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The Future of the Hashemites in Yemen

Fouad Musi'd

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 [telegram.me/abaadstudies](https://t.me/abaadstudies)
 [@abaadstudies](https://twitter.com/abaadstudies)
 Abaad Studies & Research Center
 AbaadStudiesYemen
 abaadstudies@gmail.com
 info@abaadstudies.org

www.abaadstudies.org

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Summary

This study deals with the Hashemites in Yemen, starting with the arrival of their first ancestors in the country more than a thousand years ago. It tracks the circumstances of their advent to Yemen, highlighting their key transformations and the conflicts they affected and were affected by. It ends up with their present status quo, in connection with the war, its circumstances, key actors and consequences.

The study sheds light on the emergence of two main Hashemite currents in Yemen. This first is the followers of imam Al-Hadi Yahya ibn Al-Husain, and his political theory of monopolizing power as an exclusive right of the Hashemite descendants of the "batnain" (i.e., Al-Hasan and Al-Husain and their descendants). This trend is known as the Zaidi/Hadawi current. The other is the descendants of imam Ahmed Al-Muhajir in Hadhramout and those of his relatives in Hodeidah. Later, followers of this latter current integrated into their local communities and adopted the Sunni, especially the Shafi'i, school of thought that is prevalent throughout Yemen. Followers of Al-Hadi in Saada, by contrast, uphold the Shiite Zaidi doctrine, and believe in the Hadawi theory which is based on jihad and revolt against rulers as a means of seizing power. The Houthi movement belongs to this current, and is an extension of the Hadawi Hashemite movement, which was indulged in external conflicts with other forces at times and in internal strife among its ranks at others. Both internal and external conflicts were instigated by pursuit of power.

The study focuses on the role of the Hadawi current in provoking political conflicts since the advent of Al-Hadi down to the current war. It traces their strength, areas of their political ascendance and stages of their decline. It also deals with the second current, its sectarian and intellectual origins, and its position vis-à-vis the Hadawi theory of power. Moreover, it deals with relations between the Houthis and the Iranian regime, their most vocal supporter, highlighting the impact of Iranian support on the status in Yemen, the neighboring Gulf region and wider Arab context, as well as the future repercussions of the Yemeni allies of Iran who forward its agenda and threaten its opponents in Yemen and the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia, which has led an Arab coalition since 2015 to confront the Houthi coup and support the internationally recognized legitimate Yemeni government.

The study attempts to anticipate the future of the Hashemites in light of the facts of the war, its causes and consequences, as well as its repercussions on the present and future of Yemenis.

Preliminary

The Advent of Hashemites in Yemen

Northern Yemen has known Hashemites since their ancestor, Yahya ibn Al-Husain, who dubbed himself al-hadi ila-lhaqq (The Guide to Truth), came to Saada towards the end of the 3rd/9th century. This person claimed that he was a descendant of Al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib, son of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. According to his claims, his genealogical line is as follows: Yahya ibn Al-Husain ibn Al-Qasim Al-Rassi ibn Ibrahim ibn Ismail ibn Ibrahim ibn Al-Hasan ibn Al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib. He and his followers adopt the Zaidi sect, which is named after imam Zaid ibn Ali. Due to the influence of Al-Hadi and his fusion of his own ideas into this sect, it became known as the Hadawi Zaidi sect.

The Hashemites of Hadhramaut, known as “Al ba 'Alawi,” on the other hand, claim that they are descendants of Al-Husain ibn Ali, and that their grandfather who came to Yemen at the beginning of the fourth century is Ahmed ibn Isa ibn Mohammad ibn Ali ibn Jaafar (As-Sadiq) ibn Mohammad (Al-Baqir) ibn Ali (Zain Al-Abidin) ibn Al-Husain ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib. They spread in Hadhramaut and abroad, and are Sunnis, following Imam Shafi' sect in worship and the Ash'ari doctrine in creed, while having their own Sufi order.

Concerning the Hashemites of Hodeida and the coasts of Tihama (west of Yemen), historical sources point out that Mohammad ibn Suleiman and a cousin of his came to Yemen in the sixth/twelfth century. The former initially settled in Wadi Siham, and moved later to Marawi'ah. He is the ancestor of Bani Al-Ahdal. The latter settled in Sirdud valley and his descendants are Bani al-Qudaimi. Like Al ba Alawi, they claim descent from al-Husain ibn Ali.

Hashemites and political conflicts

The Hashemites of Hadhramaut and Hodeida were mainly devoted to the pursuit of knowledge. The Hashemites of Saada, on the other hand, followed a different trajectory, igniting many political conflicts in their pursuit of power. In some conflicts they were rulers. The advent of their first forefather who settled in Yemen, Al-Hadi Yahya ibn Al-Husain, was closely linked to conflict among Yemeni tribes, especially Khawlan tribes.

The association of the Hashemite imams with political conflicts applies only to Al-Hadi, his descendants, and followers of his Zaidi Hadawi sect. These monopolized their claim of belonging to the Prophet's house as a means to achieve their goal of seizing power. It became common practice that those who found themselves strong enough claimed the Imamate and enlisted their followers to fight other competing imams. These claimants were mainly based in Saada, their main stronghold. Their power would expand to Amran, Sana'a and Thamar, but then quickly recede under the pressure of opponents from outside their areas of control or rivals from within, usually of the same dynasty. All Hashemite rivals proceed from Al-Hadi's theory, known as Hadawi theory, which is based on two factors: the da'wah, i.e., "the imamate" and revolt. A person can declare himself an imam by the sheer assertion that he is a descendant of Al-Hasan or Al-Husain. As for the second factor, it involves jihad and declaring war on anyone who stands in the way of the new imam.

Examining the circumstances of Yahya ibn Al-Husain's first visit to Yemen in 280 AH, and his call (da'wah) to the tribes, reveals that his attempt to sell his ideas was met with little sympathy or support, and he had to leave Yemen. However, he returned to Yemen four years later, this time with a delegation from Banu Saad and Al Futaima of Khawlan. The delegation had headed to Al-Hadi's quarters in Jabal Al-Rass, and showed allegiance and support for his idea, while in fact members tried to enlist his help against their opponents, Bani Rabia, who remained loyal to the Abbasid state.¹ This fact confirms that Al-Hadi was for those who summoned him merely an instrument of conflict. Indeed, he no sooner arrived in Yemen than he ignited conflict for power with the Yemeni tribes, taking advantage of religious sentiment, allegations of his Hashemite lineage, and his affiliation with the Prophet's house (Al al-Bayt).

Al-Hadi acquired the Zaidi school of thought² from his grandfather, Al-Qasim Al-Rassi, and spread it in Yemen. The Zaidi sect in Yemen followed his line of thought. However, Al-Hadi's notion of imamate differs from that of Zaid, as he wedded the notions of prophethood and the imamate, making recognition of Ali's imamate as an integral part of recognizing the prophethood of Mohammad, and thus coming close to Twelver Shia doctrine. He holds that the imamate of Ali and his two sons, Hassan and Husain, is textually established, and criticizes the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Umar, in gaping contradiction to the opinion of imam Zaid himself.³ Jaroudi opinions⁴ have overshadowed other Zaidi opinions in Yemen to the extent that Yemeni historian, Nashwan Al-Himyari, asserted that “there is no Zaidi sect in Yemen other than Jaroudia.”⁵

Yahya ibn Al-Husain seized power in Saada amid a continuous conflict with the tribes, which kept fighting him until his death. His sons succeeded him, but they were too weak to subdue their opponents. Conflict for power raged on, with Al-Hadi's sons and grandsons persistently employing religious rhetoric and holding tight to their claims of supremacy, hence priority to seize power on account of their affiliation to the house of the Prophet. Yet, they were hardly successful due to the presence of powerful parties competing with them for power.

Yemen has only sporadically and briefly lived in peace and stability because the system of the imamate, which restricted legitimacy to the sons of Al-Hasan and Al-Husain (the Batnains)⁶ made it possible for everyone who belonged to this bizarre system to declare himself imam of the country. Sometimes, several persons would claim the imamate at the same time, so an imam appears in Sana'a, another in Shahara, and a third one in Jiblah.⁷

Internal conflicts broke out among Hashemite followers of Al-Hadi, such as the conflict between the grandchildren of Al-Hadi and the house of Al-Ayyani. Conflicts also broke out between father and son, with the sons rising against their fathers and fighting them for power. An example is the war between imam Al-Mutawakkil Yahya Sharafuddin and his son Al-Mutahhar in the mid sixteenth century. Moreover, brothers fought one another, as did imam Ahmed ibn Yahya Hamiduddin and his two brothers Abdullah and Al-Abbas in the 1950s.

In sum, conflict dominated the political and social scene in Yemen; and cycles of division and fighting among ambitious and warring claimants to the imamate from the ranks of the ruling dynasty became the hallmark of Yemeni political and social life. In the meanwhile, the Yemeni society was fatigued and exhausted. The central state lost control and the country drifted into chaos for a long time.⁸

Bloody conflicts instigated by the Hashemite imams in Yemen took various forms, including:

- struggle with the local opposition and resistance led by tribal leaders, such as Al-Dhahhak family, Al-Da'aam family, Al-Turaif family, etc.
- conflict with Yemeni states that were ruled different regions of Yemen, such as the Sulaihids (1047-1138), the Hatimi state (1099-1173), the Rasulids (1229-1454), the Tahiris (1454-1517), etc.
- conflict with major states that expanded their influence and rule to Yemen, such as the Ayyubids (1173-1229), the Mamluks (1517-1538), the Ottomans during the first period (1538-1635), and in the second period (1872-1918). The Zaidi state also waged a fierce war against the Ismailis (903-947), Although both the Zaidi and Ismaili sects follow the umbrella Shiite sect, the Hadawi (Zaidi) state during the era of Imam al-Nasir ibn al-Hadi allied itself with the Ziyadi state (818-1012) led by Mohammad ibn Ziyad and the state of Bani Ya'far (839-1003) led by Asaad ibn Abi Ya'far Al-Hawali, in order to dismantle the Ismaili state.⁹ Conflict was rampant among competing imams who “called the tribes to take up arms and fight, incited them to fiercely attack their competitors, and promised them paradise as a reward. They pushed the tribes to fight one another in the name of God, His Book [the Quran], and the sons of God’s Messenger.”¹⁰

Sunni Hashemites

Hashemite entanglement in political conflicts, of course, does not include the Hashemites of Hadhramaut, Aden and other areas, as these differ from the Hadawi Hashemites,

who used the thought and adventures of Al-Hadi as a launching pad of their claims of the imamate and waging wars as a means of pursuing it. Perhaps the most distinctive trait of the Hashemites of southern governorates is their adherence to the sunni position of rejecting the Hadawi theory of power and the basic postulates about the caliphate as they believe in the legitimacy of the four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and Ali).

Historical sources show that, like their forefathers, the Alawites (Hashemites) upheld some form of Shiism and continued to do so for a long time. The famous Alawite historian, Salih Al-Hamid (Al-Alawi), states that Al-Muhajir was a Twelver Shiite, and that the Shafi'i sect spread among the Alawites only later on. This is confirmed by historian, Abdullah ibn Taher Al-Haddad,¹¹ (himself an Alawite Hashemite), based on their sources. Al-Haddad affirms that Al-Muhajir's grandfather, Ali Al-Aridhi, was a Twelver Shiite.¹² This view is also held by the Alawite historian, Abdurrahman ibn Obaidullah Al-Saqqaf, who "rules out that Al-Muhajir belonged to the Shafi' school of thought."¹³

The Alawites, at first, participated in the struggle against followers of the Ibadi sect, which was widespread in Hadhramaut. Their grandfather, Al-Muhajir, was involved in confronting the Ibadis. War raged on for many years until the Ibadis were ultimately defeated. The Ibadi sect receded and was replaced by the shafi' one, which became dominant in Hadhramaut and other regions in Yemen. The Alawites became involved in society there, and gave up arms and conflict after their war with the Ibadi sect. They contributed with the rest of Hadhramis in spreading Islam in the countries to which they migrated, especially in East and South Asia and parts of Africa.

A historical document from the 11th/17th century clearly reflects the intellectual position of the Hashemites of Hadhramaut and other regions of southern Yemen towards the theory of the Hashemite imams. This document is a letter written by the distinguished ba Alawi Hashemite, Ali Zain Al-Abidin Al-Aidarous, in reply to a letter sent to him by the Hadawi prince, Al-Hasan ibn Al-Qasim ibn Mohammad. The latter corresponded with religious scholars outside his Zaidi sect, inviting them to embrace his doctrine and to pledge allegiance to him as an imam over all of Yemen. Al-Aidarous was one of those contacted by the Hadawi prince.

He replied in a lengthy letter in which he refuted the ideas and theories of the Hadawi imams and explained the position of the Sunni Hashemites regarding the main contentious issues:

attitude towards the Hadawi theory of Imamate, position on the caliphate, the Rightly Guided Caliphs and Prophet's Companions, and the attitude towards claims of affiliation with the Messenger and his progeny. Regarding Al-Hasan's call for obeying him and acknowledging his imamate, Al-Aidarous writes: "Obeying him (Al-Hasan) as established in our doctrine is obligatory only on people of his country, and those who share his creed."¹⁴ He also showed that the calls of conflicting rivals are only binding on their companions, followers and adherents of their creed.

On the second point, Al-Aidarous explained that "the great majority of followers of rulers, and followers of the guides to the most upright path, Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah (the sunnis), whose paths God commanded us to follow, believe in the legitimacy of the four caliphs," and that "the companions were right in all they did based on their own discretion and in all matters they unanimously held based on hadith evidence. They are the masters of Islam, and they are the models whose guidance shall be followed. We do not follow other than the path of the believers after clear guidance shows us the straying path of those who view the ansar (helpers) and the emigrants as misguided."¹⁵

After citing a number of Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions on the merit and justice of the Companions, he asks, "Do you not see that if you degrade their exalted position and say that the caliphate is confined to Ali, then you have nullified their justice on which Islam was built, and rejected their narration which transmitted the Quran to the Muslim community at large?" He summarizes his position towards the claimants to imamate, "it is incumbent upon every monotheist to fight you for the sake of God as hard as he can, until you surrender and follow the dictates of religion and submit to it, so that none of you exceeds his limit, for there has arisen between us and you enmity and hatred for ever until you believe in God alone."¹⁶

Regarding the bond of lineage, Al-Aidarous argues that it shall be supported by adherence to the Quran, and following the example of the good companions, "for whoever opposes them and shows enmity towards them is deprived of the inheritance of that lineage, and cuts off what God commanded to be connected, so he becomes cut off. The right inheritors of Abraham are those who follow him, not his sons who changed his religion and cut it off, even if they are deceived by the distorted religion they have invented."¹⁷

The Hashemites after the 1962 Revolution

The September 1962 revolution undermined the last imamate state in Yemen. Revolutionaries were entangled in an eight-year-long war with the remnants of the imamate. Ultimately, an agreement was reached between the republicans and supporters of the imamate in 1970. The fledgling republic accommodated the Hashemite supporters of the imamate, who were appointed in high offices, and became part of the successive governments. At that time the ambitions of the supporters of the imamate disappeared, but the idea of imamate and their divinely ordained right to rule remained dormant, as confirmed by later events.

According to researchers, the Hashemites, or the so-called "political Hashemism" established a secret organization to rearrange the Hashemite House after the 1970 agreement. They founded the "Supreme Council of the Elders of the House of the Prophet," with the aim of "restoring power through penetration of civil and military state institutions based on a long-term strategic plan that ends with seizing power."¹⁸ The Supreme Council consisted of 12 members representing the most prominent Hashemite families. It was headed by Ahmad Mohammad Al-Shami, foreign minister in the Imami exile government that was formed to fight the revolution. Al-Shami was later appointed a member of the Republican Council, the highest leadership government body.

Political Hashemism found its goal in former president, Ali Saleh (1978-2011). It took advantage of his lust for power and his plan to bequeath it to his son. Hashemism allied itself with Saleh and strengthened its relations with him. He, for his part, facilitated the Hashemites' penetration of the state's military and civil institutions. Many Hashemites joined the Republican Guard, the intelligence agencies, the police apparatus, and the Central Security Forces. They held leadership positions in the government, the judiciary and the ruling party. Such penetration provided them with strong political cover and great military and civil authority.¹⁹

With the introduction of the multi-party system in the context of the transition to pluralism and democracy that was a byproduct of the 1990 reunification of northern and southern Yemen, a number of Hadawi (Hashemite) figures founded Al-Haq (Truth) Party in early 1991.

The founders ensured that the party supreme leadership body included the leading religious figures of the Hadawi Zaidi sect, such as Majduddin Al-Muayyadi, Badruddin Al-Houthi, Mohammad Al-Mansour, Ahmad Mohammad Al-Shami (other than Al-Shami who served as a member of the Republican Council), Hamoud Al-Muayyad, and Qasim Al-Kibsi.²⁰

The Hashemites and the Houthi movement

Researchers specializing in Hadawi thought believe that "the Houthi movement is merely a revival of the historical heritage, thought and practice of the imams of Yemen over the past thousand years. The Houthis have fully revived the Hadawi theory in both the da'wah (imamate) and revolt (jihad)."²¹

The Houthi movement began to emerge at the beginning of the new millennium, led by the Zaidi authority, Badruddin Al-Houthi, and his son Husain, after the latter took control of the "Believing Youth Forum", though he was not a founder of the forum that was established in 1992, with the aim of "filling the cultural needs of youth."²² According to one of its founders, and its Secretary, Mohammad Salem Azzan, the first round of disputes within the ranks of the Believing Youth was between young founders (Azzan and others) on the one hand and Zaidi clerics represented by Majduddin Al-Muayyadi, the most prominent Zaidi cleric on the other. More importantly, another transformation that supersedes internal disputes was underway. The Believing Youth began to receive the support of President Ali Saleh, since 1997, after his relations with his former ally, the Islah Party, which left power in 1997 and joined the opposition, strained.

Observers believe that Saleh's support for the Believing Youth at that time aimed to exploit this organization and employ it in confronting the Islah party, the leading opposition party, by playing on the ideological and sectarian contradictions between the two ideologies. Whereas the Believing Youth belongs to the Shiite Zaidi sect, the Islah Party is an Islamic party closer to the Salafist sunni thought. Relatedly, Saleh's regime had also supported a religious center that followed the traditional Salafi school (Wahhabism) in Saada itself, led by Sheikh Muqbil ibn Hadi Al-Wadi'i.

After Husain Al-Houthi took control of the Believing Youth in 1999, he introduced fundamental innovations in its role, turning it into a platform for pursuing a political agenda that eventually evolved into a military rebellion, invoking sectarian grievances for this purpose.²³

Lessons delivered by Husain Al-Houthi indicate that his movement aimed to restore what he saw as the right of the descendants of the prophet's progeny to rule over Muslims. According to Al-Houthi, this is a pre-ordained divine right over which people have no choice at all, and the ummah (Muslim community at large) will have no way out of its predicament and no way to salvation except through gathering under the banner of the descendants of the Prophet's progeny. This can be done only by restoring the absolute "right of trusteeship" to them.²⁴ He claimed that the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and those who supported them from among the Companions had robbed the prophet's progeny (ahlul bait) of that right, and that caliphs successively and persistently down the ages persecuted and excluded them up to the present day. He further identifies this supposed oppression as the cause of degradation and humiliation of Muslims everywhere, and as the cause of the defeat of the ummah in the face of its enemies, indicating that salvation and honor of the ummah can only be restored by descendants of the prophet's progeny.²⁵

Although there are some differences among the followers of the Hadawi Zaidi sect and the Believing Youth, both of them believe in the same ideas on which the Hadawi states were founded since the days of Al-Hadi. Both of them also reject any attempts to cast doubts on the main tenets of the Hadawi political theory, particularly the divine choice of the members of the prophet's house and the obligation of the imamate and its limitation to the two sons of Ali (al-batnain: Al-Hasan and Al-Husain), while establishing this as a basic fundamental of the faith.²⁶

Prior to the armed parades of the Houthi group in the mountains of Saada, the group's founder, Husain Al-Houthi, had prepared his followers for what he called "jihad and confronting of taghut (tyranny)." He then proceeded to amass weapons, dig trenches in the mountains, and organize his students in groups. He also sought to expand his base by broaden the scope of his relations and contacting dignitaries and influential figures, urging them to buy weapons and prepare for war²⁷ Clashes began in June 2004 and lasted for three months, ending with the death of the movement's leader, Husain Al-Houthi.

Although most Hashemites showed an anti-Houthi position in press statements that were at the fore in official media, during the early phase of emergence of the movement, observers considered such a position to be merely an elusive maneuvering emanating from the pressure exerted by former President Saleh. In 2004, a group of Zaidi ulema issued a statement warning of “the delusions of Husain al-Houthi and his followers, and calling citizens to guard against his deceitful words and actions.” According to that statement, “it is not permissible to listen to those heresies and misguidance, nor is it allowed to support or accept them.” The prominent signatories of this statement, which is entitled “This is a statement for the people to warn them,” were Hamoud Abbas Al-Muayyad and Ahmed Mohammed Al-Shami.²⁸ However, such a position did not endure for long. New statements were issued by Zaidi religious scholars, representing the sect's ulema at large. These statements openly declared their support of the Houthis, especially after the Houthi movement expanded and controlled large areas. One of these statements, issued in early 2012, stated that “supporting the Houthis is the duty for every believer,” calling for stopping incitement against the Houthis and followers of the Zaidi sect.²⁹

The Houthi Coup

The popular Yemeni revolution erupted in early 2011, a year after the last round of war between the government and the Houthis ended. Six wars broke out between the government and the Houthis between 2004 and 2010. The youth of the revolution welcomed the participation of the Houthis. Political and revolutionary forces were optimistic about the Houthis joining the revolution as an armed group. These forces expected that the Houthis would join the political forces opposed to the ruling regime, lay down arms and give up confronting the state and society. However, the Houthi group proved steadfast in its position, retained its weapons, and even began working to expand its control, taking advantage of the disputes among political forces and the inefficacy of the government and central state institutions.

Although the agreement based on the Gulf Initiative provided for the ouster of Saleh and instating the vice-president in his post, as well as the participation of the opposition in forming a government of national accord, the Houthis announced their rejection of the Gulf Initiative and began working against the government that was formed based on the Gulf Initiative.

The Houthi argument at the time was that the initiative strengthened Saudi-American tutelage over Yemen. In the meanwhile, Iranian support for the Houthi group increased. The aim of the Iranians was clearly to prepare the Houthis for confronting their opponents in the region, particularly the Saudi Arabia and the United States.

During the transitional period, the international community continued to encourage the Houthis to engage in the political process despite their intransigence and rejection of this course. They continued to confront the military, security forces and local communities in Saada, Al-Jawf and Hajjah in order to boost their base and impose a fait accompli while being fully oblivious to the efforts led by the United Nations and major countries supporting the peaceful transition process in Yemen.

The Houthis participated in the National Dialogue Conference that was commenced in early 2013 and lasted for about 10 months. Again, they did not give up their arms, or even stop their military expansion and unabated invasions of areas in Saada governorate and beyond. Thus, they began to move in two parallel directions: they pursued a political course through their delegation which participated in the National Dialogue Conference, and establishing alliances with some political and civil forces with the aim of at least neutralizing them, and a military course of field expansion, invasion and targeting of opponents.

Their moves were met with negative reactions from the conflicting Yemeni forces. They were sometimes facilitated at times by the complicity of local and external forces, which saw that the expansion of the Houthis would lead to the weakening of the forces of the revolution and dismantling its components, especially as it represented the Yemeni version of the Arab Spring, whose opponents began to regain their breath, and sought to besiege it and fight its components in the various Arab countries.

The comprehensive National Dialogue Conference came out with a document on building the new civil state, through decentralization and federalism. Most importantly, the document asserted the need to impose state sovereignty over all regions, dissolve and disarm armed militias, and restrict possession of weapons to the state only. The document addressed major issues and underscored the repercussions of previous wars and conflicts. It also emphasized equal citizenship and equal access to power and wealth, thus drawing the contours of the new federal Yemen.

The Houthis rejected this document despite their participation in the National Dialogue Conference, stood against Yemeni consensus and the internationally recognized authorities, and declared war against all. They adopted slogans calling for improving the living conditions at times, and at other times declared war against what they called American tutelage. They also persisted in their internal invasion of new areas, benefiting from the support of the former regime which found in supporting the Houthis vengeance against its opponents and a way to accomplish the strong drive to regain power. The Houthis ultimately took control of Sana'a and orchestrated their coup on September 21, 2014. Immediately after the coup, they plunged Yemen into a large-scale war that is still raging on in several parts of the country. The catastrophic repercussions and tragedies of this war are still strongly felt. The Yemeni economy and the infrastructure were destroyed. Overall conditions and basic services also deteriorated. In spite of all these tragic outcomes, the Houthis are still fighting other wars within their areas of control. In fact, they fought the majority of their local allies and supporters, led by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was killed and his supporters targeted in late 2017. Hundreds of his aides, supporters, relatives and party leaders were arrested.

The Iranian role

The Imamate had been eliminated as a state by the September 1962 revolution, but it did not fall as an idea. Although it remained dormant throughout the 1970s, it soon began to mobilize its supporters, emboldened by the success of the Iranian revolution, led by the supreme cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, early in 1979. Advocates of the Hadawi Zaidi imamate viewed the Iranian revolution as a victory of their doctrine.³⁰

The success of the Shiite revolution in Iran led to a rapprochement between the two Shiite wings, the Imami Twelver wing in Iran and the Hadawi Zaidi one in Yemen. This rapprochement resulted in the emergence of Yemeni Shiite extremist figures who openly showed their hostility to the Sunnis in general and attacked the companions of the Prophet, in a clear deviation from the moderate views which generally characterized the Zaidi sect in this aspect. This change marked the beginning of the Iranian-Twelver penetration of the Yemeni Zaidi movement, which later resulted in the import of the slogans and rhetoric of the Iranian revolution to Yemen. Iranian rhetoric became ultimately adopted as the slogans of the armed wings and newly established formations that enjoyed Iranian support, most notably the Houthi movement.

It can be noted here that official relations between Iran and Yemen have gone through three phases: ³¹

Phase 1: during the course of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), Yemen supported Iraq politically and militarily. Thousands of Yemeni volunteers and soldiers participated in the so-called Arabism Brigades in fighting alongside the Iraqi armed forces. This is specifically true of former North Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic), Iraq's most prominent ally at the time. As for South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), its relations with the Iraqi regime were tense, but it did not side with Iran.

Phase 2: By the end of the second Gulf War, relations between the two countries began to improve, and this improvement continued until the beginning of 2004.

Phase 3: In mid-2004, the first armed clashes between the Yemeni forces and the armed Shiite movement (the Houthi group) broke out.

Since the first war between the government and the Houthi movement, relations between the two countries began to strain again. The Yemeni government accused the Iranian regime of supporting the Houthi rebels, and Iranian support rapidly grew to later include diverse modern arms shipments. The first arms deal was concluded in January 2013, and the second one in March of the same year, at which time the Yemeni government formally requested the UN Security Council to investigate the issue. Indeed, a delegation of UN experts visited Yemen to investigate arms shipments that had been seized in Yemeni territorial waters.

According to observers, Iranian support for the Houthis took several forms, including political support regionally and internationally with the aim of engaging the Houthis as a major actor in Yemen. The Iranians also provided religious support through mobilizing and recruiting young people to the ranks of the Houthi group from a sectarian standpoint. Besides, they provided their Houthi surrogates with military support through training and arming Houthi fighters with quality and modern weapons. It has been established by UN reports that Iran has been providing weapons to the Houthi rebels since 2009. ³²

In the wake of the popular Yemeni revolution, the Houthi movement began to expand its dominions in northern Yemen, relying on the support provided by Iran, which found in the Houthis a local ally that shared its affiliation to the Shiite sect, and together they shared hostility to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its Yemeni allies. Iran provided the Houthis with shipments of weapons and training in the various military, political, media and security fields.

Immediately after the Houthis took control of the capital, Sana'a, Iranian officials rejoiced. Indeed, one of those officials boasted that the fourth Arab capital had fallen to the Iranian revolution.³³ Iran was the only state to acknowledge and deal with the Houthi authorities in Sana'a, at a time when other countries were withdrawing their diplomatic missions in a domino succession. The Houthi relations with Iran flourished.

Having denied the accusations of supporting the Houthi coup and prolonging the war leveled against it by the Yemeni government and the Arab coalition, last year Iran acknowledged its involvement in the war, admitting that it provided military support to the Houthis.

Assistant commander of the Quds Corps affiliated to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, General Rostam Qassemi, stated that all weapons that the Houthis possessed were the result of assistance provided by Tehran, which especially aided the Houthis in the field of technology of the arms industry. He added that weapons are manufactured in Yemen, especially drones and ballistic missiles. Qassemi acknowledged the presence of Iranian experts in Yemen "whose task is to provide advice."³⁴

The future of the Hashemites in Yemen

Talking about the future and the possible trajectories of the current status quo calls to mind the deep-rooted relationship between the Houthis as an armed movement that rebelled against the government and fought it for about seven years, then led an armed coup on the one hand and the Hashemites who follow the Hadawi theory, also known as the batnain theory on the other. It turns out that the Houthi movement is an extension of the doctrine of Al-Hadi's theory based on which his sons and grandsons continued to ignite wars and conflicts.

Hence, the Houthi control of power brings all followers of the Hadawi theory in one crucible, based on the belief in the divine right to power. They were united in one front, almost duplicating the age-old behavior of their ancestors.

Observers believe that the Houthi seizure of power constituted an additional burden on the country and created new foci that lead to the collapse of the sectarian state they had been dreaming of. Besides, the Houthis and the majority of the Hashemites, with their armed expansion and tampering with state institutions, sowed new and seeds of discord and created irremediable problems. They directly put themselves at odds with the society at large, with its political and social forces, especially in areas that have suffered greatly from their aggressive behaviors, such as forced conscription, kidnappings, murder, assassination of opponents, displacement, bombing of homes, etc.³⁵

Their ancestors had fought wars with all their might in order to consolidate their power - even if it was confined to a limited geographical scope. Today, they are fighting a similar war in terms of causes and motives, but it is more costly in terms of casualties, losses, effects and repercussions to the extent that it made this war a regional war with the Houthis playing the role of proxy. In this war, Iran, the staunch supporter of the Houthis, stands at one end, and at the other end is a Saudi-led military coalition comprising several Arab countries that see the Houthis' control over Yemen as a threat to regional security, and to stability and peace in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf, especially as the Houthis are positioned near international seaports, particularly Bab al-Mandab.

After several years of war, the Houthi movement has acted as a tool in the hands of Tehran which moves it according to its agenda and goals, while it had previously appeared as an extension of the Political Hashemism, seeking to reintroduce the batnain theory of power. Three overlapping parties in the equation of the coup and the Houthi war are discernible. They are as follows:

The Houthi movement: it is a group that took up arms and rebelled against the state. It launched war about twenty years ago, in order to gain power. It kept fighting until it ultimately achieved this goal through a coup, control of state institutions and invasion of most of Yemeni governorates.

The Hadawi Hashemite Movement: When the Houthi first appeared on the scene, the Hashemite movement was not inclined towards his armed movement. Rather, statements were issued against him in the name of Zaidi scholars, but things changed after the Houthis became stronger, so this movement provided steadfast social and political support for the Houthi coup. Some Hashemites, however, sided with the state against the Hadawi theory, and participated in resistance to the Houthi coup.

The Iranian Revolutionary Movement: it has supported, directed and financed the Houthi movement from an early stage. It succeeded in penetrating the movement with new slogans and ideas until Tehran becomes the point of reference and predominantly controls the Houthi positions and decision-making processes.

The intricate web of the three constituents

The threads connecting these parties can be summarized in the fact that the Houthi movement first benefited from the heritage of the Hadawi sect and its theory of power as the exclusive right of descendants of Al-Hasan and Al-Husain. It also benefited from the Hashemite movement as a mass movement with a large, active and influential presence in state institutions and society, especially in the utmost northern regions of the country. The Houthi movement also benefited from the Hashemite current, managed to contain large numbers of Hashemites and sought to recruit them to further its ends and expand its control.

In its early phase, the Houthi movement benefited from the Hashemite movement in both the intellectual and human aspects. Later it benefited from financial and military Iranian support, which included advanced weapons, expertise, training and military equipment necessary to amass a huge arsenal of weapons that now includes drones and various types of missiles, in addition to mines, explosives, missiles and live ammunition of various kinds.

The Houthis, of course, benefited from this arsenal in their previous wars and in their access to power after victory over their opponents, including the army, tribes and other opponents. Indeed, in the past three years, the Houthis were able to regain many of the areas they had lost in the early years of the war, in addition to launching missile attacks on Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

As for the Hashemite current, it too benefited from the Houthi coup, as Hashemites had access to positions and privileges of power and wealth and had their share of the resources which are controlled by the Houthis. They relied on their prior administrative experience in running state institutions, a point lacked by the Houthi movement members, with their poor background and very low qualifications in managing state institutions, compared to their experience in fighting since they mainly came from the rural areas of Saada. This helped the Hashemites, rather than Houthi fighters, control vital institutions and resources, including oil, gas, telecommunications, taxes, customs, zakat, humanitarian aid and black markets, which became a fast-track to huge wealth. Amassing wealth became an inherent feature of the Hashemites in Houthi-controlled areas.

This means that the relationship between the two parties is almost reciprocal, with each of them benefiting from the other. Observers differ in their assessment of this relationship. Some believe that Hadawi Hashemites employed the Houthis in order to get access to power and seize state institutions. Others maintain that the Houthi movement succeeded in dragging the entire Hashemite movement into a fierce war with all Yemenis and with neighboring countries. Therefore, the Hashemite movement became an enemy that must be confronted. In other words, Yemenis have much to avenge from the Hashemites, and the scope of this revenge grows as casualties of the war increase, including the killed and wounded, detainees, displaced persons, and refugees, as these constitute a large number. This revenge has been expressed by some anti-Houthi activists who explicitly call for criminalizing Hashemism, its political theory and its human mass. Some Yemeni intellectual movements that view Hashemism as a mortal enemy have emerged, such as the Yemeni National Movement (aqyal) and Al-Abahilah. This would not have happened, if the Houthi coup and war had not been instigated in the first place.

In a nutshell, the Houthis implicated the Hashemites by dragging them into a fateful confrontation. If it seems that the Houthi movement has consolidated its grip on more than half of Yemeni governorates and threatens the other half, feeling quite reassured about this success amounts to misplaced confidence that involves huge risks. Events and circumstances change, especially in light of a multi-layered war, in which little is constant while so much is susceptible to change. This in turn can lead to a shift in the balance of power, and a change in the sphere of influence and the map of control from one party to another.

Since the entire Houthi movement has become just a puppet in Iran's game in the region, the real beneficiaries of the Houthi coup and war are the decision makers in Tehran. Iranian aides are the most influential in the Houthi decision-making circles in Yemen. Iranian commanders currently manage the affairs of the Houthi-controlled areas and the run major state institutions. More importantly, decisions of war and peace are now in the hands of the Iranian commanders, who view the war in Yemen as part of their project, and will employ it in a way that serves their strategic and foreign policy goals.

Those who are cognizant of the nature of the secret leadership hierarchy of the Houthi movement realize the extent of the Iranian penetration of the Houthi leadership hierarchy. The movement is headed by the so-called "jihad council," which is "the solid secret organization and structure, and the base on which the structures of other fronts are established. All other publicized councils and bodies work towards one goal; namely, to protect the Jihad Council, serve its goals, and provide cover and capabilities for its work, while the Council organizes, fights and expands."³⁶ The most prominent figures of the Council are a general from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who is considered the general military commander, and is called the "Jihad Aide," followed by the Deputy Jihad Aide, a Lebanese commander from Hezbollah.

While the Houthis, along with the Hashemites, bear the burden of confrontation and face the prospects of the future at the local and regional levels, the Iranians take full control of drawing the Houthi movement's policy, deciding the fate of the war in Yemen and determining its options according to the dictates of Iranian interests and strategy. They also steer the Houthi policy in a direction that boosts Tehran's position in its nuclear negotiations with the major powers and secures its interests in the region.

The future of the Hashemites in Yemen may be predicted in light of a number of factors affecting the Yemeni scene in general, and the current war in particular. These factors include:

- The coup and the ensuing large-scale war that has been raging on for more than seven years, and its catastrophic outcomes and repercussions. The war has resulted in mass destruction that affected most institutions, in addition to the huge casualties as nearly 400,000 people have been killed, according to United Nations estimates. Moreover, millions of Yemenis have been displaced both internally and abroad. It has also led to the destruction of the national economy. The toll of casualties and losses is constantly increasing, and suffering goes on unabated. All these catastrophic outcomes hold the party that ignited the war responsible, no matter how the Houthis try to falsify the facts, mislead their followers, and obscure the most obvious fact of their responsibility for instigating and waging the war.

- The bond uniting the Houthi movement as a rebel and armed (Shiite) group on the one hand and the Hashemites as a social trend, whose members are scattered in the various Yemeni governorates and have multiple intellectual and political affiliations and connections on the other. The majority of the Hashemites have sided with the Houthi movement and were involved in the war it ignited and spread into most parts of the country. In view of these facts, an antagonistic discourse that views the Hashemites as a whole as enemies, and considers them responsible for the ongoing war and the crimes and violations committed by the Houthis and their followers. Proponents of this discourse believe that all Hashemites are directly involved in the Houthi war.

- The connection of the Houthi movement, the strongest and most prominent party in the war, to the Iranian regime which exploits and utilizes it to forward Iranian goals and agendas. The Houthi dependence on Iran and their links to its agenda has been manifested by Iranian support with weapons, money, and training before or during the war, especially as the official Iranian position is no more a secret. Therefore, the Houthi movement and all those who revolve in its orbit have become tools in the Iranian project, which has armed wings, similar to the Houthi movement, in several Arab countries. This makes the Houthis and the majority of the Hashemites in an open confrontation with the Yemeni people, regardless of the outcomes of political settlement efforts that seek to stop the war and establish peace.

Internally, they bear responsibility for the coup and the war, and externally, the neighboring countries and the international community consider them to be a threat to security and stability in the region, especially after they launched dozens of missile attacks against strategic interests and vital areas in Saudi Arabia.

Scenarios of the future of the Hashemites

The first scenario: Hostility among all Yemenis towards the Hashemites, except for a few of them, is likely to grow along with the ensuing determination to continue the war and confrontation with them. This might involve efforts to criminalize everything related to the Hashemite and Hashemism, especially in case of decline of Houthi power and influence. Whether the war stops or goes on unabated, hostility towards the Hashemites will persist among the majority of Yemenis.

Recently, new forces have emerged that look beyond the current war and see further afield, calling for pride in Yemeni identity and its historical symbols and invoking this identity in confronting Hashemism as a whole. This new trend is based on the view that the current war is merely a link in a long series of struggles that Hashemism has been waging against the Yemenis for hundreds of years and that the Houthi movement is only a link in that long chain. According to this view, the solution is not limited to ending the war only, but that the real danger of dynastic (Hashemite) racism must be confronted. While Hashemism and the Hashemites are considered a major party, alongside the Houthis, the target in Hashemism is not its affiliates indiscriminately, but only those among them who believe in the superiority of their lineage and their exclusive right to power, according to their Hadawi theory of divine right to power. Proponents of this view maintain that an effective solution lies in eliminating the dynastic idea from its foundation, because Yemenis had previously tried partial solutions in the September 1962 revolution, when the Hamiduddin family, the rulers of the state against which the revolution was launched, was eliminated, but the danger remained lurking for several years until it reappeared again, this time from the Badruddin family. Therefore, what is required after deciding the battle in favor of restoring the state is decisively eliminating the idea of the Imamate and its buttressing political theory once and for all to ensure that no form of imamate will ever reappear in the future.

The longer the war continues, the greater the motives for revenge against the Hashemites and insistence to expand the confrontation with them and the more the dangers of their idea are exposed; an idea that has long ignited the flames of conflict in the past and continues to do so to the present day.

The second scenario: There might be clashes between the Houthi movement and the Political Hashemism, especially if the legitimate government and Saudi Arabia succeed in winning over effective and influential Hashemite leaders, particularly as the Houthis insist on remaining a tool of the Iranian project. This means that the two sides (the two partners of the coup) will reach a crossroads, one in the direction of Riyadh, and the other leading towards Tehran. This is evidenced by the distinction between the two parties that reveals itself in some divergent attitudes and internal disagreements and conflicts that often do not come out into the open. Although the Iranian revolutionary movement represented by the Revolutionary Guards has succeeded in containing the Houthi movement, apparently the whole Hashemite movement has not been contained, especially since the broad current, with its leaders who have long experience and extensive relations, is keen to ensure its survival and influence - even partially - outside the framework of the coup and the power that resulted from it, and away from the circle of Iranian containment.

In this context, assassinations of prominent military and political Hashemite figures and leaders since 2014, of which the Houthis were accused, shall be read. Although they were officially attributed to unknown perpetrators, as is the case usually with such assassinations. Among the most prominent Hashemite personalities that were targeted is Dr. Mohammad Abdulmlik Al-Mutawakkil, professor of political science at Sana'a University. Al-Mutawakkil acted as Secretary of the Union of Popular Forces. He was assassinated in Sana'a in early November 2014, only a few weeks after the Houthis took control of the capital city. He was a political and academic figure that earned the respect of the various political forces and had relations with the political and cultural elites at the Arab level, especially since he is considered one of the symbols and founders of the Islamic Arab Conference, and had earlier served as its coordinator. Abdulkarim Al-Khaiwani, a journalist and political activist affiliated with the Houthis,

was also assassinated in March 2015 in the capital, Sana'a. He had been criticizing the actions of his group, and its manner of conducting relations and alliances.

In October 2020, the prominent leader of the Hashemite movement and Minister of Youth and Sports in the Houthi government, Hassan Zaid, was assassinated. According to some of his relatives, Houthi leaders were implicated in his assassination. In reporting the crime to Houthi security authorities, Zaid's family stated that the assassin, a Houthi official, admitted his crime and kept threatening the family members. He informed the relatives of the murdered minister that he merely executed a sentence of executing Hasan Zaid.³⁷ The death of the most prominent leader of Political Hashemism, Yahya Mohammad al-Shami, also raised brows. The Houthis announced that Al-Shami died as a result of a Coronavirus infection in April 2021. This announcement came only two days after the funeral of his eldest son, Zakaria, the cause of his death was also shrouded in mystery. This latter served as chief of staff under the Houthi government, and despite his young age, he was one of their most prominent military leaders. Both Al-Shami and his son were major generals, and are considered among the most influential leaders who played a part in the coup since an early stage.

It was noted that some members of Political Hashemism left Sana'a following the clashes between the Houthis and former President, Ali Saleh, in December 2017, for fear of persecution by the group, especially after it liquidated Saleh, its former ally, who along with his supporters played a major role in the success of the coup. Although these Hashemites did not declare any anti-Houthi position, crystallization of a rejecting Hashemite position remains open, especially since most of the leaders of the movement are good at adapting to prevailing circumstances. This might constitute a seed for a group of Hashemites distinct from the Houthi movement, especially as the majority of Yemenis have become convinced that the Hashemites in general identified with the Houthis in the coup and war.

Some observers rule out this scenario in light of the absolute control of the Houthi movement at the present time, and the absence of indicators of Hashemite defection, especially as eight years have elapsed since the Houthis orchestrated the coup and waged their large-scale war.

Precluding this scenario means that rejection of the Houthis among the Hashemites will remain limited to a few individuals rather than crystallize into a collective organized movement that takes the form of a cohesive bloc capable of fighting the Houthi movement which dominates power and wealth.

The third scenario: Differences among anti-Houthi forces will escalate and snowball into an armed conflict. This scenario has been seen in the clashes between government forces and forces loyal to the UAE in several liberated areas in the past years, including the events of January 2018 in Aden, the August 2019 confrontations in Aden, Abyan and Shabwa, the Abyan War in May and June 2020, and clashes in Shabwa in August 2022. This means more attrition for many years to come in conflicts that may take new forms. New currents, parties and formations may also surface outside the context of the main conflict that involves the two main warring parties, the Houthis and their allies on the one hand, and the internationally recognized government and its allies on the other.

In spite of the additional risks, losses and repercussions implicit in this scenario, and that it is likely to benefit the Houthis and the Hashemites generally, it delays war with them, or pushes it to a secondary position for a while, the state of hostility towards the coup and its components will remain alive among most Yemeni forces. The Hashemites, or most of them at least, will be targeted in the future in a manner commensurate with the mass destruction inflicted by the new Hashemism (in its Houthi version) and the countless casualties, losses and tragedies that it left behind.

The fourth scenario: This scenario involves reaching a comprehensive settlement, under international and regional pressures, that ends the war and political and military conflicts, and lays the foundations for a new future based on the consensus of the active Yemeni political forces. This can be regulated by the adoption of new treaties, laws and regulations to deal with the post-war phase. All circumstances that led to the war and contributed to prolonging it will be taken into account,

putting in place appropriate legal solutions, and recognizing the exclusive powers of the judicial and official bodies to decide all issues related to the conflict and its effects and consequences. All parties shall submit to competent state institutions and respect the law and the rulings of the judiciary. At any rate, sporadic incidents and individual reactions might take place. This scenario will mostly be related to the factors and circumstances in which it is created, and will be linked to the forces and parties that sponsor the agreement and support reconciliation. The success of such a scenario depends mainly on the emergence of relevant subjective and objective factors. It also relies on the degree of seriousness and willingness of key influential (Yemeni) actors in the political and military scene.

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Fouad Musi'd

Researcher at the Abaad Center for Studies and Research

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