



**Between war
and politics**
**Future of Islah
Party after 30 years
of Foundation**

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Index

Research Summary and Methodology:.....	5
Preface:.....	7
First topic: The Emergence and Establishment:.....	11
The definition:.....	16
Ideology and Intellectual Tributaries:.....	17
Islah’s Relationship with Muslim Brotherhood:.....	18
The Second Topic: Moving from Mobilization to Partisan and Political Work.....	21
The Third Topic: Islah ... Issues and Positions:.....	25
The Republican System in the Face of Dynastic Thought.....	25
Shura and Democracy.....	26
Violence and Terror.....	28
Under penalty of indictment.....	31
The Southern Issue.....	34
Women Issue.....	37
Tribal Community.....	39
The Palestinian Issue.....	40
The Fourth Topic: Prominent Stations in the reform process.....	43
First: Participation in Power.....	43

Second: Leaving the power, Launching the "Joint Meeting" and Peaceful Struggle.....	46
Third: The Yemeni Popular Revolution 2011.....	50
Fourth: Houthi Coup and War.....	53
The Fifth Topic: Islah at Times of War.....	59
The Islah’s Vision towards War with Houthis.....	60
War against Islah.....	61
Islah and Regional and International Tensions.....	65
The Conclusion: Challenges to Islah.....	67
Scenarios for the Future of Islah.....	70
References.....	73

Research Summary and Methodology:

The research deals with the Islah party and its future, as the largest Yemeni party at the present time, and the general conditions that Yemen has been going through since the outbreak of the popular revolution in 2011, and the current war, which has entered its sixth year, between the legitimate government and the Houthi group, which led an armed coup against the state and the political process in September 2014.

The research sheds light on the first emergence of the Yemeni Islamic movement, which became known after the declaration of political pluralism in the country as the “Yemeni Congregation for Reform”, with the most important and prominent circumstances and factors that contributed to the emergence, whether historical and political factors or intellectual and ideological tributaries, as well as the conditions of the local Yemeni reality and external interweaving.

The research focuses on the most important transformations in the path of the Islah party during the past 30 years, since its establishment in 1990, beginning with its active and influential presence in the political opposition during the transitional period after the Yemeni unity, through its participation in power after it won the second place in the first general parliamentary elections in April 1993, and then its return to the opposition square following the parliamentary elections in 1997, and the developments that resulted from that after the Ali Saleh regime won power in the wake of the 1999 presidential elections, the local elections in 2001 and the parliamentary elections in 2003.

The research deals with the role of the Islah party and its partners in the "Joint Meeting Parties" in the last decade of Saleh's rule, then the popular revolution in 2011, and finally the Houthi coup, and the all-out war.

The research also sheds light - briefly - on the Islah's positions towards a number of issues, including women, democracy, violence and terrorism, and the republican system.

It concludes with brief references to the main challenges that the Islah party currently faces, and tries to answer a question whether the party will continue its political journey as a single bloc, with its ability to distinguish between the political and military performance during war? Or will be divided and fragmented due to challenges it faces and dangers that threaten the Yemeni State? It also provides some recommendations based on some findings.

It consists of five main topics. The first topic deals with the emergence of the Yemeni Islamic movement from which the Islah party was formed later. The second topic focuses on the transition of the Islah party from the popular mobilization to the partisan action, while the third topic discusses the Islah positions towards the issues of democracy, the republican system and the imamate ideology, in addition to the Islah's position towards violence and terrorism. As for the fourth topic, it deals with the most important historical and political stages that the Islah party processed.

The final topic discusses the status of the Islah party in light of the current war that has been raging for almost six years, in addition to the political and media campaigns by local and external forces that target the party's existence.

The researcher adopted the historical approach to study the events and facts of the recent past related to the subject of the research in order to better understand the present, and to anticipate the future in a closest manner to reality and its implications. He also adopted the descriptive analytical approach to study the current situation of the Islah party - the subject of the research- in terms of its most important characteristics and features, and its relationships between its components, and analyzing its most important contents, developments and connections, and the factors that affect it, positively or negatively.

The researcher also used the (interviewing) tool that includes a number of the party's leaders, in addition to politicians, academics, researchers and interested persons from outside the party, with the aim of enriching the study with various contents, ideas and opinions under several themes.

Preface:

By September 2020, 30 years have passed since the founding of the Islah party, as it was officially announced on September 13, 1990, after the declaration of the unity between the north and south of Yemen, and the establishment of the Republic of Yemen and the announcement of the political and party pluralism in the country for the first time, as the partisanship was banned in both north and south.

A few months after its establishment, the Islah party became the third political force after the two ruling parties, the General People's Congress party, led by president of the united Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the Socialist Party, led by Vice President at the time Ali Salem al-Baidh. Then the party became the strongest and most present voice in the political opposition, following the first parliamentary elections. The Islah won 63 seats to become the second after the GPC, which won 123 out of the total number of 301 seats in the House of Representatives. Accordingly, the party moved from the opposition to the power. It joined the GPC and the Socialist Party, which came in third place with 56 seats, to form a tripartite alliance to rule the country.

When the new coalition just began to grope its way, several obstacles appeared in front of it. It found itself in front of a stormy political crisis that stormed the alliance. All efforts to end the tension and resume the political life failed, leading to a comprehensive war between north and south that lasted for nearly two months, May through July 1994.



It ended with the victory of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his allies, including Islah, and the defeat of Ali Salem al-Baidh and his Socialist Party, who left power after that. So Saleh's party and the Islah began a bilateral alliance that formed a new government.

The Islah party has only eight ministerial portfolios in the government, in addition to the presidency of the House of Representatives, which was assumed by the party's head Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar, and the position of the second deputy prime minister, which was assumed by Abdul Wahhab al-Ansi, the Secretary-General of the Islah party. The relationship between the GPC and the Islah party, which was described as "strategic", receded when the GPC began to exclude its ally and restrict its cadres and members in most of ministries and government institutions in various governorates. After the parliamentary elections in 1997, the Islah party withdrew from the ruling power and engaged in dialogue with other political parties that were included in the (Supreme Coordination Council for the Opposition Parties),

including the Socialist Party, the Nasserites Organization party, the National Baath Party, the Union of Popular Forces and the Al-Haq Party. The dialogue resulted in the formation of the "Joint Meeting Parties" (JMP). With the establishment of the JMP, the Yemeni political parties moved to a new phase of peaceful opposition against the ruling regime, which has been working with all its power, through legal and illegal means, to empower itself and exploit the state's capabilities and resources to keep President Ali Abdullah Saleh in power for ever. After the political horizon in Yemen was blocked, in addition to the economic deterioration, insecurity, successive crises in the country, and then the Arab spring revolutions in several Arab countries, the popular revolutionary wave started and it was the path of salvation for the Yemeni people and the political and social forces, as the ruling regime blocked all ways to peaceful change.

Although the Arab Gulf States interfered with an initiative to make a peaceful transfer of power in Yemen,

they granted President Saleh and his followers an immunity from any prosecution for what they had committed during the GPC's reign for three decades. They also offered the GPC a big partnership in the new government, its share exceeded the half of portfolios. However, Saleh chose to fight the new president [AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi] and the new government, in which his party was included. He decided to take revenge against all his opponents through establishing an alliance with the Houthi group, against which Saleh launched six wars between 2004 and 2009.

The cooperation between Saleh and the Houthis resulted in the complete fall of the state into the Houthis' grip, especially after the Houthis took control of the capital, Sana'a, in September 2014. The two parties, Saleh and the Houthi group,

explicitly and implicitly stated that their target is only the Islah party, Saleh's opponent that was the most prominent component of the popular revolution against him. The Houthi group then saw that it does not need to have a political dispute with the Islah party, but rather considered it as an ideological opponent, given that the Islamic party's reference is Sunnah, while the Houthis adopt an opposing ideology, based on the faded Zaydi legacy and the revolutionary ideas, driven from the Iranian regime's (Wilayat al-Faqih), which has the Twelver Shiite authority. This approach was a kind of transforming the conflict in Yemen from a political conflict into a sectarian one. The approach was adopted by Iran, the Houthis' ally, in Lebanon and Iraq, where it succeeded in tightening the grip on the governance in the two countries.



In the first three months of 2015, the Houthis besieged the president and the government, and placed them under house arrest. They announced a constitutional statement according to which they installed themselves as rulers over Yemen. They sent their forces to south and east to complete their control over the rest of the country and subjugate the whole people by force.

But President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi fled Sana'a secretly to Aden, so the Houthi-Saleh plot was spoiled, especially since President Hadi succeeded in holding meetings and making deals with the countries of the region and a number of ambassadors. After the first vanguards of the Houthi invasion reached the outskirts of Aden, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced the launch of the Decisive Storm and the formation of an Arab military coalition in support of the Yemeni legitimacy against the Houthi-Saleh coup by the end of March 2015.

At the time, the Islah party rushed to issue a political statement in support of the Decisive Storm and the legitimacy,

represented by President Hadi, and rejecting the Houthi-Saleh coup and supporting the popular resistance against it.

Although the Houthis mainly targeted the Islah party's leaders and members with killing, abusing and kidnapping in various governorates under their control, the Islah party was also targeted by forces affiliated with the Arab Coalition in the liberated governorates, especially in the temporary capital, Aden, where hundreds of people and Islah's members and leaders joined in the liberation battles against the Houthis. Dozens of Islah's members were killed and wounded in the battles, but their award after liberation was murder, assassinations, incursions, burning the party's headquarters, pursuing their activists, and launching security and media campaigns against them. This situation increased the suffering of the Islah party's leaders and members, who are often divided into three groups: refugees in other countries, or hostages with the Houthis, or displaced in liberated and safe areas, even if relatively.

First topic: The Emergence and Establishment:

All studies that dealt with the history of the Islah party almost agree that the Islah party is an extension of the Yemeni renewal and reform movement that emerged in the last three centuries and was led by a number of scholars, thinkers, and reformers, including Muhammad bin Ismail al-Amir (1688-1769), Saleh Mahdi al-Muqbili (1720-1788), and Muhammad bin Ali Al Shawkani (1760-1834).

Since the thirties of the twentieth century, a renewal movement with an Islamic intellectual dimension began to crystallize within the Yemeni opposition movement after some of its members left Yemen to study in Egypt, where they met with several intellectuals and political currents, including members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement that was founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. Some historical sources attribute the convergence of

the two views of the two sides (the Yemeni opposition and the Brotherhood movement) to the fact that the first is a religious reform movement and most of its members and senior leaders like the founder Hassan al-Banna and other founders got their Islamic intellectual from the symbols of the Islamic thought, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1739-1897) and Muhammad Abdo (1849-1905). This rapprochement was later strengthened by several factors, including the Brotherhood's support for the Yemeni national movement through media coverage and political support for the Yemeni constitution revolution in 1948 against Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din. This is what made some sources consider the Yemeni opposition movement - especially in its early beginnings - represents an intellectual and organizational extension of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.¹

In the fifties of the 20th century, the Yemeni opposition movement expanded, especially in the Republic of Egypt, where the majority of the opposition were placed, whether those who left Yemen to escape the oppression of Imam Ahmed Hamid al-Din, after the failure of the 1948 revolution, or those who went to study in Egyptian universities. The revolution of July 23, 1952, led by Jamal Abdel Nasser, contributed to strengthening that relationship between the Egyptian government and the Yemeni opposition. Egypt showed its support for the opposition against the British colonialism in southern Yemen and the imamate rule in the north. The opposition began to interact with the Arab and international environment and it was influenced by different currents, parties and forces, as well as by thoughts that were widely spread at the time. The Yemeni opposition established relations with intellectual and political currents like Muslim Brotherhood, the Arab nationalists, the Nasserites and the Baathists. After the Yemeni revolution in September 1962 against

the imamate rule in northern Yemen, and the revolution of October 1963 against the British colony in southern Yemen, several currents emerged in north and south, while young people, who were mostly neutral about the intellectual conflicts between the Nationalists, Nasserites, Marxists and Baathists at the time, gathered under the banner of the Islamic work. The beginning was through Yemeni students in Egypt and then the renewal of work in Yemen took several forms.

In Aden, the activities of the Islamic movement were manifested through the Islamic Center, founded by Sheikh Muhammad bin Salem al-Bayhani. Young members of the center were influenced by the ideas of the Islamic renewal leaders, including Omar Salem Tarmom, the Center's President, and Muhammad Ali al-Bar, the Center's General Secretary. Some senior scholars had close relations with youth of the Islamic Movement, such as Sheikh Ali Bahamish. The youth also were able to weave wide relations outside the Islamic Center,

one of the most prominent figures of them was Brigadier General Hussein Othman Ashal, Commander of the federal Army in southern Yemen.²

In Sana'a, a group of people with Islamic intellectual inclinations, led by Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Zubairi, one of the most prominent historical leaders of the Yemeni opposition and revolutionaries, had begun to communicate with members of tribes and tribal leaders with the aim of coordinating positions to confront campaigns by remnants of the imamate rule that were still fighting the revolutionaries and the republican system, and were misleading their followers by using religion to arouse the religious sentiments of the Yemenis. The campaigns by the Imamates were based on accusing the revolutionaries of infidelity and working for the benefit of the Jews and Christians. The religiously conservative youth had an effective role in the tribal community. They foiled the campaigns of the revolution's opponents. Al-Zubeiry along with tribal leaders and intellectuals succeeded in convincing sons of tribes,

who were fighting against the revolution in favor of the remnants of the Imamate rule, to give up and join the revolution. In the city of Taiz, the young Abdo Muhammad al-Mikhlaifi, one of the most prominent founders of the Islamic move in Yemen, began to gather a number of young people, who formed the nucleus of the Islamic work, and their work was closer to the activity of the Islamic Center in Aden, awareness and education. Although the city was full of different currents, al-Mikhlaifi, along with Saeed Farhan and Abdul-Salam Karman³, succeeded in establishing a strong base for the Yemeni Islamic Movement.

The Islamic movement suffered a heavy loss following the assassination of Al-Zubairi in 1965, after which efforts began to consolidate the Islamic work under one leadership in three work areas: Sana'a, Aden and Taiz, and because of the characteristics and abilities that Abdo al-Mikhlaifi enjoyed, he was chosen as a public official until his death in 1969. His successor in the leadership of the movement was Sheikh Abdul Majeed Al-Zindani. Since 1979,

the leadership was transferred to one of the most prominent founders of the movement, Yassin Abdul Aziz al-Qabati, who remained in position until the announcement of the political pluralism in 1990. In the late sixties and early seventies, the Islamic Movement witnessed notable expansion in northern Yemen, while the Marxists in southern Yemen were able to tighten their control on the power and practiced all forms of oppression and abuse against opposing currents and ideologies, especially the Islamic trend, which suspended its activities and many of its members fled the country, or moved to the north, where they resumed their activities within the framework of the Islamic Movement there.

It can be said that the decade of the seventies witnessed the evolution of the Islamic Movement and the expansion of its members, especially in the education sector. The Association of Scholars, the Guidance Office, and then the scientific institutes became a platform for the Islamic Movement. When the era of President Ali Abdullah Saleh began in July 1978, the Islamic Movement became more present.

The movement allied with President Saleh to confront his opponents in the nationalist and leftist currents. They stood by him against the coup by the Nasserite organization three months after he came to power. They also allied with him against those who were working to bring down his regime with support from the ruling regime in Aden . On the ground, the alliance between Saleh and the Islamists became more evident at the beginning of the eighties through armed confrontations against the National Front in the central regions, which included elements of the left, and politically through the establishment of the General People's Congress, which included various political currents, and had al-Methaq al-Watany (National Pact), which included Islamic texts.

In July 1988, the first parliamentary elections were held. Most of the intellectual and political currents participated, but in an undisclosed manner, because partisan pluralism was prohibited at the time. The Islamic Movement won a remarkable victory represented in obtaining 36 seats out of the total of 128 seats nationwide.

Upon the achievement of the Yemeni unity in 1990, and despite the presence of the Islamic Movement and its wide expansion, the movement remained mostly limited to the elite, for two reasons. The first is related to the nature of the stage as the multi-partisan was prohibited, and the second one is related to the work and polarization mechanism of the movement. Despite the expansion of the movement, it witnessed disagreements among its leaders during the sixties and seventies over its modus operandi. One team saw the importance of maintaining the public action through various means.

This team was represented by Sheikh Abdul Majeed al-Zindani, who seemed to be influenced by his professor al-Zubairi in this aspect, and the other team predominantly focused on strengthening the internal organizational work, represented by Yassin Abdel Aziz and Omar Tarmoum And Abdulmalik Mansour, Ali Hood Baabad and Muhammad Al-Yadoumi. The French researcher Francois Borgia distinguished between the two currents as a Wahhabi movement,⁴ led by Sheikh Abdul Majeed al-Zindani, and a Muslim Brotherhood movement, led by Abdo Al-Mikhlafi and Omar Tarmom.⁵

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After the achievement of the Yemeni Unity in 1990, the Islamic Movement emerged, but it was limited to the elites, and the Islah party believes that it presented its credentials to the people, not as an Islamic party, but as an extension of the Yemeni reform and renewal movement, led by clerics al-Shawkani, Ibn al-Amir al-Sana’ani, al-Bayhani, al-Hakimi and al-Zubairi.
”

When the Islamic movement announced that it joined the political scene as a political party, under the name of (the Yemeni Congregation for Reform), the polarization was not limited to the movement's cadres only, but it was expanded to include tribal sheikhs, religious scholars, academics, merchants and others. The leader of Hashid tribes Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmar was elected as head of the Islah party, and leader of Bakil tribes Naji AbdulAziz al-Shayef⁶ and Sheikh Awad Banjar, one of the religious scholars in Hadramout governorate, were elected as deputy head of the party. ⁷

The definition:

Al-Islah defines itself as a political organization that adopts the Yemeni people's thoughts and values based on the Islamic religion, and represents "the extension of the modern Yemeni reform movement, led by the Yemeni advocates of reform and renewal."

Dr. Nageeb Ghanem, a leader in the party itself, believes that Islah presented its credentials to the Yemeni people not as an Islamic party,



but as an extension of the Yemeni renewal and reform movement that Imam Al-Shawkani and the son of Al-Amir Al-San`ani, Sheikh Muhammad bin Salem Al-Bayhani, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Hakimi and Muhammad Mahmoud Al-Zubairi⁸ drew its path way. He pointed out that the Islah party has attracted various segments and groups of the Yemeni society,⁹ and that it chose Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar as its president in appreciation for his historical role in supporting and defending the Yemeni revolution, and for his social prestige.¹⁰

Ideology and Intellectual Tributaries:

After a brief presentation of the historical background that preceded the announcement of the establishment of the Islah party,

it is worthwhile to look at the most important intellectual streams that have contributed - in one way or another - to the intellectual, cultural and educational formation of the Islamic Movement represented by the Islah party since 1990. Depending on so far background, it is clear that the founders of the movement relied mainly on the intellectual heritage of Yemeni scholars and innovators, whose reform visions were based on the Islamic ideology. This was evident in the first generation of the Yemeni national movement that was crystallized in the thirties of the twentieth century and took upon itself the task of confronting the Imamate rule that was based on claims of entitlement to power only because its rulers are descended from the noble Prophet's house, and they call themselves "Al al-Beit".

Islah's Relationship with Muslim Brotherhood:

In a later stage, the Yemeni national movement was affected by the intellectual and ideological conflict on the Arab arena at the time. Some people were affected by ideas of symbols of the Islamic renewal movement, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdo, and Rashid Rida, so some of them, including the founders of the Yemeni Islamic movement, liked thoughts and writings of the Muslim Brotherhood. It could be considered the second intellectual tributary of the Islamic movement in Yemen.

The third tributary was the Salafi "Wahhabi" ideology. Many elements of the Islamic movement headed to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where they were enrolled in Saudi schools and universities. They were influenced by the growth of the Salafi discourse in the seventies. ¹¹

It was mentioned so far that the Yemeni Islamic movement, represented today by the Islah Party, came as an extension of the Yemeni reform and renewal movement, which was initiated by Yemeni scholars and thinkers, who contributed to the enrichment of the reformist thought and religious renewal at the level of Yemen and the Arab region.

In several statements, the Islah party denied "any organizational or political relations linking it to the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood,"¹² stressing that its "priorities as a political party are national priorities."¹³ In this context, the party points out to its documents (the party's statute, its political program and its internal regulations), as references that clarify the party's identity and principles, and explain its ideas, visions, perspectives and goals.

The Islah's documents do not show any link between the party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Rather, they define Islah as "Yemeni reform movement that embodies the aspirations of the Yemeni people, and takes it upon itself to meet the demands of the people of freedom, justice and consultation," as stated in the Main Regulation. Regarding the party's political program, it is mentioned that the party came "to be a living extension of the modern Yemeni reform movement, and a framework that includes all those seeking to reform the reality and change it for the better."

According to some researchers in the ideology of the Islamic movement field, the Muslim Brotherhood movement was established as an extension of the religious reform movement, led by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdo, and an extension of the Yemeni School of Reform and Renewal, its most prominent founders are Imam al-Shawkani and the Ibn al-Amir al-Sana`ani.

During the period of founding the contemporary Islamic trend, many of the founders - most of whom were students in Egypt, were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.

After the establishment of the Yemeni Islamic Movement in the 1960s, students returned from Cairo were the main component within the movement, but they soon melted away within the social and political balances. This strategic strength of the Islah Party has become more linked to the Yemeni people, the same social structure and the same political role.¹⁴

According to some researchers, the relationship between the Yemeni Islamic movement and the Muslim Brotherhood is a voluntary coordination and cooperation, similar to the case of Brotherhood organization in Sudan. The Islamic movement in Yemen entered in reconciliation with its geography, and it did not retreat or abandon its affiliation to the nation.

It is the product of its society with its culture, identity, traditions, transgressions, delinquencies and civilization.¹⁵

Some people believe that the Islah party which adopts

the Islamic reference is an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. But it includes other groups of society, making it closer to a political coalition than to an organized party.¹⁶



The Second Topic: Moving from Mobilization to Partisan and Political Work

After the establishment of the unity and the declaration of political pluralism, Yemen entered into the transitional phase set by the agreement on unity in two years and a half, after which general parliamentary elections were held, so the Islah found itself in the face of accelerating events at the political and economic levels internally and externally, especially since it has become the largest opposition party¹⁷ against the two ruling parties (the General People's Congress and the Yemeni Socialist Party).

That period (1990-1993) - according to Yemeni researchers and politicians - was characterized as the best period of democracy and political openness. Although the two ruling parties did not allow citizens and other political forces to have their own media outlets,

the conflict between the two forces allowed other political forces to play more effective and important roles by making use of the resources controlled by one of the parties.¹⁸ Of course, the tools and means that the GPC possessed were closer to the Islah party.

Early after the announcement of Yemeni unity, the Islah party fought its first political, media and public battles in the "referendum on the constitution of the unity state" in May 1991, where it announced its rejection of the constitution in that formula, and demanded amendments to a number of articles the party considered a violation to the principles and rulings of the Islamic religion. Among those articles was the third article, which recognizes the Islamic law as the main source of legislation,

while Islah wanted to be “the Islamic law is the source of all legislations. In return, the two ruling parties confronted Islah with a wide media campaign accusing it of standing against the Yemeni unity.

During the conflict over the constitution, the Islah’s disagreements with President Saleh appeared publicly for the first time after coordination and understanding between the two parties continued to prevail for a long period.

Although the media conflict between the Socialist Party and Islah was more intense due to the ideological struggle between them, each party found an opportunity through the issue of the constitution to present itself to the people and attack its opponents.

The Islah party succeeded in gaining a wide audience during (1990-1993) for several reasons: the strength of the media discourse and its political positions according to some researchers. ¹⁹

And its possession of a widespread educational organization, and the social and cultural services it provided, according to others²⁰ But it was suffering from a problem resulting from the mixing of the political struggle with the fighting for the sake of religion and defending it, according to Mohamed al-Sabri,²¹ a leader in the Nasserite organization.

The term Jihad was prevalent in the eighties and nineties due to what was known then as the "Afghan Jihad" against the Soviet Union - the main supporter of the idea of socialism - in Afghanistan. When some Yemenis, who participated in the fighting against the Soviets, returned home in the early 1990s, they found that the Soviet ally, the "Socialist Party", was a partner in power, and then some of them were used by opponents of the socialism, on top of them was Ali Abdullah Saleh and his regime, so the conflict between the two ruling parties was exacerbated.

Hence, the religious dimension seemed to be more present in the Islah's discourse and methods, which often included speeches, lectures, celebrations and public conferences, including a massive rally in the capital Sana'a in mid-May 1991, and its success in late 1992 in organizing a wide public meeting called "Conference for Unity and Peace."

Islah was able to draw the attention of the Yemeni street in various governorates, and its "role was increasingly important as the main opposition party against the ruling alliance that shares power,"²² according to (Michael Hudson),²³ in addition to its presence outside the circle of the ruling authority, which made it safe from waves of discontent in the Yemeni street, because of deterioration in the economic and living conditions especially during the Gulf crisis that broke out due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (August 1990).

The crisis broke out shortly after achieving the unity, and resulted in the return of about a million Yemeni expatriates from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. This situation had negative repercussions to the government and increased the state of discontent with its performance.

The lack of trust between the two ruling partners, as each of them was seeking to monopolize power and marginalize the other, the wave of assassinations and bombings that targeted members of the Socialist Party, and the occurrence of riots in northern cities only, not in the south, has intensified the conflict between the GPC and the Socialist Party in favor of the Islah Party.

At the organizational level, the documents of the First General Conference for Islah state that the party leadership tried to quickly accomplish preparations for holding the conference

"to approve the system and programs on which the Islah is based, and elect its leading bodies to launch the process of work according to stable and organized rules. ²⁴

However, when the leadership began its work, it found itself obliged to direct the efforts of the party and its capabilities to confront the successive and accelerating events and crises²⁵ "that have followed the establishment of the party. The events and crises at the time prevented the party from holding the conference. The first conference for the party was in September 1994, four years after its foundation.

Therefore, Islah's leadership continued to manage its organizational and political activities through the "Supreme Commission",

which is the highest leadership component in the party's hierarchy that emerged from the "Supreme Preparatory Committee." The party's branches in districts and governorates were managed by preparatory committees that are like executive offices. The character of the Islah party was not clearly crystalized during the transitional period, even though the party had a parliamentary caucus in the House of Representatives, the Parliament that was formed after the unity and included the People's Council in southern Yemen, and the Shura Council in the north. It has been indicated so far that the Islamic trend - the core of the Islah party - won more than 30 seats in the Shura Council elections in 1988.

The Third Topic: Islah ... Issues and Positions:

The Republican System in the Face of Dynastic Thought:

The Islah party considers “working to achieve the goals of the Yemeni revolution and preserving the republican system”²⁶ at the forefront of its goals, because the revolution that ended the imamate tyranny in northern Yemen and the foreign presence in its south represented - in Islah’s opinion - “a victory for the values of liberation and emancipation from sectarian shackles, the Imami dynasty.”²⁷ That was the most prominent feature of the Imamate rule against which the Yemeni revolution in the 1960s was launched.

While Islah affirms that it “fought the battle to liberate the popular consciousness from the sediments of the past and the ideas of dynastic tyranny, extremism and superstition,”²⁸ the party’s performance towards the Imami thought in the past period was not without criticism, as it failed - like other political parties - to promote

the national values established by the revolution and the republican system. On contrary, the arguments between the parties opened the way for the Imami ideological and political current to return to the forefront and try a new round. The Yemeni parties and the cultural, political and social elites wake up after the Houthi group, the armed wing of the Imamate, tightened their control over the capital, Sana’a, and other governorates.

In June 2020, the Islah Party issued a strong statement against the Houthi group,²⁹ which some politicians considered a “historical statement”, because it “came more powerful and clear, and attacked - for the first time - Yahya bin Al-Hussein, founder of the Imamate, the Zaydi State, and demanded the criminalization of all forms of racism and everything that conflicts with the values of justice, equality and citizenship.”³⁰

The most prominent point in the Islah's statement - according to Yemeni writer and researcher Thabet al-Ahmadi - was that it emphasized the major and fundamental strategic importance of the republican system, and the collective Yemeni identity with its long-standing cultural and civilizational heritage.³¹

The statement that carried an intellectual and political conflict between Islah and the Imami thought, which is represented in the current situation by the Houthi group. The Islah's statement did not discuss the points of political controversy and the military conflict, but rather targeted the intellectual foundations and historical roots on which the Imami movement was based, and this is why the statement was praised by many people outside the party.

All other statements by Islahi officials, in this context, confirmed that the party's position in the statement was not new, because the roots of the party - according to the deputy head of its media department - "are pure republican, and the republic, democracy, popular will and political pluralism firmly represent foundational values in the reference of the Islah organization,

and every idea contradicts with these values will be confronted with firm, decisive and uncompromising stance."³²

The Islahi leader concludes that the popular echo of the Islah's statement against the dynasty came as a natural expression of the harmony between Islah and the values for which the people is striving, and the congruence between the positions of the party and the aspirations of the Yemeni people.³³

Shura and Democracy:

The Islah Party devoted an item in its political program about the foundations and principles of Shura and democracy, considering that "the ideal embodiment of the concepts of Shura in our current era requires the adoption of the best that human societies have reached in their democratic practices, in terms of forms, rules and procedural and technical methods to organize the extraction of consensus and improve the exercise of power, and ensuring peaceful exchange of power, expanding the circle of popular participation, and activating the supervision."³⁴

On the other hand, some observers believe that the Islah includes anti-democratic elements. The writer and politician Abdel Bari Taher says: “Islah as bases and an organization has a popular extension so there is no doubt that it has a real interest in democracy. Many of its bases are concerned with democracy. However, Islah has dual elements, as it is with and against democracy at the same time. Its rhetoric is double and ambiguous.”³⁸

The Islah Party - like other Yemeni parties - is struggling for a comprehensive transition to democratic practice and its full implementation, whether at the country level in general or within the party’s framework due to factors related to the general conditions and circumstances, and the political and military conflicts and successive crises that the country has lived and still live. Some opponents of Islah see that democracy, which it advocates, is not very different from what is prevalent in the Arab region.³⁹

Since announcing its foundation in 1990, Islah’s rhetoric has emphasized “the continuation in deepening the Shura and democracy, and the acceptance of the election results in order to enrich the experience.”³⁵

In all of its literature, Islah confirms its commitment to consultation and democracy, the acceptance of other opinion, and commitment to the opinion of the majority, but on the ground it appears to be relatively different, according to the time, place, and leadership positions. Shura is apparent in super leadership position, and it is gradually weakening in grassroots.³⁶

While some observers consider Islah as a conservative party, in the Western sense of the word, they see it as a contributor to the democratic experience in the country through its support for the democratic system. This support practically stopped argument over the religious legitimacy among a wide range of audience. They think that the Islah party mixed a religious statement with a largely public, free and open one.³⁷

Nevertheless, observers note that peaceful struggle has become the Islah's strategy that integrates with political partnership. It has also become a culture for its members and cadres, and a method for demanding rights and freedoms.⁴⁰

Violence and Terror:

The Islah Party stresses on building a member's personality on "dialogue and moderation in speech and action, and opposing all forms of extremism and terrorism, whatever its source and its color".⁴¹ Therefore, the Islah Party - and its partners in the Joint Meeting Parties - pursued a peaceful struggle rejecting all forms of violence, and the Yemeni peaceful revolution in 2011 was an evidence of the dynamics of Islah and its partners in the path of peaceful struggle. They adopted the peaceful option and rejected all forms of violence and militarization in their revolution, which made the Islah Party and its allies sign the Gulf initiative

and its chronic implementation mechanisms and accept partnership and political settlement through choosing a consensual president for Yemen, and a government of national accord to conduct the transitional period.⁴²

Islah believes that the scourges resulting from extremism, such as terrorism, violence, exclusion, oppression, bypassing laws, the spread of corruption, favoritism and others, will be rooted out only through the culture of dialogue, accepting other opinions, defending rights and adopting the peaceful, democratic and civil political action by all parties, in power and opposition, as a principle for resolving disputes.⁴³

There is no doubt that the ruling regimes in the Arab region, including the regime of former President Ali Saleh, took advantage of the war on terror after the events of September 11, 2001, and worked to strengthen the security grip and distribute accusations to the political actors and influencers in the opposition.

So accusations began to find their way against the Islamic-oriented Islah party, which became the largest opposition party, while Islah preferred the peaceful political action along with its partners in the Joint Meeting Parties. The Islah broad activity and its active presence in civil society made the ruling party's propaganda and accusations lose their credibility.

According to some researchers, terrorism accusation, after the events of September 11th, was a prominent feature of the political conflict, especially against the opposition, represented by Islah, the most important force of the opposition on the scene. So the Islah decided to confront such accusations with more "patriotic actions and political openness" and exerted more efforts to advise and evaluate the political experience in the country whose sons must defend the freedom of each other, regardless their different visions or positions,

affirming the firm position of Islah "in defending the right of every citizen to express and reject any terrorism or treason." ⁴⁴

Islah considered that "the issue of terrorism can no longer be used for blackmail or for killing the society's dreams of moving towards fair and rational governance," calling on the Yemeni authority to benefit from efforts of other countries that claim partnership in combating this human scourge, and from the relationship of governments in other countries with opposition, but even with efforts by the West to reach a common understanding of the reasons behind the imbalances between East and West. ⁴⁵

In its third general conference (2002), Islah renewed its rejection of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations from any party and under any name,

and affirmed its rejection of “the use of violence in political action, and denounced all sabotage operations that harm the public security and tranquility, and affect the innocent.”⁴⁶

The Islah party announced early its position rejecting assassinations, kidnappings, bombings and armed clashes, and considered them to be inconsistent with “the values, history and ancient traditions of Yemeni society, which require everyone's cooperation to get rid of them.”⁴⁷

It is clear that in many of its statements, Islah still expresses its rejection of violence, extremism and terrorism. However, observers of the Yemeni political affairs see the party’s rhetoric toward democracy and against extremism as a sign of the extent to which the political developments in the region affected the political forces, especially

in the period prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, and the subsequent approach of combating terrorism and draining its resources, and the growing call for political reforms in the Arab region.⁴⁸

It is noted that accusing opponents of terrorism is not limited to one party. Like Ali Abdullah Saleh, who accused his opponents of terrorism, the Houthi group also launched its propaganda against the Islah Party and the government, which includes a political spectrum. The group launched its war under the slogan of fighting terrorism, Takfiris, al-Qaeda and Daesh (ISIS). During the war, new opponents of Islah appeared and used the same accusation of terror against the party that confronts non-stop attempts of eradication.

Under penalty of indictment

Sheikh Mohamed al-Moayad (1948-2017), one of the prominent leaders in the Islah party, was the first to be charged with "terrorism" by the Americans, after he was arrested by German intelligence at Frankfurt Airport in 2003. He was transferred to the United States at the end of the same year amid Yemeni calls for his release. He was convicted by a US federal court with "supporting the Palestinian Hamas movement and Al-Qaeda organization". He remained in US prisons until a US Court of Appeals overturned his conviction in 2008, revoking the first ruling. He was sentenced to time served and deported to Yemen in 2009.

In its statements and calls for the release of Sheikh Al-Moayad, the Islah party was keen to ward off the accusation of terrorism, praising al-Moayad for his charitable and humanitarian work, and supporting and caring of orphans. However,

some observers saw that Islah's position towards the issue was weak. But the Islahi leader Hamoud al-Tharehi, who was the head of the National Authority for Defending Sheikh Al-Moayad (non-governmental), denied that and said in one of his press interviews, "Islah wanted not to be alone in defending Sheikh Al-Moayad, because he is a Yemeni citizen, the responsibility to defend him and follow up on his case is the responsibility of the government and the President of the Republic."⁴⁹

In May 2017, the US Treasury Department issued a statement in which it included the Islahi leader Khaled Al-Arada (from Marib governorate), on a list of penalties for alleged links to terrorist groups. The accusation that the Islah party denounced in a statement: "The US administration receives false information from entities targeting national figures known in the circles of Yemeni society for their moderate ideology."⁵⁰

At the end of 2016, the US Treasury Department had included the Islahi leader Al-Hassan Abkar in the same list. He is a well-known leader in Al-Jawf (northeast of Yemen), where he was leading a popular resistance against the Houthis, who have been fighting a continuous war since 2011 to control the governorate that locates on the southern border with Saudi Arabia.

The Islah Party condemned the US decision at the time, and considered it "clear evidence of targeting national figures with moderate ideology, without relying on any tangible evidence," adding in a statement: "Al-Hassan is the earliest national figure who believes in coexistence and peaceful political work as a way to reach power. Yemenis knew him as an inclusive social figure, who spent his life reforming and resolving armed tribal conflicts and revenge phenomenon that spreads in the tribal areas, including Al-Jawf,

to which he belongs." ⁵¹ Observers believe that there was a weakness shown by Islah in defending its affiliates, who are accused of terrorism. They saw that the Islah leadership was satisfied with issuing statements, and demanding the presidency and government "to take a clear position on these decisions that affect Yemeni citizens, who stood by the legitimacy and sacrificed their lives for the sake of defending the right of Yemenis to build a state that can protect them and meet their aspirations for freedom, dignity, equality and a decent life." ⁵²

Sheikh Al-Moayad was supported by a wide popular interaction and evident continuous follow-up of his case since his arrest in Germany until his transfer to the United States, through his trial and discharge, and ending with his reception by thousands of citizens, who celebrated his return after spending years in US prisons.



But the matter seemed to be different regarding the two Islahi leaders Al-Hassan Abkar and Khaled Al-Arada, who are far from physical targeting by the Americans. They are also known for their social presence in their areas of a cohesive tribal structure (Al-Jawf and Marib), and they enjoy a prominent social and political position, and each one of them maintains a large record of fighting against the Houthi group. This makes it likely that the Houthis and regional parties affected

by the Islah's support for President Hadi's legitimacy are involved in misleading the Americans with false information about them to achieve their own goals through incriminating their opponents with terrorism, the accusation which the Iranian-backed Houthi group and the UAE-backed Transitional Council have been using against opponents of the Houthi coup in the north in September 21, 2014, and the Transitional Council's declaration of "self-administration" in the south in April 2020.

The Southern Issue:

The southern issue witnessed a noticeable escalation in the political and media aspects after the launch of the Southern Movement in 2007 through the associations of the forcibly retired military personnel as one of the consequences of the 1994 war, which led to the exclusion of southerners affiliated with the Socialist party that lost the war. While the authority kept ignoring the protests in the south, the political parties did not expect that protests would proceed to reach a far extent after a few years, especially after the popular revolution in 2011. Although the opposition parties did not comply with the demands of the leaders of the movement regarding the secession of the south from the north, the southern issue was their priority in the National Dialogue Conference. All parties and political components participating

in the dialogue agreed on the importance of the southern issue, and the urgent need to resolve it.

This is what we observe in the Islah's stance towards the southern issue, which began timidly in the closing statement of its first general conference in September 1994, almost two months after the end of the war, when it called on the government, in which the party had nearly a third of the ministerial seats, to "address the effects of war, remove its remnants, and reconstruct the affected areas."⁵³

In its Fourth General Conference, the Islah devoted a special part of the conference to address the southern issue. "The conference called for stopping the dangerous conditions in the southern governorates and their catastrophic consequences, mainly those resulted from the policy of exclusion against political partners and the absence of equal citizenship."

The Islah accused the authority of turning its back to the foundations of political pluralism and the national partnership upon which the Yemeni unity was based. It insisted on dealing with the post-war situations and challenges transcendentally.⁵⁴ It called on the Yemeni society, with all its political and social powers and components, and civil organizations to bear their national responsibilities and find serious solutions and remedies, using the southern issue as an entry point for comprehensive political and national reform.⁵⁵

With regard to the Islah's vision to solve the southern issue, it included it in the documents it had submitted to the National Dialogue Conference (March 2013 - January 2014) as all other participating political forces did. The Islah's vision emphasized that "the southern issue is at the top of the national issues presented to the agenda of the dialogue conference, suggesting that solving the southern issue will constitute the correct entry point for comprehensive national reform,

and the solid foundation on which the pillars of the modern civil state will be built."⁵⁶

The vision stated that "the first step begins with confidence-building measures and creating the appropriate atmosphere in preparation for resolving the southern issue fairly and comprehensively to preserve the entity of the state, and restore the peaceful contents of the unity of May 1990, and to put the south in its natural national equation, as a true partner in power and wealth. "

With the Islah's stress on the need to end the security imbalances occurring in some southern governorates, and to quickly address the absence and lack of public services. It called for "the provision of all necessary resources for the judicial committee formed by the presidency to handle the issues of retirees and lands, obliging the government to implement its decisions and return the properties that were confiscated, whether those belong to individuals, or parties, or trade unions or the state with fair compensations for the last period."

It also stressed on "dealing with the conditions of civil and military employees, the people displaced aboard, those forcibly arrested and transferred to retirement, and returning them to their work and paying their legal dues. Treating and settling the conditions of deportees and missing civilians due to various political conflicts in the southern arena and settling the pensions of those who were not included in the inventory of the deportees." ⁵⁷

The Islah's position towards the southern issue remains tainted with ambiguity and suspicions that arise around it from some factions of the southern movement calling for secession,

because Islah was partner of the regime of Ali Saleh under the slogan of defending the Yemeni unity and confronting secession. At the present time, the extremists in the Southern Movement - particularly the Transitional Council faction, supported by the United Arab Emirates, do not hide their hostility against the Islah Party for two main reasons. The first is related to their preconceptions about Islah as a strong and coherent political organization that stands against the secession project, supports the federal state project, led by President Hadi. The second reason is related to Abu Dhabi's position against the Islamic political currents, including the Islah party.



Women Issue:

Despite the importance of the role that women play in the Yemeni political life within the political parties or outside them, many obstacles still stand in the way of women, and prevent their participation as required. The women participation is different from one party to another and from one governorate to another.

In the Yemeni tribal community, women are seen in the second order after men, as women in many Yemeni regions are deprived from their right of education, especially secondary and university education, not to mention women's participation in elections, but political competition between influential parties - in the forefront of which is the Islah Party, that is influential in many tribal areas and rural areas, had a major role in engaging women in the elections, mostly as voters, not as candidates.

Women's political participation in Yemen

was characterized with vitality, especially in the latest parliamentary elections in 2003. The percentage of women participated in the elections was 42% of the total number of voters, but only 11 women ran for office, and only one won, because of the gap between advanced the legislation and the society's negative perception towards women.⁵⁸ However, the injustice that women suffer is not related to legal texts, but rather to the economic, social and cultural conditions of the Yemeni society.⁵⁹

The presence of women in the Islah party noticeable began marginally and then grew up. The second session of the Fourth General Conference of Islah witnessed a wide debate between members and leaders of the party on the issue of women. After discussions that consumed a lot of time and effort, the conferees approved with majority to expand the scope of women's work in the party,

transforming women's office in the party to a circle⁶⁰ According to supporters of this change, the amendment aims "to develop Islah's structures and regulations, and to improve and strengthen work in the women's sector."⁶¹

However, the status of women within the Islah party is still lower than the desirable level, because of the fact that "the prevailing heritage in the region is still at a late stage, and this leads to the lack of full integration of women, and that the party is not able to amend this legacy."⁶²

During the past period, the Islah's women members have emerged in the political activities, media outlets and civil society organizations, including the human rights activist Tawakkol Abdul Salam Karman, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, and she is a member of the Islah Shura Council,

which represents the party's parliament. Before receiving the Nobel Prize, Karman was one of the most prominent human rights activists in Yemen for defending human rights in various activities and events, particularly the rights of journalists and freedom of opinion and expression, through Women Journalists Without Chains organization, which she founded in 2005. The organization actively monitors the reality of the Yemeni press and violations against media. After the Arab Coalition started its operations in Yemen, Karman continued to criticize the coalition's war in Yemen. Karman's relationship with the leadership of her party, which supports the coalition, worsened and the party issued a decision to freeze her membership in the party for her continuous criticism of the Arab coalition that supports the Yemeni legitimacy.

Tribal Community:

Some observers see the diversity of the Islah party as a weakness, while it is - from the point of view of others - a reflection of Yemeni society, because the presence of tribal figures, various religious currents such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Sufism and Zaydism, in addition to youth, students and women, from across the country, within the party preserved this party to be the son of its environment, rather than an elite, factional or ideological movement. ⁶³

As a popular party – not an elitist party- the Islah party was able to deepen its presence in the tribal society, which remained almost closed to political parties, especially those with external ideology and strict organizational restrictions.

The presence of tribal and social leaders and symbols in the leadership ranks of the Islah party had pushed a lot of members of tribes to join the party, either through disciplined membership or through establishing some kind of understanding and coordination in some situations.

Regarding the party's association with society, Muhammad Qahtan, one of the reform leaders, says: "The announcement of the establishment of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform was a sincere expression and a natural extension of the modern Yemeni reform movement, as it came as a natural response to the Yemeni society's intellectual values. That was a big push in the path of the political, social and cultural development of the Yemeni society. ⁶⁴

The Palestinian Issue:

The Palestinian issue is at the forefront of the concerns of the Yemeni Islah party. The party summarizes its position towards the Palestinian issue by “supporting the Palestinian people until they obtain their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent state,” according to the political program of the party. Many members and leaders of the party participated in several events in support of the Palestinian people. President of the party, Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar, was known for his stances in support of the Palestinians, and he presided over many committees and bodies - Yemeni and Arab - in support of the Palestinian cause.

It is noted that the position of Islah towards the Palestinian issue came mostly in harmony with the official and popular position in Yemen in support of Palestine. The Yemeni political forces are unanimous in this position "towards the Palestinian cause and supporting the Palestinian people until they achieve all their legitimate rights and establish their independent state on the entire Palestinian national soil." ⁶⁵

”
Islah considers that achieving the goals of the Yemeni revolution and preserving the republican system is at the forefront of other goals it seeks to achieve in its political program. It calls for supporting the Palestinian people until they attain their rights to self-determination and establishing their independent state.
”

In its first public conference in 1994, the Islah's statement said, "The progress that the Zionist entity is achieving at the expense of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Islamic nation is due to the deteriorating state of the nation,"⁶⁶ calling on "the leaders of Arab and Islamic countries to correct the course and reconsider all issues, on all political, cultural and economic levels, and adopting new methods in dealing with the Zionist enemy, which guarantee the restoration of legitimate rights to their owners and deter the aggressors." ⁶⁷

After nearly two years, Islah denounced the Israeli "settlement and aggressive policies," and called "all countries of the world, led by the United States of America and European countries,

to exert pressure on the Zionist government to stop aggressive practices."

⁶⁸

When the second Palestinian uprising (Al-Aqsa Intifada) erupted in the year 2000, the Islah party praised "the uprising against the Zionist occupation, the jihad of the Palestinian people, their sacrifices and their steadfastness,"⁶⁹ and praised the "cohesion of the Palestinian people and all its factions and political forces on the basis of national unity in the face of the aggressive Zionist attacks and attempts to desecrate the Islamic sanctities." ⁷⁰

In its latest conference, Islah praised "the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in Gaza and other resistance forces in the face of the brutal aggression by the Zionist entity."⁷¹



The most important determinants of the Islah's position towards the Palestinian issue can be concluded as follows:

- 1. Emphasis on the Palestinian-Arab right to restore the occupied lands, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the right of the Palestinian people to face the Israeli occupation until they liberate their land. ⁷²**
- 2. The necessity of "dialogue between the Palestinian factions to restore unity and cohesion of the Palestinian people, as that will enable them to resist occupation."**
- 3. Rejecting normalization with Israel, considering it a "historical crime against the peoples".⁷³ The Arabs who normalized relations with Israel did not get any benefit that serves the Palestinian issue,**

and the Islah affiliates believe that normalization makes Arabs "give up everything in exchange for engaging in a new Middle East to be established on the ruins of Arabs as a nation and an entity that it is able to determine its fate and address its own issues."

Although the party's stance was consistently beside the official position of the Yemeni government and the popular stance towards the Palestinian cause, this did not push Islah as a political party to conclude agreements, partnerships, or even relations, far from the Yemeni government, with any of the Palestinian factions, including Hamas, as a resistance movement. It let the decision-makers in the official bodies lead the Yemeni public opinion towards the Palestinian issue, provide official aid to the Palestinian people and its leadership, and supervise popular humanitarian efforts in support of the Palestinian issue.

The Fourth Topic: Prominent Stations in the reform process

First: Participation in Power

In the parliamentary elections in April 1993, the Islah party came in the second place as it won 63 seats, 21% of the total number of, after the General People's Congress, which won 123 seats, 40%, and then the Socialist Party, which won 56 seats, 18%.⁷⁵ The result is that the three parties agreed to enter into a tripartite alliance, which includes the formation of an alliance government and parliamentary coordination between the three parliamentary blocs.

The Islah party believed that its participation in power - at the time - "came as a natural result and an objective necessity, after it ran, with honor and integrity, the first parliamentary elections after the establishment of the Republic of Yemen."⁷⁶

The Islah gave up the second position it got in the new government for the Socialist Party" in favor of the national interest and to show goodwill towards its partner, the Socialist Party."⁷⁷

The results of the 1993 elections ended the two-parties system that lasted during the transitional period for several reasons: The first one is the presence of a new partner in power, the Islah party. The second one is the modest result of the Socialist Party in the elections. And the third reason is the General People's Congress's control of nearly half of the parliament. The Islah party's concession allowed the Socialist Party to retain a reasonable share of power beyond its representation in the Parliament. However, the elections were one of the axes of the new conflict that led to the 1993 political crisis and then the 1994 war.

When the Socialist feared that the GPC, with support from the Islah party, would reduce its influence and power under the name of the legitimacy of the elections, so it bullied with the legitimacy of unity and its agreement against the bullying with the parliamentary majority. The two sides continued to bet on what they were relying on in their confrontations, and each party worked to exclude the other. But the Islah party's support for the General People's Congress Party made their voice greater than the Socialist Party, so the latter began to ally with small parties.

Despite this, the relationship between the Islah and the Socialist witnessed a significant improvement after the formation of the alliance government, and after several meetings between the leaderships of the two parties. The experience of alliance did not continue, and it was quickly hindered by the political crisis that ravaged the country for eight months during the period of August 1993 - April 1994, and then the outbreak of war,

May through July of the same year. The Socialist Party lost the war and left power. After the war, a bilateral alliance was formed between the GPC and the Islah party.

The Islah party saw "the nature of its relations with the General People's Congress and their common denominators that bind them together as an incentive to enter the bilateral alliance, and it was expected that the alliance would have success factors that would enable it to seriously address all imbalances."⁷⁸ Hence, its participation in the government, "despite the qualitative imbalance in the distribution of portfolios, as it bears the responsibility of the service ministries that were suffering from stifling problems that put them on the verge of collapse."⁷⁹ As for the legislative and constitutional level, the Islah achieved a legislative victory represented in amending the Article (III) of the Constitution. It stipulates that the Islamic law is the only source of all legislations, after it was previously "the main source."⁸⁰



Disagreements quickly erupted between the two partners of the Yemeni unity agreement, the GPC and the Socialist Party, to disrupt the mechanism of the alliance between them. The new bilateral alliance (the GPC and Islah) soon began to face an obstacle that blocked its way. The GPC adopted a policy of getting rid of Islah's participation, and began fighting the Islah-affiliated ministers by reducing their powers.⁸¹ This was confirmed by the Yemeni politicians outside the Islah party,

noting that the most prominent developments occurred after the 1994 war, under the regime of Ali Saleh, included campaigns of repression, increase of corruption, narrowing the democratic margin, mounting the tendency of looting and plundering, and more insecurity and administrative chaos. The repression and marginalization targeted even the regime's partners in the war, southern leaders and the Islah party, which suffered a lot of defamation and harassment.⁸²

Second: Leaving the power, Launching the «Joint Meeting» and Peaceful Struggle

The differences between the two partners in the ruling alliance widened day after day, and President Saleh's meetings with the leadership of Islah were no longer able to address and contain them, so the Islah began its first move towards the main opposition parties affiliated with the (Supreme Coordination Council for Opposition Parties), namely the Socialist Party, the Nasserite Organization and the Baath Party, in addition to the Al-Haq Party and the Popular Forces Union. The meeting that took place in late August 1996 discussed preparations for parliamentary elections (April 1997) in light of accusation against the Congress Party of managing the electoral process in a single way that excludes the other parties and depriving them from their right to participate. At the time, the two parties

(the Islah Party and the parties of the Supreme Council of Opposition) signed an executive program for “the Joint Meeting” to ensure free and fair elections.⁸³ The meeting was the first nucleus of the formation of the Joint Meeting Parties’ bloc that was announced later.

The parliamentary elections were held and the GPC won 187 seats, while the Islah party won 64 seats. Although the Islah party saw that the result “does not reflect the real weights of the political forces in the arena, as it was just a result of illegal arrangements and procedures for which the state’s mechanisms were frantically used,”⁸⁴ it made Islah breathe a sigh of relief by announcing that they would leave the ruling alliance and join the ranks of opposition.⁸⁵

The Islah's meetings with other opposition parties continued under the banner of the Joint Meeting, and since 2001 the political conflict between the GPC and the Islah Party has reached at a difficult stage,

and Islah strengthened its presence within the Joint Meeting Bloc, and it has become the largest party in the Yemeni political scene during the last decade of President Saleh's reign, in the period of 2001 and 2011.

For its part, Saleh began to take new measures to fight the Islah Party as a punishment for its withdrawal from the alliance with his regime and engaging in an alliance with the opposition. Saleh canceled the scientific institutes system in which the Islah's members constitute a large proportion as administrators, teachers and students. The regime also began to encourage Islamic groups opposed to the Islah party, such as Salafis, Sufis and others, and provided them with various aspects of support in order to crack down the Islah party. The organization of "Believing Youth", based in Sa'ada and affiliated with the Zaydi Shiite,

received generous support from the Saleh's regime, which included regular and seasonal financial resources, projects, and overlooking their illegal control over branches of ministries and government institutions in Sa'ada governorate, which led to their ability to set up their own institutions, expand their control, attract members and supporters, arm their elements and wage war against Saleh's regime later. ⁸⁶

The Islah believed that "the democratic margin is being narrowed day after day through targeting and weakening the unions. The ruling party tried to control unions, organizations and associations, and to abort any independent trade union action. The regime also cloned some political parties. The press was harassed by the government, and this aroused internal and external public opinion. ⁸⁷

In light of the general conditions in the country, the position of Islah in the opposition began to change according to the change in its vision. Islah had been drawing up its own position in the opposition since it left power in 1997. It began to meet with the opposition parties within the framework of the Joint Meeting, but it re-allied with President Saleh and supported his candidacy in the 1999 presidential elections, but that was the last connection point between Islah and Saleh. Immediately after the local elections and the referendum on the constitution were held in 2001, Islah took a position opposing the ruling party, but its position was not integrated with other opposition parties.

The Islah's position was a controversy and raised questions. It was sometimes accused of putting one leg in power and another one in the opposition. The Islahis attribute this to the fact that their party has been influencing "the approach of reform - not change - and what the reform jurisprudence requires in dealing with issues,"⁸⁸ in a manner that differs

from the methods of the forces that seek change . At the time, some observers attributed the Islah's stance to its desire to return to the power. Therefore, they saw that "Islah's desire to return to power weakened its performance in the opposition."⁸⁹

This continued for a period of time, during which the situation worsened and the relationship between Islah and its allies in the Joint Meeting Parties was strengthened, especially between the two major parties, the Islah party and the Socialist Party. Observers considered "their acceptance to meet, engage in dialogue and build an alliance after the war, was a very important issue."⁹⁰

During time, the Islah was satisfied that "the ruling regime is leading the country to abyss,"⁹¹ after it managed to win in the electoral rounds - the local elections in 2001 and 2006, the parliamentary elections in 2003, and the presidential elections in 2006, so it controlled everything, so the opposition parties (the Joint Meeting) could not do anything in favor of democracy and political pluralism.⁹²

At the same time, the vision of Islah began to move towards change after attempts to reform the system failed. The Islah's positions were consistent with the rest of the Joint Meeting parties, especially since "the political space within the Islah party has widened at the expense of the religious space," according to some researchers.⁹³ Other researchers see that "Islah integrated a religious speech with a widely open political one."⁹⁴ The political researcher Amr Hamzawy notes - in a study issued

by the Carnegie Middle East Center- that the legislative priorities for the Islah have changed. It was seeking constitutional amendments in favor of more equitable distribution of power, reforms in electoral laws, political rights laws, and improving the Parliament's controlling over the government social and economic policies, reducing corruption. Moreover, the Islah sought, to a lesser extent, to add the religious legislations to the list.⁹⁵



Third: The Yemeni Popular Revolution 2011

The Yemeni popular revolution erupted in February 2011 for major factors: The first was the political deadlock and accusations by the opposition parties against Saleh of breaking all agreements that resulted from dialogue between the authority and the opposition (2007-2011), the last one of which was the February agreement 2009 to carry out the parliamentary elections but the Parliament's term was extended until today - and the July 2010 agreement, which refers to a government of national unity.

The Second Factor: the economic and societal blockage, as the government imposed economic restrictions on the middle class, and the political conflict intensified when Saleh completely seized the power and the three state's institutions. Then wide discontent raged, and Saleh used the six wars against the Houthis as a cover to confront the political opposition that became stronger

and to justify his rejection of reforms and the need for economic restrictions because the country lives in war.

The government was incredibly weak in terms of inefficiency. The bureaucracy collapsed, and the government was unable to manage the country, in addition to the deterioration of the currency and most food subsidies were lifted. Demonstrations continued in the main cities, and repression was rampant in light of Ali Saleh's plans to inherit power to his eldest son, Ahmed, who was appointed as commander of the Yemeni elite forces in 1999.

The Third Factor: the wave of the Arab Spring that launched from Tunisia and Egypt and overthrew the two regimes. The Islamists had an influential role in the Arab Spring. A revolution was looming against the Saleh's regime, so the Arab Spring came to crystallize a Yemeni revolution in the same direction that the Tunisian and Egyptian Spring had set.

The Yemeni popular revolution began in February 2011.



It was linked to two main factors, the wave of the Arab Spring that launched from Tunisia and Egypt and overthrew the two regimes, and the deterioration of economy and living conditions and services, the expansion of wars and armed confrontations. In addition, the ruling party's solo management of the political process that reached a dead end. Although the protests began spontaneously, away from the opposition parties (the Joint Meeting), the members of these parties, including Islah, joined the revolution since its inception, and then the Joint Meeting parties declared their support for the revolution. The Islah's presence was strong in all squares of the revolution in the capital, Sana'a, and other governorates, because of its large base of fans,

and the material capabilities, expertise and experiences it has in the field work and media activity.

The Islah and its allies in the Joint Meeting took the lead and active force in the revolution, preserving its peacefulness and sparing Yemen from civil wars and other dangers. They also approved the Gulf initiative and its chronic implementation mechanisms, and accepted partnership and political settlement in choosing a consensual president for Yemen and a government of national accord to run the transitional phase."⁹⁶ However, the opponents of Islah - some of them affiliated with the revolution - accused it of controlling the revolution's squares by forming organizational and security committees from people most of them belong to Islah.⁹⁷

Two years before the end of the transitional period, the counter-revolutionary forces in more than one country began plans to bring down the revolutions and the governments that resulted from them. Internal and external forces allied to confront the popular revolutions in the Arab Spring countries, including Yemen. These forces succeeded in achieving their goals in Egypt in mid-2013.

The Islah Party had absorbed the danger of being alone in governance and administration, no matter how strong its popular base was. It realized that the rise of the Islamic movement to the forefront of the revolutionary political scene, as one of the results of the Arab Spring revolutions, does not necessarily mean that the Islamists took a popular mandate to decide the fate of these revolutions and lead the people alone.⁹⁸ The course of events demonstrated without any doubt the impossibility of managing a popular revolution by a single political party or a particular current. Therefore, Islah adhered to the political settlement

in which all national forces participated as the best way to build the new Yemeni state and challenge the counter-revolution plots.⁹⁹ According to the Gulf initiative, the ruling GPC had half of seats in the new government and the other half was distributed among the parties of the Joint Meeting and its allies. The Islah received four ministries, including Interior, Justice, Planning and Education. Therefore, the Islah was not alone in bearing responsibility and confronting what the counter-revolutionary forces were planning, especially since the remnants of the former regime had reorganized themselves in new locations, betting on stirring up disputes and rivalries between the forces of the revolution, and creating cracks in the revolution's wall." Some revolutionary forces realized the danger, including the Islah party. So the most important challenge facing the revolutionary forces was their ability to set aside their ideological affiliations while they were moving towards the building of the new state.¹⁰⁰

Fourth: Houthi Coup and War

As soon as the term of the new president AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi started in 2012, several obstacles appeared. Some of them were related to the crises and problems that the country was going through in terms of mismanagement and the failure of previous governments to secure basic needs and public services, and other obstacles were related to practices by some parties that exerted efforts to thwart the new government and obstruct the political transition process and its theoretical framework (the Gulf Initiative). At the forefront of those parties was the armed Houthi group that has Zaydi sectarian roots. It is based in Sa'ada in northern Yemen. The leader of the group, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, who took over the leadership of the group after death of the group's founder Hussein Badraddin al-Houthi in armed confrontations with government forces in early September 2004.

In addition to the Houthi group, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his supporters in the GPC and in the state's institutions did not hide their desire to thwart the government and obstruct the political process as the best way for them to return to power. So the two parties (Houthi and Saleh) began to coordinate their efforts, despite six rounds of war between them, 2004 through 2009. It seemed that they overlooked all of that in order to align the present moment, as a necessity in order to get rid of common opponents, especially the Islah Party, which is the number one opponent for the two sides.

The Islah was the most prominent political opposition force within the framework of the Joint Meeting Parties, and it was also the most important political and social force that participated in the revolution against Saleh and used all their capabilities to bring him down.

Differences between the Houthi group and the Islah party appeared since the first days of the revolution, as they have different ideologies and different projects. The Houthi movement, which calls itself the (Ansarullah),¹⁰¹ is based on the Zaydi Shiite reference, and the Islah party is based on the Sunni reference, it stands on the opposite line to the Houthis ideologically, doctrinally and politically, in addition to the desire of each party to lead the political scene. While Islah emerged to lead the forces of the revolution, the Houthi movement has sought, since the signing of the Gulf Initiative, to lead the political opposition.¹⁰² In 2013 and 2014, the Houthi movement seized villages, districts, and governorates one after another, with direct support from the former president Ali Saleh, and the pillars of his party, and the traditional tribal clans in order to abort the Yemeni revolution and destroy the entire political process,

preventing Yemeni youth and the political Islam movement (the Islah party) in particular from taking power.¹⁰³ Although the Houthi group has focused on targeting the Islahis and their allies in all areas they control or seek to control, the Islah Party has chosen not to be alone in taking the decision of confrontations. It has been keen to deal with the Houthis hostilities within the framework of the general political system that includes all parties or within the framework of the official government approach, considering the Houthis an outlaw armed movement. However, this did not happen, as the political forces were divided over the Houthi expansion, and the state was weak and unable to take a position towards the risks of the Houthi expansion at the expense of the state, its institutions and its powers, with the exception of some military units that continued to defend themselves against Houthi hostility from time to time.

In September 2014, the Houthis seized the capital, Sana'a, and quickly stormed the institutions of the Islah party and its allies and supporters, especially the party's headquarters and media outlets that support it. This was not surprising, as the Houthi media - throughout the previous period - threatened the Islah party, and its allies, including the army and security officers, tribal sheikhs, activists, media professionals and others. After the Houthis invaded the capital, the political components - including the Houthi group - signed a new agreement

(the Peace and Partnership Agreement). The Islah party said that it "signed the agreement despite all its disadvantages, injecting the blood of Yemenis, strengthening the culture of dialogue and framing the foundations of civil work." ¹⁰⁴

The Houthis blew up everything that was agreed upon, and later besieged President Hadi and placed him under house arrest in January 2015, two days after the kidnapping of his office manager, and then forced the government, which was formed according to their wish,

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In September 2014, the Houthis seized the capital, Sana'a, and quickly stormed the institutions of the Islah party and its allies and supporters, prompting Islah to declare its support for the “Decisive Storm” to restore the legitimate authority, represented by President Hadi, and ending the coup.
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to resign as they placed prime minister and most of ministers under house arrest.

In February of the same year, the Houthis saw that their chance to formally seize power had become favorable, after the President of the Republic submitted his resignation, and so did the government. They announced the “Constitutional Declaration” through which they formed the “Supreme Revolutionary Committee” to run the country, led by Mohamed Ali Al-Houthi, the cousin of the group’s leader, Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi.

Secretly, President Hadi left his house in the capital, Sana’a, to the city of Aden to announce the resumption of his work, while the Houthis - and their ally, former President Saleh - began preparing to pursue President Hadi to Aden and complete their control over the rest of the governorates in the center and south of the country. When their forces reached Aden, President Hadi headed east towards the Sultanate of Oman,

and from there to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which announced on March 26, 2015, on the eve of the Houthi seizure of parts of the city of Aden, the military intervention in Yemen, and the formation of an Arab military coalition that included about ten Arab countries, to support the legitimate president, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, and to counter the Houthi coup supported by Iran. The Saudi-led coalition launched the “Decisive Storm”, and then the “Operation Restoring Hope”.

The Islah Party announced its support for the “Decisive Storm”, with the aim of restoring the legitimate authority, represented by President Hadi. The party said - in a statement issued by its General Secretariat - that "the intransigence of the Houthis and their coup against dialogue, imposing house arrest on the elected legitimate president and members of the government, disrupting official state institutions and invading the regions, prompted President Hadi to seek support and assistance." ¹⁰⁵

The result was that the Houthi group announced the dissolution of the Islah Party, and began a campaign of abuse against the party's leaders, members, headquarters and infrastructure. The campaign included murder, kidnapping, disappearance and storming houses and institutions in Sana'a and other areas of the Houthi control. ¹⁰⁶

According to a statistic issued by a Yemeni non-governmental human rights center, the Houthi group kidnapped 122 leaders and members of the Islah party in the capital, Sana'a, one day after announcing support for the Decisive Storm, and 17 houses of Islah leaders and activists were stormed, and nine of the party's headquarters were subjected to widespread looting, according to the Center's report. ¹⁰⁷

While the state of weakness and fragmentation continued to dominate the state and the parties, a societal rejection and resistance movement emerged in various regions and governorates,

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One day after Islah announced support for the “Decisive Storm,” the Houthi group kidnapped 122 party leaders, and signs of war on Islah appeared after the liberation of Aden. The assassinations targeted about 30 preachers, some of them affiliated with Islah, kidnapped other leaders and burned the party's headquarters, and excluded affiliates with Islah from all important administrative positions in the state's institutions and replaced them with Salafi and other followers of the separatist movement affiliated with the UAE
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especially after the Arab Coalition announced military intervention in Yemen to support legitimacy and confront the Houthi coup. The Islah's leaders and members fully supported the popular resistance in many regions. Islahi prominent leaders led several fronts of confrontations against the Houthis, so Houthis were very angry with Islah's members in the areas under their control. They launched a campaign of detention against them and put some of Islahi activists in weapons depots that were targeted

by the Arab Coalition warplanes. The Islah party lost many of its leaders in the war against the Houthis, whether by torturing in prisons and detention centers, or in the battlefields, or in bombing by the Houthis, which affected institutions, buildings and homes located in residential neighborhoods in several cities and villages. In al-Jawf governorate - north of Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia - more than half of members of the executive office of the Islah party were killed during confrontations with the Houthis.



The Fifth Topic: Islah at Times of War

The Islah party is currently experiencing extremely complex conditions. Although its members and leaders are in the battlefields to restore the state from the Iran-supported Houthis, it suffers from another war, different from the general war in the country. The party members believe that a war against it is waged by the United Arab Emirates, and by all local forces that receive Emirati funds and support, including political organizations and armed formations, some of which follow the (functional) religious Salafi trend, and some of them are regional factions.

Some observers believe that the Islahis are paying a heavy price in the war launched by the Houthis, who announced from the beginning that they are targeting Islah, its members and its allies. Indeed, their goals coincided with what some followers of former president sought in the fight against Islah. The first wave of war against Islah

was political and media in the period 2011-2014. While the second wave came roughly with the claws of military force and armed militia. This wave is still going on, as members of Islah believe. They believe that the first wave sought to demonize Islah and hold it responsible for what the situation has turned into after the revolution, as well as attempts to isolate it politically and socially. While the second wave seeks to liquidate Islah's presence by discrediting it and eliminating its elements.

Many parties participate in the political and media campaign against the Islah Party, whether leaders affiliated with the GPC, or with some small parties. But they do not link their position with the Emirati agenda, but rather they sometimes accuse Islah of controlling the legitimate government, and sometimes accuse it of following the agendas of Qatar and Turkey.

Adel Al-Shuja, a leader in the GPC, revealed at the beginning of this year that the Emirati support for a Yemeni alliance, which includes leaders in the GPC and others in the Transitional Council, aims to "bring down the Islah party." ¹⁰⁸

The brave leader, who is considered one of the most prominent GPC's leaders criticizing the Islah party, considered the two parties campaign against Islah as a "shock". From his point of view "the two parties do not only share punishment against Islah, but they help the Houthis to confiscate the republic forever. They did not take lessons from the past, when Al-Houthi was able to swallow them all because of their differences." ¹⁰⁹

So he calls on the GPC and the Islah party to overcome their differences and to stand beside the homeland, not to be dragged by the tools of regional conflict at the expense of the "national cause".

The head of the Islah Party, Muhammad al-Yadoumi, denies accusations directed against his party, and classifications that take it out of context, stressing that Islah is part of the Yemeni structure and shares its destiny with the Gulf and Arab nations. He says that any classification of Islah, by false media outlets, will not deter Islah from its exclusive battle to resist the coup and restore the state." ¹¹⁰

The Islah's Vision towards War with Houthis:

The Islah party considers war as a "contradiction to politics", and holds the Houthis responsible for it as they ignited it and rebelled against the state." It sees that the best way to put an end to the conflict is to tackle its reasons. It sees that the Houthis must "give up the tools of war by canceling the coup, handing over the state's weapons, withdrawing from cities, and stopping attacks on neighbor countries." ¹¹¹

This is also the content of the government's vision, and the Security Council's resolutions, particularly resolution (2216), issued in April 2015. This indicates that Islah's position goes in line with the official position that the dialogue with the Houthis must be based on the national references, including the Gulf initiative, the results of the National Dialogue Conference and the UNSC's resolutions related to Yemen.

When Islah stresses on obligating the Houthis to "handover the state's weapons," it seeks to "secure the future of Yemenis and protect them from wars, because there are many experiences in Yemen that prove that the failure to solve the arms problem keeps the political process under threat, as happened in the National Dialogue Conference." When the Houthis participated in the dialogue, and the weapons were still in their hands, and the result was placing politics hostage to the militants.¹¹²

Accordingly, the Islah party determined its position against the Houthi group coup.

But Islah can build a relationship with the Houthis, if they decide to "transform into a political entity that works in accordance with the Yemeni constitution and law, owe allegiance to the Yemeni state, and to be affiliated with the country's geography and citizenship, not with the cross-border sect or illusions of the Iranian revolution."¹¹³

War against Islah:

While the Islahis were participating along with the rest of the political and social forces and independents in the battles to liberate the provinces from the Houthis, there was a party in the Arab Coalition, the United Arab Emirates, preparing to launch a new war against Islah. The United Arab Emirates is the most influential party in the coalition after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The coalition and the local forces supporting the legitimacy almost succeeded in liberating some governorates in mid-2015, including Aden, Lahj and Abyan, until signs of war against Islah began to appear in those areas.

Among these signs was the exclusion of Islah's affiliates from all important administrative positions in the state institutions, and replacing them with elements loyal to the UAE, which managed, within a short period of time, to absorb thousands of the followers of the Salafi religious trend and supporters of the Southern Movement, who demand secession from the north. It established military formations outside the government's army. It provided them with arms and funds, so they have become predominantly the de facto authority in Aden and neighboring governorates. Mohammed al-Yadoumi, head of the Islah party, says that his party "faces a campaign of liquidation in a number

of liberated areas through closing its headquarters and targeting its leaders and activists with assassinations and kidnappings."¹¹⁴ He considers that as "heavy price that the Islahis pay in return for their rejection to agree with projects that seek to drag the country into small conflicts that distract everyone from confronting the Houthis, obstruct the state-building efforts, and bring society into a state of internal wars."¹¹⁵

Assassinations targeted almost 30 Imams and preachers in Aden, including Islah and moderate Salafis who participated in the war to liberate Aden from the Houthis. Storming and burning targeted a number of Islah's headquarters. The security forces raided homes of leaders and activists, and arrested dozens of them.



All coincided with media campaigns by Emirati and other local media outlets. The campaigns focus on attacking Islah and accusing its members of terrorism, or coordination with the Houthis.

In October 2018, BuzzFeed News published an investigative report confirming that the UAE had hired former soldiers in the US Army, currently working for a private security company called the "Spear Operation" group, have been recruited by the UAE. The report included a video record for the company's founder, Abraham Golan, Israeli nationality, confessing that they carried out assassinations in Yemen in favor of the UAE. The website also broadcast videos documenting one of the operations carried out by foreigners, when they attacked Islah's headquarters in Aden in late December 2015.

The Islah's intellectual and political elements and its support for legitimacy, in addition to its popular presence and active participation, make it a target of accusations from the local

and regional powers, because they decided in advance to stand against it or because they have their own reasons. The media campaigns waged by Islah's opponents are still continuing, accusing it of dealing with the Houthis, either with complicity or coordination and agreement with them at the expense of the legitimate government and the Arab coalition. It is an accusation that did not base on any evidence or proof, especially since the accusation was issued by internal and external parties that supported the Houthis with the aim of aborting the Yemeni revolution and destroying the entire political process, and preventing Yemeni youth and the political Islam movement (the Islah party) in particular from gaining power¹¹⁶

The UAE and its loyalists are working to remove the Islah party from the scene. Reuters quoted a Yemeni official in August 2019 as saying that the separatists' control of Aden had been approved by the UAE, and that its goal was to drive the Islah party forces away,¹¹⁷

because they see that the problem lies in the fact that "Islah infiltrated or controlled the government,"¹¹⁸ as they announce from time to time, that the failure to complete the liberation of regions" is mainly due to the Islah party."¹¹⁹

The most prominent obstacles facing Islah are now evident, including the media campaigns that demonize it (in the media), exert pressure on it and blackmail it (politically), leading to its exclusion, marginalization, liquidation of its elements, and assassination of its leaders and symbols. In addition to the fact that Islah is in a state of paralysis because it is busy with military action, and the completion of the liberation of the provinces from Houthi control, at the expense of the party's intellectual agenda, political actions, and its social, economic and cultural roles. Some internal imbalances

have also appeared in the last two years (2019 and 2020), which are attributed by observers to the feeling of many of the party's youth of political and military failures as a result of the delay in the process of resolving against the Houthis. All this raises concerns among the followers of Islah that this will lead to the eradication of the party or at least weaken it, especially after the war stops, and Islah finds itself at the forefront of losing powers, but the leadership of Islah shows a measure of cohesion and confidence, and the deputy media officer of the party affirms that "the status of Islah after the war, and far from fears, is determined by the popular will, the weight of the party, its presence, its field activities and its effectiveness. These elements determine the status of any party or political organization."¹²⁰

Islah and Regional and International Tensions:

When the Gulf crisis erupted in 2017, the Yemeni government announced that it stood on the side of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the expense of the State of Qatar. Accordingly, Islah declared its commitment to the Yemeni official position, lining up alongside Riyadh. The Islah's statements flowed in the same direction, expressing the depth of relationship with Saudi Arabia. The Islah's position was not surprising, as it has consistently affirmed the strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia, as Yemen's relationship with Saudi Arabia is in general a "deep-rooted historical relationship."¹²¹

According to the deputy head of the Islah Media Office, the party "looks at its relationship with Saudi Arabia from the point of common interests of the two countries, so it adheres to its relationship with Saudi Arabia, and it is keen to give it the value of strategic stability from this standpoint,

as Islah realizes the depth of fateful intertwining between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, two states that cannot ignore the depth of overlap between them."¹²²

Between the media campaigns accusing Islah of working with new opponents of Saudi Arabia, or the so-called Qatar-Turkey axis, and the voices of Islah-affiliated activists and media figures criticizing the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and the leadership of the party as well, the leadership of Islah always confirms that its relationship with Saudi Arabia is undoubtedly stable and no deviation from it. The Islah underestimates the impact of both cases (accusations by its opponents and criticisms by its supporters) on its cohesion.





It considers accusations by its opponents as "bunk",¹²³ as the party leader says, or "propaganda for a fabricated case, which does include malicious desires attributed to a kind of political jealousy by those who have been deprived from the gift of complete alignment with the people, and been exposed to clear divisions, while the Islah party remained intact."¹²⁴

As for criticism by some of its elements, the Islah's leadership sees they do not go beyond the fact that they are just "individual positions" and "personal opinions" that "have no weight or influence within the Islah bodies and decision-making circles inside it, and do not constitute divisive features in the organization, and do not affect its cohesion."¹²⁵ While the Islah literature confirms its keenness to strengthen its foreign relations with its regional neighborhood

in the Arab peninsula and the Gulf, and then with Arab and Islamic atmosphere, and with the international community, the Republic of Iran, which supports the Houthis, represents a rare case dominated by isolation. Islah believes that "relationship with Iran is determined by Iran's relationship with the state of Yemen," and that "if it stops interference in Yemen's affairs, revises its aggressive policy against Arab countries, first and foremost Yemen, and begins to establish political relations that respect the national sovereignty and avoid interlocking with internal groups trespassing the state, then Islah's relationship with it will be harmonious with its relationship with the Yemeni state, according to legal regulations that regulate relationship between national parties and any country in the world."¹²⁶

The Conclusion: Challenges to Islah

The Yemeni Islah Party is facing and expected to face several challenges, the most prominent of which is that it is targeted by two armed parties, the first of which is the Houthi group, which is fighting its war against the legitimate government, and the second is the UAE and its armed formations in southern Yemen, led by the Southern Transitional Council.

Although the UAE and Islah stand together in the face of the Houthi group, the Houthis see the Islah party as a key component on fronts against them. Abu Dhabi, which has undertaken the task of confronting the Arab Spring and its components, especially the Islamic trend, places Islah at the top of the list of political forces to be liquidated.

The Islah party is also facing attempts to remove it from the political scene in various ways and forms, with support from regional powers, most notably the UAE.

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The Yemeni Islah Party faces at the present time - as well as in the near future - several challenges, the most prominent of which the two armed parties, the first of which is the Houthi group, which is fighting its war against the legitimate government and Islah, and the second is the UAE and its armed formations in southern Yemen.
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Islah is also facing the desire of some local forces and parties, who believe that their future will be better if Islah is removed and forced to leave the scene. Some forces build their hostility against Islah on previous enmities, or motivated by searching for special interests, when they present themselves as an alternative to Islah and demand its shares and privileges.

The Islah party depends upon legitimacy in fighting against the country's division, to defend itself from strikes by local and regional opponents, but the legitimacy bets on the continued support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the leader of the Arab coalition. However, the Riyadh's support is currently ambiguous, especially after the rebellion of the Southern Transitional Council in the southern liberated areas and the control of Abu Dhabi on the Socotra Island, and its promises about an Israeli presence on the island that overlooks Bab al-Mandab. This means that Islah should quickly review and evaluate its relationship with Saudi Arabia, whether it is a real partnership through the legitimacy,

or Islah came to a closed road to just avoid any future strikes against the party and against the remnants of the legitimacy.

On the internal and organizational level, Islah suffers from war consequences and a status of division in its structure due to the dispersal of its members at home and abroad, and because many of them were killed on fronts against the Houthis or assassinated and attacked by certain forces in some liberated areas, in addition to the detainees and kidnapped. This was a big cost for the Islah party, so its leadership should work hard to swiftly reorganize its ranks and fill the gaps that are widening from time to time.

Islah has suffered from consequences of the ongoing war and a vacuum in its structure as a result of the dispersal of its members and the loss of many of them, whether on the battle fronts against the Houthis or intentionally targeted in some liberated areas, in addition to detained and kidnapped members of Islah. The Islah should pave the way for a wider participation of women and youth within the leadership of the party.

Regarding the intellectual and cultural aspects, the Islah party is facing the problem of moving from one side of the duality (group / party) and to the duality (the nation / the country), because political transformations have brought about a qualitative development in the Islah discourse, as the party integrated its religious discourse into a public one. The political space is gaining more prominence in the Islah discourse. The Islah party must translate this in its intellectual approach, and the cultural structure of its members, especially since Islah, in its statement against the Houthi's action to gain money through what is known as al-Khumus (the fifth) revealed a positive development towards

the national identity, the Yemeni state and the national project confronting the scourges of intolerance and racism in all its forms.

The Islah Party must make more widely space for the participation of women to play their role and assume their responsibilities, giving them the opportunity to assume leadership positions and tasks commensurate with their competence and experience. The same thing must be done for the youth, as the Islah leadership must make a change that empower women and youth within the leadership of the party in line with the size of the party and the active presence of its women and youth members in the society.



Scenarios for the Future of Islah:

The First Scenario: the disintegration of the party

This scenario is difficult to be achieved because it assumes a great victory for Iran in Yemen, and the occurrence of a Saudi-backed division in the country. A split within the Islah party may happen only if the Iranian-backed Houthis managed to control the north, and the UAE-backed Transitional Council control the south, and if Saudi Arabia accepts to deal with the reality of division and support it in exchange for ending its support for legitimacy.

If all these factors occur, they will be a justification for the party's disintegration and its leaders abroad should move to establish a new political current, while the tribal current and the religious trend in the party, in particular the Islah members who are in areas subject to the Houthi group or the Transitional Council, each one will announce its own political current that is compatible with this stage.

The conflicting countries in Yemen will seek to attract some components of the party and form currents loyal to them, but the most dangerous point is the party's members, who are involved in the fighting within the legitimate government and resistance forces, may turn into an armed trend that is not subject to a political leadership.

The Second Scenario: flexibility of the party that allows some currents opposing the political leadership's decisions regarding war alliances to leave the party and form new currents, with the possibility of organizational coordination between the political leadership of the party and the leaderships of the new currents.

This scenario is weak, even if it is possible, especially after the decisions to freeze some leaders in the party, such as Tawakkol Karman,

and the expectation of a bang within the party as a result of pressures of the war and the Islah's stalemate against strikes by its opponents and allies. The advantage of such a decision is that it reduces pressure on the party by local and regional allies because of opinions of some members of Islah about the failure of the legitimacy and the Arab Coalition to achieve the announced goals of the "Decisive Storm," the restoring of the state and ending the Houthi coup. What makes this scenario weak is the extent to which the party's leadership is able to control the course of its internal affairs because such a situation requires relatively political stability, strong leadership, and high coordination between the party's components. However, these factors are not usually available during wars, because the sensitivity of the situation on the ground does not allow the party to divide, because this will negatively affect it in the post-war phase, as the party will seek to return to the political work, strong and unified.

The Third Scenario: The party reviews its performance and evaluates the previous phase to build a new strategy based on balance in internal and external alliances, in addition to finding new local, regional and international friends and allies, and maintaining good relations with former national and regional allies to create balances.

This scenario is likely to happen, but the party needs to hold a general conference through which fundamental changes should be made in the party's structure at the leadership level or bylaws level. One of its benefits will be the rejuvenation of the party and updating its political thought to be fit with a national identity, independent from transnational ideas. The party should pay attention to building a national belief that considers the imamate as the first enemy of the Yemeni people.

But the war remains a potential obstacle to holding the party's conference and making broad changes, in addition to the local and regional Islah's partners, who may consider any openness of the party to new partners at home and abroad as an action against them.

The Fourth Scenario: The party's current internal situation remains and the party keeps the same internal and external alliances with some reforms.

This scenario seems to be the strongest for Islah, maintaining the local alliances linked to legitimacy and political parties, and those related to Saudi Arabia, the leader of the Arab Coalition, along with some reforms in relationships.

The party leadership may push some of its youth members to take part in holding some files, especially those related to the party's international reputation,

such as the media, politics and international relations files, as well as some organizational files that are highly related to the party's youth members, who are involved in the popular resistance areas under the control of the Yemeni government, or files related to the intellectual interest of the party's youth in areas under the control of the Houthis in the north or the Southern Transitional Council in the south.



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The Executive Office for Reform - Amanat Al Asimah (the local leadership of the party in the capital Sanaa), the Islah party headquarters in Old Sana'a, the Islah Institute on Sixtieth Street, the Islah students 'headquarters at the College of Education - University of Sana'a, the Student Department's office, in addition to the Islah headquarters in the departments (12- 13-14-19).

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