force: In mid-November 2016, Hadi dismissed the director of the National Oil Company, Aden Branch, who is loyal to the UAE, Abdul Salam Hamid, on the background of his involvement in the signing of a contract with an Emirati company to monopolize oil imports. The government canceled the agreement. Aidaros al-Zubaidi (former governor of Aden and president of the Transitional Council) did the same thing after the government announced in January 2017 that it would allow the importation of oil derivatives, but the Yemen Oil Company should buy it with the local currency. No company offered a bid within four months. Aidaros al-Zubaidi tried to make a deal with an Emirati company to import oil derivatives. President Hadi dismissed al-Zubaidi accordingly in April 2017. [45] The Yemeni Oil Company depends on the Arab Gulf Company of the Yemeni businessman, Ahmed al-Issa, whose company accepts to receive amounts in local currency (riyal), not dollar.

The same is true of Hadramout, where its governor, Ahmed bin Buraik, who is loyal to Abu Dhabi, announced in April 2017 an oil refinery project and the intention of the local authority to import oil from the Emirati company, "Plus Group" [46]. In June 2017, Yemeni President dismissed bin Buraik, and the director general of the Yemeni Oil Company in Hadramout.

- **The monopoly of internet and communications sector:** The Yemeni government has rejected increasing pressure by the UAE for a license to operate two mobile phone companies and internet [47] to monopolize the service. The UAE request was met with strong objection from the Yemeni government, but the UAE has already launched these companies on the island of Socotra, where poor people burden expensive tariff. [48]

- **Ports and Airports:** The UAE officially controls airports of Aden, Al-Rayyan and Mukalla in Hadramout and Sayoun through the forces loyal to it, and prevents any landing without the official permit from of the UAE officials. The UAE also monopolizes flights to Socotra Island. It carries out marketing and tourism campaigns for UAE companies, and prevents any other flights that are not booked via airports or tour operators in UAE [49]. In May 2018, the UAE had officially operated the island and appointed an Emirati ruler (Abu Mubarak Al Mazrouei).

The Yemeni government has refused to give the DP World another license to control the port of Aden because of the dark history of the UAE company that neglected the port and caused a significant decline in the port's activity before the government of Mohamed Salem Ba Sundowa canceled the contract in 2012. The UAE also controls other ports (Mukalla / Makha). It fully controls oil ports of Al-Shahr in Hadramout, Balhaf in Shabwa.

- **Oil and gas sector:** Abu Dhabi carried out a military operation in Shabwa governorate in 2017, aiming to secure the oil and gas pipelines in the governorate, one of the largest governorates in Yemen, to produce and acquire gas for the UAE Dove Company, which used to have the excellence in producing oil in block (53) in Hadramout. The military operation, which was carried out by the Shabwaniya elite, led to an announced crisis with Saudi Arabia to be addressed by an agreement between the Oil Minister in the government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the Saudi Aramco to replace a number of foreign oil companies, which left Yemen since the beginning of the war, in Marib and Al-Jawf (East). [50]. In addition, the UAE also controlled the oil port of Nishmeh in the directorate of Rodom in Shabwa, where there are five oil tanks with capacity of 126 thousand barrels.



In March 2018, the Yemeni government announced the start of oil export through an Austrian company (OMV) in Shabwa, in the east of the country, after UAE prevented during the past three years the export of crude oil from the areas under its control. But going back to the Austrian Company's website, it shows that the International Petroleum Investment Company (IPIC), which is owned by the Government of Abu Dhabi, holds 24.9% of the Austrian company (OMV). [51]

This is why Abu Dhabi has been keen to handle this file, starting with the formation of the security belt forces in Aden, Lahj, Abyan and the elite forces in Hadramout and Shabwa, and turning these forces to tools in its hands to move them according to its own agenda and policies, passing to planning and supervising security operations by the security belts forces. In coordination sometimes with US intelligence and possibly US forces, taking full care not to involve the National Army and the security services and the legitimate authority in those operations, and even without the announcement of the participation of Saudi Arabia

and the Arab coalition countries in order to appear as the only party eager to fight terrorism and eliminate extremist groups in Yemen, and that it does so for the interest of the international community, which should turn a blind eye to any abuses by the UAE against Yemen and its unity and the legitimate authority, in return for the UAE "effective" role in the fight against terrorism.

The UAE realizes that any effort to combat terrorism will make it a regional ally of Western countries, particularly the United States of America, which is concerned about the existence of militant organizations in Yemen.

The UAE achieved partial successes in the elimination of some cells of extremist organizations in Aden and in the removal of al-Qaeda from the city of Mukalla in April 2016 after al-Qaeda controlled it for a year. UAE helped the government to regain control of the cities of Azzan and Ataq of Shabwa and rural areas of Hadramout, Shabwa and Abyan in August 2017. In February 2018, UAE supported the Al-Faisal security operation in border area between Hadramout and Shabwa where the Balhaf plant that exports the liquefied natural gas locates. In February 2018, the UAE also contributed to the operation of the Decisive Sword to regain control of the directorate of Al-Saeed in Shabwa. [52]

These efforts have led to the expulsion of al-Qaeda from some areas and the restriction of movement of its supporters in other regions. However, the procedures that the UAE applied in this regard are based on false convictions that serve terrorism in the medium and long terms.

The UAE support to the option of secession and its attempt to impose a force in the southern cities will create a new source of a lasting and complex conflict in Yemen and the region. It will cause instability and chaos and provide an appropriate environment to the presence and expansion of al-Qaeda and other militant organizations, especially in the south, which may suffer more conflicts and instability due to political, social, historical and personal divisions between the political elite and social forces and may completely fall in the hands of al-Qaeda and militant organizations.



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The exclusion of the official authority from participating in the fight against terrorism and relying on parallel entities and proxy combat forces creates an unenthusiastic community and changes the issue of fighting terrorism into a controversial issue that subjects to political auctions, while it requires to be dealt with from a national perspective and under the authority of the state, not from an individual perspective or an external motive.

The Yemeni Interior Minister, Ahmed al-Maisari, said, "The tools used in Aden to combat terrorism are incorrect, because the bodies that are authorized to combat terrorism are the National Security and the Political Security apparatuses in an executive partnership with the Ministry of Interior. And what is going on now is that untrained people in the Coalition carry out random raids that may not lead to any result."<sup>[53]</sup>

It is also noted that the policies pursued by the UAE in dealing with the file of terrorism in the southern Yemen are characterized by heavy political recruitment and exploiting the war on terror to harass the Yemeni parties that disagree with Abu Dhabi in the political vision, or criticize the UAE's performance and the deviation of its role in Yemen by accusing those parties of terrorism and putting them in prisons and detention centers where they are subjected to torture, as reported by the international humanitarian organizations.

There are also those who believe that the policies that the UAE apply in the fight against terrorism lack for credibility and consistency, and that it uses war on terror just for propaganda.

It is not logic for the UAE to fight extremist organizations in Abyan, Shabwa and Hadramout, while it provides support and care to the same groups in Taiz, including the Salafist leader Abu Abbas, who is on a Gulf list of terrorists. The UAE continued to publicly support Abu Abbas and his group with all financial, material and media resources until it was listed in October 2017 by the United States and the Gulf countries, including the UAE, on the terrorism list, and then the UAE reportedly began to support him and leaders in al-Qaeda secretly – according to an investigative report by Associated Press news agency. [54]



### • Soft power "humanitarian and development work"

After the harsh force, represented by the military and security presence, the UAE used the humanitarian aid and development work for more influence in Yemen, in light of the real and urgent needs of the Yemeni society due to the war that is about to end its fourth year on one hand, and the excessive resources and wealth in the UAE on the other hand. The tool of humanitarian relief has significant impact in reality, and makes them an important pillar for the UAE role in Yemen.

Despite the fact that part of the UAE humanitarian relief, including shelters, medical care and reconstruction works, in southern and western Yemen is not free of humanitarian motives, it is often used in a framework that serves the UAE's political and military influence.

The UAE has directly intensified its humanitarian, development and reconstruction activities after entering into Aden in order to build a positive image of the UAE among the people of Aden as part of the media campaigns accompanying its activities under the slogan "Thank you for the Emirate of goodness". But after that the humanitarian and development activities were a prelude to full control of the city. The UAE has become the only ruler in that city.

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The same happened in the Socotra archipelago. The UAE humanitarian action was the main key for controlling the archipelago politically and militarily.

Although the UAE presence in the archipelago dates back to the reign of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, it was strengthened after the island was hit by "Shabala" and "Meigh" cyclones. The UAE's initial focus was on rehabilitating the infrastructure destroyed by the two cyclones. It developed public facilities and services, including communications and tourism and trained security units. It also worked on winning the loyalty of the social and official leadership in the island, which helped the UAE to tighten its political grip on the island.

This was followed by a second phase in which the UAE put its hand on everything related to the island, including activities and actions that amount to sovereign acts such as land purchases, management of government facilities, construction of private facilities and dealing with the Yemeni island as the eighth emirate of the UAE.



In a third stage, the UAE used more tough military actions that aimed at occupying the island and expelling the government from it, according to a statement by pro-government political parties.

During a visit by Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid Bin Daghar and other government officials to the island in May 2018, the government team has been surprised, on the third day of the visit, "the arrival of an Emirati military aircraft carrying two armored vehicles and more than 50 UAE soldiers, followed immediately by two other aircrafts carrying tanks, armored vehicles and soldiers. The UAE forces immediately took over the Socotra airport and informed the protection soldiers at the airport and staff that their duty is over. The same thing happened in Socotra's sole port [55]." This action resulted in a crisis between the UAE and the legitimate government of Yemen. The Yemeni government has complained the UAE to the UN Security Council.

In respect to the humanitarian aspect, part of the UAE's work is not oriented towards urgent community needs, but rather focuses on marginal needs.

A number of humanitarian, service and development activities are directed towards areas that may not be of priority to the local population, including the painting of walls of schools and hospitals and holding Henna festivals in the cities where residents are looking for water, electricity and bread, which made these projects a mockery of Yemenis.

Otherwise, the services that address the needs of the citizens in Aden are not sufficiently attended, as in the case of electricity, for example, which comes on the top of the community needs. It was expected that the supervision of the city after the liberation will solve this problem, but it remained until now. The population continues to complain of disruption and irregularity of electricity for long periods of time, especially during summer months.

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The main reason for the UAE's lack of interest in resolving the electricity crisis in Aden is probably due to its desire to employ it politically towards the legitimate authority by taking responsibility for such a situation, mobilizing the citizens against it, and showing it as a failed government.

### Harvest of UAE influence in Yemen

#### • Deviation from the path of restoring the Yemeni state:

The UAE intervention in Yemen has produced a bitter harvest. According to an official report of the UN Security Council's experts, the UAE-backed entities are now the most threatening parties to Yemen's unity and legitimate authority. "After nearly three years of conflict, Yemen, as a state, is close to disappear." The Houthis in the north contributed to weaken the state and the government of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi has been weakened in the south by the formation of the Southern Transitional Council, which is supported by the UAE, and "the proxy military forces, which are armed and funded by the UAE, to achieve their own objectives in the field." [56]

The authority of the legitimate government of Yemen has been dispersed to the point where it is doubtful whether Yemen will ever be able to return to its former one country. The international team of experts is referring to four factors, three of which refer to Abu Dhabi's policies in Yemen: The inability of President Hadi to govern from abroad; and the formation of the Southern Transitional Council, which has the declared goal of establishing an independent southern Yemen; the continued presence of the Houthis in Sana'a and many of the northern governorates; and the proliferation of independent operations by proxy troops, funded and supplied by the United Arab Emirates." [57]

A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) in August 2018 states that the UAE committed horrendous acts of arbitrary detention in an effort to fill the vacuum left by government forces following the liberation of the country's southern provinces. The report pointed out to the following:

- The prevalence of arbitrary detention, where hundreds of people were arrested for opposing the UAE.
- Detainees were subjected to torture and other cruel treatment at facilities such as the Rayyan and Bureika facilities (controlled by the United Arab Emirates); the 7th of October facility in Abyan, the Central Prison in Lahj, Mansoura prison in Aden (controlled by the pro-UAE security belt forces).

UNHCR's team of experts investigated sexual violence in detention centers, including the rape of adult male detainees, committed by United Arab Emirates employees. At the Bureika facility, the detainees described themselves as being interrogated naked, bound, blindfolded, and sexually assaulted and even raped. In Bir Ahmad prison, the United Arab Emirates forces raided the facility and committed sexual violence. In March 2018, nearly 200 detainees were stripped of their clothes while UAE nationals examined their anus forcibly. Several detainees were raped with fingers, tools or sticks.

### • The Proliferation of Armed Groups and the Prolong of War

The UAE participated in its military intervention in Yemen under the umbrella of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Coalition. But in the previous years of the war, a clear deviation from the stated objectives of the coalition appeared. In the framework of dividing tasks between them, "Riyadh and Abu Dhabi seemingly shared some tactics in Yemen. Saudi Arabia attacks the Houthis in the north through air strikes, while the Emiratis focus on leading the ground military operations in the south. [58]

After the liberation, the UAE took over the southern cities. Throughout the previous phase, the UAE has adopted policies towards these governorates, which are mostly based on their political orientations, their own interests, their self-ambition and their virtual rivalries, not the stated objectives of the Arab Coalition.

Abu Dhabi has dealt with the forces of resistance that fought the Houthis in Aden, Lahj, Dale and Taiz with bias, and classified them according to their political orientation and if they are with or against its own project of domination. Unfortunately, the forces that the UAE adopts hostility against them are mostly the forces that believe in the Yemeni unity and support the legitimacy of President Hadi, but the the forces that the UAE supports are the forces that reject the Yemeni unity and the legitimate authority, and have a narrow horizon.



In parallel, the Abu Dhabi Authority sought to impose its military presence in the coasts and islands of Yemen. It focused its military action on extending its influence along the Yemeni coasts from Mukalla in the east and even near Hodeidah in the west, [59] as well as the control of the Yemeni islands and the establishment of military and tourist facilities there over the past year, including Socotra which has witnessed some activities that violate the Yemeni sovereignty, including the purchase of lands and the management of government facilities, in addition to constructing private facilities and dealing with the island as the eighth Emirate of the United Arab Emirates. [60]

The United Arab Emirates and the factions of the separatist movement pressed for the appointment of the most prominent figure, Aidaros al-Zubaidi, as governor of Aden and the other people who belong to the separatist movement in several other governorates, all together refuse to show any work under the legitimate authority and carry out acts of secession acts after President Hadi dismissed Aidaros al-Zubaidi. The UAE publicly supported the establishment of the Southern Transitional Council and adopted a systematic policy to undermine the authority of President Hadi. At the end, the UAE was able to expel Hadi from Aden and kept him most of the time in Riyadh. It also imposed restrictions against the government of Ahmed Obaid Bin Daghr and worked on making it fail and practiced some kind of an announced siege against it.



## **The conclusion**

The previous presentation shows that the UAE presence in Yemen is based on a number of pillars that provide it with a degree of influence and intervention. On the top of those pillars is the Saudi umbrella and the tendency of the Kingdom to avoid confrontation with the UAE role or at least reduce it. It is also based on the presence of a number of local forces loyal to the UAE or associated with it. Those forces carry projects that are in contrary to the Yemeni unity or to the existing political system or to the future project of the federal state, which came out of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) and adopted by the legitimate authority. Those pro-UAE forces include the factions of the separation movement that demand the secession, the hardened Salafi trend, and some supporters of former President Saleh.

This goes in line with the strategy adopted by the UAE to participate in the military intervention in Yemen, which is based on participating in battles on the ground, building military bases, setting up camps for local forces, controlling the lands, raising the banner of the fight against terrorism and restricting the legitimate government's activities and movements.

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The UAE uses the Saudi umbrella in two important contexts. The first one is to easily move in Yemen, as it will not be able to move in Yemen without the existence of this umbrella "within the Arab Coalition, led by the Kingdom. The second one is that Saudi Arabia is always blamed for wrong actions by the UAE such as "secret prisons," torture, encouraging separatists in the south, in addition to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the failure of the legitimate government to manage the liberated areas and to offer a good model that may encourage people in areas under the Houthis control to confront the coup.

Saudi Arabia receives blame and loses its reputation due to the UAE actions. The US Congress and the British Parliament, when discussing Yemen's file, condemn Saudi Arabia and call for an end to its armament because of the "wrong" raids and secret prisons- Emirati prisons- while the UAE is emerging as the fighter against terrorism and "Small Sparta" that fighting for the stability of the region.

On the other hand, the role of the UAE is facing a number of constraints and competitive forces, foremost of which is the Saudi ownership of the initiative and the ability to re-adjust this role or remove it from the framework of the Arab Coalition. All this is linked to the will of the Saudi leadership, the strong position of the legitimate authority, forces loyal to the legitimacy, and to a lesser extent, the regional rival forces, and more importantly, the state of disclosure of the role of UAE in Yemen.

Despite the gaps in the legitimate authority, both in terms of composition and performance, it has much in its hand to rebalance with the United Arab Emirates and rationalize its role. This can come from working in parallel tracks. The first one is to improve the composition and performance by re-examining the recruitment in senior positions and linking it to the need and merits, which will reduce its slackness and corruption, in addition to the concentration on highlighting the effectiveness in dealing with various issues and files.

The second track is linked to exerting pressure on both Saudi Arabia and the international community as Saudi Arabia is the party that has the ability to rationalize the UAE's behavior and policies towards Yemen. Pressure on Riyadh could reduce the deviation of the UAE role, especially if that pressure goes in parallel with pressure on the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, which has the legal mandate to intervene as Yemen is still under Chapter VII.

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\* Al-Salafia al-Jamiya is attributed to the Ethiopian doctor (al-Habashi) Muhammad Aman al-Jami (1349-1416 AH), who traveled from his country to Saudi Arabia to learn from clerics. It is a local trend within the map of the Islamists in Saudi Arabia. It has many characteristics, the most important of which is hostility against anyone who criticize the ruler and deter the violators.

\* Position Sufism is a new term meant by some of the members of the Sufi movement and practice politics through loyalty to the most powerful party and thus it became a political and functional tool as it was revealed at the conference in the city of Grozny in Chechen, organized by the Tabah Foundation that is based in UAE and affiliated to Sufi cleric Ali al-Jafri

9 - The leaks emerged from email of Al Otaiba through 2017 until today, and the embassy in Washington confirmed the penetration of the e-mail of "Al Otaiba." The leaks were published in batches in various media outlets, mostly American. <https://goo.gl/C6i95T>

Al-Otaiba leaks attack the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and describe it as capricious- Al Araby Al Jadeed, <https://goo.gl/C6i95T>

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12 - Interview with Hassan Zaid, head of Al Haq Party, published on Marib Press website <http://cutt.us/BTlka>

13 - Details of the imposition of house arrest for Mansour Hadi in Saudi Arabia, Misr al-Arabiya cited the Associated Press, <http://cutt.us/0NhAJ>

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- 22- The situation in Aden: a picture that reflects the future of conflict in Yemen, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, August 27, 2017,
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- 24- See video interview: <http://cutt.us/zxNlf>
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\* Henna is a green plant that uses powder to beautify and dye hands and hair and is widely used by Yemenis to beautify women in weddings

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59- The forces of the security belt loyal to the UAE tried to control the airport in Mahrah, but the tribal groups and forces in favor of President Hadi refused to allow it. It is noteworthy that the sheikhs of Mahra have good relations with Oman and the governor of Mahrah Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Kada strongly refused to join the UAE-backed Transitional Council.

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