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The Allies War in Shabwa

between the Dream of Secession and the Lust for Gas

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Introduction

The Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants Brigades, which are loyal to the UAE, took control of Shabwa governorate in eastern Yemen, and expelled government forces after battles in which drones believed to be Emirati took part to tip the balance in favor of forces trained and funded by Abu Dhabi. Government forces withdrew to the borders to remote areas in the governorate, or dispersed with soldiers returning to their tribes. Most of the government forces in Shabwa are recruited from Shabwa tribes.

The clashes in Ataq, the main town in Shabwa governorate, are reminiscent of the clashes and battles in August 2019, when forces loyal to the UAE took control of Aden, and failed to control Shabwa governorate. Government forces then were bombed at the gates of Aden. Shabwa governorate has usually been a locale of redefining the relations between government forces and the Saudi-led coalition.¹

These developments are important because they came five months after the announcement of the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council, which came to power in April 2022. They are the first incidents that revealed internal schism within the Presidential Council. This schism led to abandoning the army and security forces in favor of unofficial forces that have not yet been integrated into the state's military institutions and use the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council as a political front.

This paper discusses the turning points under which the incidents in Shabwa took place, comparing them to the 2019 events. It then presents a chronology of the clashes since their outbreak and escalation to provide an overview of the nature of their development and their implications for the Presidential Council, the future of Yemen, and the oil and ports triangle². It proposes urgent solutions that may be adopted by the Presidential Council to address this crisis, which is the first and most difficult test it has faced, and underscoring its repercussions on the battle with the Houthis.

Turning points

With its social-tribal structure and its geo-political and economic location, Shabwa has directly and indirectly influenced most events in Yemen during the war. Yet, it seems that most parties are not prepared for the repercussions of national and regional transformations that started in early 2022, such as the transformative incidents in Shabwa governorate, which are likely to affect the map of the country and local parties in the near future.

Several new turning points have led to the rise of the local party demanding secession and a regional party, represented by the United Arab Emirates, and facilitated their control of the oil and gas triangle in eastern Yemen. These include,

1. Appointing a new governor: In December 2021, Awadh ibn Al-Wazir Al-Awlaki was appointed governor of Shabwa, replacing Mohammad bin Adyo, who had managed the affairs in the governorate for years with a political and social balance that consolidated the state's presence. In August 2019, Bin Adyo managed to secure tribal and societal support for government forces in the face of the Shabwa Elite Forces and their reinforcements. During the following years, bin Adyo persistently pointed out the danger of the UAE military presence in Belhaf and its impact on security and stability in Shabwa governorate, until he was substituted by a governor from the Congress Party and loyal to the UAE. The new governor, who was residing in Abu Dhabi, was one of the sworn opponents of bin Adyo, and was brought from the UAE capital to the locale of his office aboard a private plane.

With the arrival of the new governor, the Shabwa Elite Forces, which were defeated in the August 2019 clashes with the army and security forces, were revamped and brought back to Ataq, the administrative center of Shabwa governorate, under the new name of "Shabwa Defense" forces on January 1, 2022.

The number of forces in Shabwa governorate increased with the persistent reinforcements of the Giants Brigades deployed to the governorate since late 2021 under the pretext of pushing the Houthis back from three main districts that they had controlled to impose a siege on Marib governorate in 2021.

Indeed, the forces were able to push the Houthis away from those districts due to the participation of government forces in the battles. However, after evicting the Houthis, those forces remained in the governorate center in Ataq and in the three districts that were liberated from the Houthis.

2. The Presidential Council: The Presidential Leadership Council was formed on 7 April, when President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi transferred his powers to a council consisting of a president and seven members representing the parties that oppose the Houthis and support the internationally recognized government, including the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council which demands secession. The policy of former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, was based on two main foundations; namely, safeguarding the unity of the country and thwarting secession and division, and fighting violations of the country's sovereignty by backing militias at the expense of the state and national unity. By contrast, the Presidential Council has not proven over the past four months that it preserves these two foundations. This is mainly because it comprises figures from diverse backgrounds and parties with conflicting interests.

Along with other challenges, keeping the Presidential Council unified was a difficult test. The Presidential Council is an internationally recognized authority that is difficult to change or replace, regardless of the extent of its political legitimacy and the way it acquired it. However, it undergoes a test of the extent to which it abides by the Constitution and effective laws in its decisions and behavior and the extent of its commitment to the declaration of the transfer of power, which gave it legitimacy to exist in the first place. In this regard, the factors that reflect the failure of the Presidential Council to carry out its tasks which were stated in the declaration of the transfer of power are as follows:

a. The lack of any regulating rules: The Presidential Council failed to approve the rules regulating its own tasks. This failure is the result of the obstinate position of the Southern Transitional Council, which is represented in the Presidential Council by Aidarous Al-Zubaidi.³

These rules regulate all tasks and bodies of the Council, and mitigate differences among its members.

The declaration of the transfer of power underscores this fact, "The Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council shall approve the rules regulating the functions of the Presidential Leadership Council, the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission, the legal team, and the economic team formed under this declaration within 15 days from the date of submitting the legal team's draft of the regulating rules, which shall be passed by a law.⁴ This law should have been passed last June, but this did not materialize!

In view of the absence of these rules, the Council does not have any cover that regulates its work. Its activities, therefore, are solely guided by personal understandings among its members. This constitutes the backdrop against which the disputes that came to the fore in the phase just before the events in Shabwa governorate.

b. The Consultation and Reconciliation Commission: The declaration of the transfer of power underscores convening the body consisting of 50 members - representing all parties - to elect the Executive Board of the Commission, but there was no meeting in the first place and no elections took place. Rather, members of the Board were appointed, and a young man affiliated the Southern Transitional Council and lacking political experience was appointed chairman of the Board, despite the presence of other older and more experienced members. The commission has not held any meetings since then, while it is part of the legitimacy of the Presidential Council. Its tasks include "working towards unifying the visions and goals of the various national forces and components in a way that contributes to restoring state institutions and consolidates the belonging of Yemen to its immediate Arab framework."⁵

c. Partnership: Legitimacy of the Presidential Council is based on the partnership of the components from which the Presidential Council and its subsidiary organs was formed. There is no representative of Tihama in the Presidential Council or in its subsidiary organs. Similarly, Tihama is not represented in the government. There have been recurrent complains of such disregard for this strategic and important area. On the contrary, critics of the decisions of the Presidential Council say that, during the first four months, those decisions categorically reflected the horizontal and vertical control of a specific constituent; namely, the Southern Transitional Council vertically, and Al-Dhali'/Yafi'/Lahj triangle horizontally, in a move that seems to serve the goals of the Southern Transitional Council, which is calling for secession, and in violation of the first principle on which the Council was founded; i.e., to preserve the country's unity and sovereignty.

This policy does not only threaten the country's unity, dividing it into small cantons, but also reinforces regional segregation on the basis of the 1986 civil war, as it boosts the position of the regions previously known as tughmah (gang); that is, Al-Dhali', Radfan and Yafi', at the expense of what was called zumrah (band), that is Abyan, Shabwa and the rest of southern governorates.⁶ Northern governorates are also drawn into this game of regional segregation by strengthening the positions of the southern governorates at the expense of the northern ones.

Since independence that ended the rule of the Imamate in the early 1960s, and later in unified Yemen, authority, in the south and north alike, was based on a delicate balance between regions in terms of representation in the government and its organs, so that no grievances of exclusion or underrepresentation, or feelings of being neglected by the authorities in Sana'a at the time might arise in any region. When any authority fails to achieve this balance, it raises tension. Discontent indignantly boiled in private before it broke into the open if the central authorities failed to act.

In the judiciary, which has separate laws, the Presidential Council limited most of the positions to one party; again, the Southern Transitional Council, whose affiliates dominated judicial institutions, including the attorney general, the Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the Chairman of the Judicial Inspection Authority.⁷ Some of these appointments violate the law.⁸ However, the Presidential Council did not reverse these appointment, despite early reminders of its obligation to abide by the law.⁹ After approving those appointments, it “promised to abide by [the law] in the future”!¹⁰

Regarding the appointments of governors, most of them went to those close to Abu Dhabi. In addition to appointing Awadh bin Al-Wazir Al-Awlaki, who is close to Abu Dhabi, governor of Shabwa, the Presidential Council also appointed Issa Al-Thaqali governor of Socotra. Al-Thaqali is an STC leader, and has fought against the Yemeni army and security forces and dismissed the local authority in June 2020. The same also applies to Hadhramaut, where Mabkhout Mubarak bin Madhi was appointed governor, and Major General Fayez Mansour Saeed Qahtan as commander of the Second Military Region, which is based in Mukalla. These two officials are also close to the UAE. In 2021, the latter was tasked by the Emirati Special Unit in Yemen with creating a military force in the Hadhramaut Valley¹¹ to expel the First Military Region and control the oil areas.

Reserving appointments in the high offices of governorates for leaders of armed and extremist groups renders rebellion against the authority of the state a prerequisite of securing such positions under the authority of the Presidential Council, and grants those governorates to a foreign country which seeks to implement its agendas and goals in those provinces.

The survival of the Presidential Council and its government in the Ma'ashiq Palace, where it is besieged by the paramilitary forces affiliated with the UAE and nominally under the authority of the Southern Transitional Council, is a major reason that makes the Presidential Council constrained in its decisions that are exclusively in the interest of the dominant party. This led Tariq Saleh and Sultan Al-Arada to leave Aden after the provocations of those forces against the two members of the Presidential Council.

d. Failure of the Security and Military Committee: The declaration of the transfer of power points to the formation of a joint security and military committee, which was set up in May and chaired by Haitham Qassem, who belongs to Radfan. During the war, he was a field commander and military advisor to the Emirati forces in the battles in southern and western Yemen. Earlier, he served as Minister of Defense in the separatist government in 1994. The committee consisted of 59 other military and militia leaders, and is tasked with the following:

1. Ensuring security and stability by adopting policies that would prevent any armed confrontations throughout the republic,
2. creating conditions and taking the necessary measures required for the integration of the armed forces under a unified national command structure within the framework of the rule of law,
3. ending the division in the armed forces, addressing its causes, and ending all armed conflicts,
4. establishing a national doctrine for the army and security services,
5. performing any other tasks the Council deems appropriate to enhance stability and security. ¹²

The Military and Security Committee has not made any progress, nor has it expressed a position on the Shabwa events. It did not attempt to prevent the confrontations in Ataq, nor did it condemn the control of the Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants Brigades of the camps of the national military and Special Security Forces in the governorate.

The state of instability and the breakdown of security in Shabwa, which has remained stable and secure since 2019, also resurfaced, while the committee makes no efforts to end the state of division.

It seems that the problems faced by the Presidential Leadership Council are the same as those faced by this committee, as STC leaders control the meetings and ensuing decisions. During the discussions of the camps that did not participate in the fight against the Houthi group, STC representatives insisted on redeploying the First Military Region camps from Seiyun. These camps are currently scattered in the valley and desert of Hadhramaut and in Al-Mahra in the farthest east of the country. When several committee members expressed their surprise at this proposition and argued that evacuating those camps from Seiyun was illogical and would upset the balance of the unity of the Yemeni territories and the Republic of Yemen, STC members replied that another party would expel those camps by force if the committee did not perform its role of expelling the forces from their camps.¹³

e. Easing tensions and protecting national unity: The preamble to the declaration of the transfer of power underscores the need to preserve the unity of the country and the republican system, and to remove elements of political and security tension. It states,

Further affirming our commitment to Yemen's unity, sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity

Further healing the wounds, and in embodiment of the goals of the glorious September and October revolutions, and preserving the unity of our Yemeni people in a civil state on the basis of broad partnership and a fair distribution of wealth.

And further affirming the need to meet our people's aspirations for change and reform, and to remove sources of political and security tension...

The Presidential Council was created mainly to end tensions which have repeatedly intensified since 2010 between the Yemeni army and security forces on the one hand and other paramilitary formations or militias, on the other. Most of the latter forces receive direct support from the UAE and are managed and commanded by it. The fact that the paramilitary formations remain outside the authority of the Yemeni ministries of defense and the interior confirms the scenario of continuous small-scale wars. Yemen's modern history presents a painful experience of this security dilemma.¹⁴

Appointing leaders of sub-national formations or figures known for their separatist tendencies in key positions in the governorates reinforces the division and fragmentation of Yemeni geography, enhances instability and plunges the areas under the control of the internationally recognized government into a series of small-scale wars. It also makes maintaining the country's unity in a federal system a difficult task.

3. The truce: The events in Shabwa come in the midst of an ongoing truce between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Houthi armed group. The truce has been extended to October 2nd 2022. The Giants Brigades felt reassured by the truce which prompted them to return to Ataq, leaving their positions in the front lines on the Shabwa border with al-Baydha, where Houthi reinforcements are focused. Fighting battles against the army and security units inside Ataq and moving to other districts.

The goal of the Presidential Council was to unify the front of the Saudi-led coalition that has been fighting the Houthis since 2015, in preparation for a political solution to end the war that has been raging on since the Iranian-backed Houthis took control of state institutions in 2014.

In light of the inability of the Saudi-led coalition to unify decisions and stop deliberate exclusion and targeting of state institutions, including the military, security forces and the judiciary, the Houthis appear as a solid force capable of management and war. They also exceed the internationally recognized government in maintaining security in the areas under their control. This weakens the internationally recognized government argument and renders it incapable of exerting pressure, confronting the Houthis, or establishing its authority in the areas under its control.

4. Regional and international variables: These variables are considered an important turning point that led to the incidents in Shabwa, as they came after Joe Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia. Biden's visit was prompted by the need to stabilize the oil market and obtain gas to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas by winter, in light of Moscow's war on Ukraine. Western countries avoid denouncing the targeting or dismemberment of Yemen in light of the need for the Gulf countries, and in light of Emirati promises that the French will be awarded contracts of the Marib gas that passes through Balhaf.

French experts were in Shabwa after the clashes, despite knowing that very little Yemeni gas may not be enough for the French or any other country. There is also information about a Russian tendency to pressure against French acquisition of Yemeni gas.

Shabwa determines the seriousness of the relationship between the Presidential Council and the Coalition

The Shabwa incidents took place in the context of the aforementioned turning points, which were the result of tensions that had persisted since the return of the Shabwa Defense Forces/Shabwa Elite to the governorate, and assuming the task of guarding government and civil institutions, and the resulting gradual exclusion of security forces and Special Forces. The local authority led by Awad bin Al-Wazir Al-Awlaki began to legitimize curtailing the tasks of the security forces and the army, and the deployment of the Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants Brigades near the points and camps of the Special Forces and other military brigades.

The attempt to assassinate the commander of the Special Security Forces, Brigadier General Abd Rabbo La'kab by the Shabwa Defense Forces in an ambush at the entrance to Ataq on 18 July, and the killing of two of his attendants, was the last in a series of provocative events, after months of brewing tension among the security forces, the army and the Shabwa Defense Forces. Tension began soon after the arrival of the latter in Ataq in January following the orders of Governor Awad bin Al-Wazir Al-Awlaki.¹⁵ As the forces led by La'kab are formed from the tribes of Shabwa, he demanded that the assassins of his attendants be handed over, so that the matter would not turn into a tribal revenge. The governor ignored these military and tribal demands to hand the murderers over to the Public Prosecution.

It seems that the plan was to assassinate the military leaders, and replace them with loyalists to Abu Dhabi and the Southern Transitional Council. When this plan failed, it was used to isolate the military leaders and dismantle the government forces, accordingly. The chronology of events later indicates the most recent trend.

Date	Incident
18 July 2022	The assassination attempt on the life of Brigadier General Abd Rabbo La'kab failed. He was targeted in an ambush by the Shabwa Defense Forces at the entrance to Ataq on July 19, and two of his attendants were killed.
19 July 2022	The Security Committee in Shabwa forms a committee to investigate what was described as the incidents the Special Security Forces and the Second Brigade of the Shabwa Defense Forces. The committee refused to detain the murderers of La'kab's attendants.
24 July 2022	Before releasing the findings of the investigations, Awad bin Al-Wazir ordered the arrest of La'kab and confining him to house arrest together with commander of the Second Brigade, a division of the Shabwa Defense Forces. The governor also ordered the formation of an investigation committee from the local authority. He appointed an officer from outside the ranks of the Special Forces to carry out the duties of La'kab. The new acting commander who originally served as the deputy director general of the governorate police, and is accused of participating in the assassination attempt on La'kab. While the staff of the Second Brigade of the Shabwa Defense Forces was appointed as acting commander of the Second Brigade. This latter appointment comes from the ranks of the same force rather than from outside it as in the case of La'kab.
25 July 2022	The governor appeared in a video attacking the Special Security Forces and accusing them of not securing the governorate. He also accused the Minister of Interior and senior leaders of colluding with the Special Security Forces ¹⁶ . This was the first time that he revealed his involvement in the incidents, and his support of the Shabwa Defense Forces. Transgressing the limits of his powers, the governor had earlier rejected a decision issued on July 3, 2022, appointing Lt. Col. Ali Mohammad Tamous al-Qumaishi, staff of the Shabwa units of the Special Security Forces, and Lt.

	Col. Nasser Mohammad Abdullah Al-Khulaifi, director of Operations of the Shabwa Special Security Forces branch and commander of the Anti-Terrorism Unit. These two were prevented from assuming the duties of their new positions. ¹⁷
25 July 2022	<p>President Rashad Al-Alimi issued a directive ordering that "the Public Security, Emergency Services and the Joint Forces shall take over the task of securing Ataq and all other directorates; the Special Forces shall secure the entrances to the city, while the Shabwa Defense Forces shall stay in their camps or redeployed to the fronts." Influx of the Giants Forces into Ataq shall be prevented. Public Security, Emergency Services and the Joint Forces shall be jointly responsible for securing Ataq from within. Appointing Brigadier General Jahdal Hanash as a member of the investigation committee formed by the governor.</p> <p>The governor of Shabwa ignored the president's orders. The Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants forces continued to control Ataq, reinforced forces from other directorates and governorates, and built military barracks in Ataq, including in the vicinity of the Special Security Forces camp, and other military camps.</p>
26 July 2022	Shabwa governor's office announced that Brigadier General, Ahmed Al-Ahwal, continues to perform his duties as acting commander of the Special Forces in the governorate.
1-5 August 2022	Military reinforcements to the Giants forces and Shabwa Defense Forces from outside the governorate, were deployed in front of Ataq International Airport, creating new checkpoints in Ataq, harassing the Special Security Forces and threatening them with expulsion from the governorate.

6 August 2022	<p>A statement issued by the governor accused the commander of the Special Forces camp, Ahmed Mohammad Habib Daraan, and the director of La'kab's office, Nasser al-Sharif, of preventing the deputy director of the Governorate Security force, who is also acting commander of the Special Security Forces, Brigadier General Ahmed Nasser al-Ahwal, from entering the camp.</p> <p>This was considered a declaration of military rebellion against the leadership of the governorate and against the decisions of the Security Committee.</p> <p>Acting prior to the release of the findings of investigations, the governor of Shabwa held Brigadier General Abd Rabbo La'kab responsible for the July 18 incidents, including the assassination attempt on La'kab and the murder of two of his attendants. He issued a decision dismissing La'kab and Daraan from their positions, preventing Al-Sharif from entering the camp, and appointing Al-Ahwal in La'kab's position, in complete transgression of his powers since dismissal of security leaders is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and the government, and shall be based on presidential decrees. ¹⁸</p>
	<p>In the context of issuing the previous decision, the governor said that he commissioned the director of the Usaylan District to meet the relatives of the murdered to offer blood money in relation to the case of the two murdered attendants: (1. Awad Abdul Qadir Ali Bateh) (2. Abu Bakr Abdul Qadir Aidhah Al-Najjar), who served in the Special Forces without indicating their tribes! The governor's position is flawed on two counts:</p> <p>Firstly: The decision indicated that if the relatives refuse the blood money, the governor will refer those responsible for the incidents to the police whereas they shall be referred to the prosecution office! He also barter the two killed attendants for money, which reveals an act of trifling with the blood of the two police officers, while such an act is criminalized by law.</p> <p>Secondly: The governor underestimated the blood of the two killed officers from the beginning and did not take immediate measures to refer the murderers to the Prosecution and decide the issue through tribal arbitration with the killed officers' tribes and relatives,</p>

	<p>which is a widespread and established custom in Yemen, until the completion of investigations or acceptance of the tribal ruling. This would have alleviated the rage among the Special Forces first and among their own tribes. In a similar incident, on August 13, Awad Al-Awlaki arrested those responsible for the murder of Mufarrej bin Shaleel Al-Harithi, the commander of the Fifth Brigade of the Shabwa Defense Forces, and presented a great tribal arbitration to the elders of the Balharith tribe. This murder took place on the same day the two officers were killed, by the Giants forces are loyal to the governor. The Giants Brigades stated that the murder was committed by mistake.</p>
7 August 2022	<p>The Ministry of Interior considered¹⁹ the decisions of the governor of Shabwa to dismiss the leaders of its Special Forces in Shabwa null and void, as they constitute “an infringement of the powers of the local authority and interference in the powers of the Ministry of Interior.”</p> <p>"Presidential orders were issued to the governor of Shabwa to contain the problem, but they were not implemented."</p> <p>The Giants Forces and Shabwa Defense Forces intensified their deployment in the streets of Ataq, and besieged the house of the Special Forces Commander, La'kab.²⁰</p>
7-8 August 2022	<p>The assassination of the commander of the Rapid Deployment Force in the Shabwa Axis, Lt. Col. Ahmed Laqqum Al-Awlaki, in an ambush in Ataq. A number of his attendants were wounded.</p> <p>Groups of the Shabwa Defense Forces controlled Al-Haijah hospital and deployed snipers. In the early hours of 8 August, they launched an attack on the sites and camp of the Special Forces in Ataq, and attempted to control its positions by force. This led to the outbreak of fierce clashes near these camps and sites. Clashes spread to most zones in Ataq.</p>
8 August 2022	<p>The Presidential Council issued a decree dismissing La'kab from office and appointing Colonel Muhim Saeed Mohammad Nasser in his place. It also dismissed commander of the Ataq Axis, commander of the 30th Brigade, Brigadier Uzair Nasser Al-Atiqi,</p>

	<p>The Presidential Council issued a decree dismissing La'kab from office and appointing Colonel Muhim Saeed Mohammad Nasser in his place. It also dismissed commander of the Ataq Axis, commander of the 30th Brigade, Brigadier Uzair Nasser Al-Atiqi, and appointed Brigadier General Adel Ali bin Ali Hadi in his place. The commander of Shabwa Governorate Police, Brigadier General Awad Masoud Al-Dahboul was also fired and Brigadier General Fouad Mohammad Salem Al-Nassi occupied the vacant position.</p> <p>Surprisingly, the Presidential Council issued a decree to dismiss the commander of the Second Brigade of the Shabwa Defense Forces, Colonel Wajdi Baoum Al-Khulaifi, even though this force is affiliated with the Emirates and is not under the command of the Ministry of Interior or Defense. The Council was aware of the lack of powers in such appointment decrees, so it did not appoint new officers to fill the vacancy because it lacks the authority of appointing them, and this turned to be the main dilemma.</p>
	<p>After these presidential decrees were issued, Ataq witnessed a calm that lasted for several hours, then the governor of Shabwa directed the forces to resume fighting in Ataq as new military reinforcements of the Giants' forces from the Baihan district arrived in the town. The house of the dismissed commander of the Special Forces, Brigadier General Abd Rabbo La'kab, and the Special Forces camp were stormed.</p>
9 August 2022	<p>A campaign of arrests and kidnappings in Ataq, the center of Shabwa governorate (eastern Yemen), targeted a number of Yemeni citizens who were born in the northern governorates, including owners of, and workers in, shops, in the midst continued battles. Clashes spread at night, with the government forces having the upper hand and advancing to secure their camps and positions in the center of the town.</p>
	<p>The Presidential Council assigned the Ministers of Defense and Interior, Lieutenant-General Mohsen Al-Daeri, and Major General Ibrahim Haidan, to go to Shabwa governorate to implement the recent decrees of the Presidential Council and normalize the situation in the town.</p>

9-10 August	<p>In a reaction to the success of the Special Security Forces and the army in securing their camps and their forces, drones believed to be Emirati launched dozens of raids on those sites and camps. In conjunction with this bombing, the governor of Shabwa announced launching a military operation against the Special Security Forces, the 21st Armored Mecha Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Jahdal Hanash (a member of the Investigation Committee), the 2nd Mountain Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Mahdi Mushfir, Brigade 163 Baihan commanded by Brigadier General Saleh Laqsam Al-Harithi, and the Facilities Protection Brigades commanded by Brigadier Nasser bin Aidarous, the Patrol Police and Road Security commanded by Colonel Abdullatif Dhaifeer and Staff of the 2nd Marine Infantry Brigade, Colonel Muhim Saeed Al-Bobakri, appointed by the Presidential Council as commander of the Special Security Forces in place of La'kab. The Shabwa Defense and the Giants Brigades moved with Emirati air cover to control the sites and camps. The raids left dozens of soldiers and security personnel killed and wounded, and most of the military vehicles were destroyed. During the withdrawal of forces from Ataq, drones tracked them, killing and wounding dozens more. Raids continued in and around Ataq over the next days.</p>
10 August	<p>The command of the Yemeni army and security forces in Shabwa governorate²¹ stated that "the Presidential Leadership Council and the Yemeni government are responsible for handing over national decision-making to foreign powers that have violated the dignity and sovereignty of Yemenis."</p> <p>"The rebel governor, Awad ibn al-Wazir, summoned militias from outside the governorate to fight the residents of Shabwa."</p> <p>"Under Emirati air cover, the militia carried out, all the crimes of murder, looting and assaults."</p>

	<p>"The command calls on all the free people of Yemen to start coordination and consultation to come up with a practical formula to resist the Houthis and the Emirati occupation and those who provided them with cover, support and backing."</p>
	<p>support and backing."</p> <p>The Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council said in a speech after the UAE-backed forces took control of Ataq:</p> <p>"The unfortunate events in Ataq give an additional lesson on the importance of unity under the authority of the state and its right to monopolize force and take all measures to impose its sovereignty and protect citizens."</p> <p>"Forming a committee chaired by the Minister of Defense, and comprising the Minister of Interior and five members of the Joint Military Security Committee, in accordance with the declaration of the transfer of power. This committee shall investigate the facts and find out the reasons for the events in Shabwa."</p>

Repercussions and implications of the Shabwa events on Yemen

The behavior of the Presidential Leadership Council shocked the tribes, politicians, society, and local and international observers, as it gave priority to the militias, i.e. Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants Brigades at the expense of the Yemeni government forces. Some of the repercussions of the Shabwa events on the oil province and on the country as a whole are discussed below.

- **The Tribal Position:** The Shabwa events revealed that the test is very difficult with regard to the Southern Transitional Council. Although the tribal position was not clear during the battles with the government forces, the fact that most of the soldiers in the Shabwa Defense Forces and the Giants Brigades came from Al-Dhali' and Lahj enraged the tribes of Shabwa even more. The forces in Shabwa governorate are mainly recruited from the ranks of the tribes of the governorate. The names of dozens of the dead of the attacking forces indicate their affiliation to Al-Dhali' and Lahj,

which brought to mind the 1986 civil war, and the crackdown by the party that won the war on the sons of Shabwa governorate.

The societal structure Shabwa is a complex tribal one. Most of the tribes are opposed to the Emirati role. A large number of tribesmen among the Shabwa Elite Force refused to fight the tribesmen loyal to the legitimate government for fear of vengeance.

In the events of 2019, the UAE dismissed most of these tribesmen and replaced them with recruits from Al-Dhali' and Yafi'. Former governor, Mohammad Saleh bin Adyo, and local officials and leaders in the governorate played a major role in promoting tolerance and reconciliation, and resisted provocations that aimed to draw them into conflicts and wars. It seems that the new governor does not try to get out of this predicament.

- **The duality of energy and ports, including Marib:** The forces loyal to the UAE managed to control the oil areas, in addition to the oil export port and the gas liquefaction plant in Shabwa governorate, where an advanced Emirati military base is located.

Those forces took control of the Yemen Gas Company (YGC). "They looted the property and the assets of the camp of the YGC near Ayyad, which had been closed, with all assets left on site since 2009, yet no one had approached the place before."²² The UAE had earlier begun to control the oil companies operating in the Shabwa governorate. A document by Al-Uqla Field Workers' Union indicates that OMV company sold its share in the oil field in Shabwa governorate, and that the deal was supervised by the Yemeni Ministry of Oil. The purchasing company is (SPEC). Not enough information is provided about this company. It is SPEC Gulf Oil & Gas Contracting, LLC and is headquartered in Abu Dhabi. It was established in 2015 as a subsidiary of the SPEC Group, which has branches in the UAE and the United States and specializes in providing oil services.

The Yemeni Gas Syndicate indicates that the Ministry of Oil allowed an international company (whose nationality is unknown) to be compensated through extension of the contract to exploit the area for several years instead of several months.

Apparently, the world's need for oil and gas drives the matter in Shabwa governorate. Global events have prompted this need. Neither Shabwa nor the UAE has gas. Marib has gas and its gas passes through Shabwa for export. Abu Dhabi, it seems, is planning to impose a siege on Marib from most directions to the south and east and force it to continue pumping.

- **Explosion in the face of the Presidential Council:** The inefficacy and contradiction of the Presidential Council causes cracks within the new partnership that gives it its form. Council member, Abdullah Al-Alimi - from Shabwa governorate – has submitted his resignation. The Islah party, the largest political component in the council, announced that failure to dismiss Awad al-Awlaki and exonerate the army forces and restore them to their former positions, will push the party to reconsider its decisions in all matters. It does not seem that the matter is limited to the Islah party, as an increasing number of politicians have come to see that the Presidential Council is unable to thwart the project of Yemen's secession. The insult to the Yemeni flag and the intervention of the UAE air force was a new and serious turning point in the broad partnership in the Council.

A session of the Yemeni parliament was scheduled in Aden after the Shabwa events, but it was postponed to an indefinite date. The events in Shabwa angered members of Parliament and caused a sharp division. Perhaps the session was postponed to avoid a stormy session against the Presidential Council, and its behavior towards Shabwa and the national army. ²³

- **The Yemeni people's and the military and civil institutions loss of confidence in the political leadership:** The gravity of the Shabwa events necessitates restoring legitimacy to the Presidential Council. Since the council already exists and cannot be bypassed, talk about obtaining legitimacy shall be restricted to the feasible options. These events raise the issue of legitimacy, by which we mean that the council decisions and its behavior conform to the constitution and effective laws. The view of the people and all civil and military institutions (the army and security forces) of council decisions, either enhances or loses confidence in the political leadership. If the leadership loses its ability to rebuild the state and favors the militias backed by a foreign country in such a way that makes them aspire to fill the void and seize power.

The events of Shabwa are a milestone in the legitimacy and features of the state that the Presidential Council seeks to reflect. Therefore, the confidence of the people and of state's security and military institutions must be restored by reordering the Presidential Council priorities that enable it to restore the state.

- **Reproducing the scenario in the other governorates:** Shabwa was a test of the new governing body and the Saudi-led coalition. The militias in the south expand in the same way the Houthis did in the north as they moved from Saada until they controlled Sana'a and the rest of the country and military camps. They moved according to a strategy: first controlling an area, then negotiating and signing agreements with tribes and military leaders to surrender or neutralize their areas. This strategy was clearly evident in Shabwa and the militias are now moving east towards Abyan and Wadi Hadramawt.

As a result of the events in Shabwa, and the army and security's lack of political cover to defend the national territory, the forces loyal to the UAE expanded towards Hadramawt Valley. They had already taken control of several checkpoints of the First Military Region, before the Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council intervened and ordered them to withdraw, but they continued to control the oil and gas institutions in Shabwa. Agitations continued in Hadhramaut governorate so that the forces loyal to the UAE moved towards the valley and desert districts, where oil fields and the First Military Region protecting these facilities are located. The new governor's statements indicate that the Hadhrami Elite Forces, loyal to the UAE, will be deployed in all regions of the governorate, including the valley and desert districts. This reveals the intention to control all oil and gas areas in the country.

After taking control of Shabwa governorate, the Southern Transitional Council pushed its forces towards Abyan governorate via land and sea. A military operation was announced in the governorate.²⁴ The Presidential Council stated that it would fight terrorism and terrorist organizations in Abyan governorate. Hence, government forces did not show any resistance. Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, who announced the military operation,²⁵ violated a Presidential Council decree that prevents launching a military operation in Abyan governorate, but he did launch the campaign despite this decree.²⁶

Government forces in the districts of Shaqra and Ahwar did not show any resistance to the UAE-backed forces, but retreated to their camps and withdrew from most of their positions on the southern coast in Abyan to the camps, calling on the Presidential Council to act and restore "the situation to normal."

Recommendations to reduce escalation and prevent collapse of the Presidential Council:

- Alleviating tension and preventing the collapse of partnership:

Dismissing the governor of Shabwa, and nominating an independent and patriotic person from the governorate is a prerequisite to alleviating tension with the Shabwa community. Meeting the tribal elders, reassuring them, compensating the families of the martyrs and treating the wounded is important to restore the tribes' confidence in the state. The restructuring and integration of all forces in Shabwa into the military and security institutions within a national framework shall be carried out immediately. In addition, the Presidential Council shall impose adherence to the constitution, the law, and consensus so that the political authority may regain the confidence of the people, the army and the security forces.

- Approving the regulations of the duties of the Presidential Council, and defining its priorities accurately:

The Presidential Council has to adopt solutions that reflect its cohesion, and increase its capacity to overcome the current cracks plaguing it.²⁸ Urgently passing the regulating rules law is a critical initial step in this direction. The diverse parties of a council cannot work as a team without defining the limits of each party and the form of consensus upon which decisions are based.

This will also be linked to activating the Consultation and Reconciliation Committee, defining its work, and initiating the meetings of this very important body. Addressing and resolving the causes of tension and abiding by the constitutional declaration (the declaration of the seventh of April) is also necessary. It is unhealthy that such a vital organ remains an incapacitated ineffective constituent of the Council,

and its fifty members who are among the experienced politicians and influential figures in the country continue to be ignored.

The Presidential Council is also supposed to push the Military Committee to carry out its work in accordance with the constitution and effective laws. It shall also arrange its urgent priorities, and immediately begin with restructuring the army and security and providing guarantees to the political parties and the local community of proceeding with the implementation of laws and safeguarding social security.

- Saudi intervention to restore balance:

Without the Presidential Council's commitment to finding solutions, the country will head towards fragmentation and overlapping wars. It is difficult to find solutions without engaging the UAE. The STC as a local party cannot implement those commitments, even if it undertakes to do so, since most forces act on the spur of Abu Dhabi rather than the local party that is considered its political front. Here lies the need for a Saudi intervention to support national options. Without this intervention, the priority of confronting the Houthis and their ally, Iran, will recede in favor of conflicts between the allies of the Saudi-led coalition, leaving more room for foreign powers and their local allies to maneuver inside the country. Thus, regional security, particularly Gulf security, will be affected most, in which Yemenis will suffer during the next phase due to failure to effectively address current events. Repercussions of such failure will not be limited to Yemen and its territorial borders.



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Transformation that preceded Shabwa events



Replacing the governor who relied on the army and security forces to maintain stability in Shabwa with one who acts as a cover for the militias



The Presidential Council fails to fulfill its duties under the transfer of power declaration.



The truce reassured the Presidential Council that there was no threat from the Houthis.



Europe's need for oil and gas.

Presidential Council failures

Failure to pass the law governing the council regulating rules

Failure of partnership; assigning the lion's share of positions to the STC



Failure to approve the powers of the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission, and failure of the committee to hold public meetings

Failure of the Military and Security Committee to make any progress

Repercussions of the Shabwa events

- Destabilized Shabwa and enraged the tribes; fears of regionalism
- UAE control of ports, oil areas and gas liquefaction plant
- Partnership threatens the Presidential Council unity
- The military and security forces lose confidence in the political leadership.
- Presidential Council popularity declines.
- Reproducing the scenario in other governorates
- The Yemeni army refused to fight in other governorates after losing the political cover.

Recommendations to reduce escalation and prevent the collapse of the Presidential Council

- ending tension and preventing the collapse of partnership
- Approving the regulations governing Presidential Council tasks, and defining its priorities accurately
- Saudi intervention to restore balance

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Conclusion

The Shabwa events reflect the way the militias took control of major official institutions in the country to forward the goals of foreign parties, while demolishing the remaining stays of the survival of the state. This is a reproduction of the scenario of the events of Amran and Brigade 310 when the Houthi militias invaded the country, looted army and security camps, and engaged in maneuvers on the Saudi borders at the end of 2014, then moved to seize the rest of the state institutions in Sana'a, dissolved the Parliament, declared itself a de facto authority, and imposed a siege on the presidency and government before Saudi Arabia intervened in support of the legitimate government. The war continues to the present day and its dire consequences are constantly increasing.

In order to prevent the recurrence of this scene, the Yemeni national forces and Riyadh shall support national options, deprive the militias of their political cover, and restore the confidence of the army and security in the political leadership. Failing to do that, the country will be pushed to the verge of splintering into small states. Even the current political facades of the militias will dissolve as their current role comes to an end. Therefore, the Presidential Council and the Yemeni parties, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states have no choice but to move to manage the largest and first crisis facing the Presidential Council. No success can be achieved in this respect without supporting the options of stabilizing the state and its institutions. The alternative option forebodes a bleak immediate future in Yemen, which may pose a major threat to the security of the Gulf on a scale unprecedented in modern history.

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- 4 Article 1/4/m, Declaration of the Transfer of Power
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