

# The Edge of the End...

## Is legitimate government in Yemen eroding?

Situation Assessment  
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## Introduction

In 2011, a popular uprising in Yemen managed to force former President Ali Abdullah Saleh<sup>[1]</sup> to resign, according to an initiative presented by the Gulf Cooperation Council states. His deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, was chosen to lead the country during a transitional period to prevent Yemen from sliding into a civil war. Hadi was elected as the sole candidate for the country in February 2012 to become the legitimate president of the country through the elections.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Yemenis met at the National Dialogue Conference (2013-2014) in which all the Yemeni parties and social forces participated, including the armed Houthi group that rejected the state's form that all parties agreed to in the dialogue, and demanded a region that includes Saada with a port on the sea across the "Midi" area. The Houthis began armed escalation against the reconciliation government through several signs, among them are "confronting the Salafis" and "dropping a government decision to lift subsidies on oil derivatives." The Houthi group allied with "Ali Abdullah Saleh" despite the state of hostility between the two parties, as they fought each other for six wars (2004-2009). The Houthi / Saleh coalition invaded Sana'a in September 2014 and the reconciliation government was overthrown, and a new government, led by Khaled Bahah, was appointed, but months later the Houthis imposed house arrest on members of the new government and forced the elected president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and forced him to submit his resignation to the Parliament before he leaves Sana'a to Aden and retreats his decision he made under the Houthi pressure.

The Houthis dissolved the Parliament and announced a new Shura Council. President Hadi asked Saudi Arabia to intervene to confront the Houthis after the Houthis targeted the presidential palace of Ma'ashik in Aden, where he arrived after he was able to secretly leave Sana'a.

According to the official invitation from the elected Yemeni president, Saudi Arabia intervened in the framework of an Arab coalition against the Houthis in March 2015 to protect the legitimate government and restore it to power in Sana'a. Since that time, the legitimate government has been subjected to a campaign of bulldozing on two levels.

The first is its allies in the coalition, and the second is the Houthi group, which rejects to recognize the legitimate government at all. In light of the developments of the war, the legitimate government, led by Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, faces great challenges while it tries to stay as the carrier of the national project, despite its vulnerability in the areas under its control due to the war's "new parties" that have a great influence on it.

**This paper discusses the legal status of the government after five years of war, in several perspectives:**

**First: factors that erode the legitimate government and the role of the coalition in making that**

**Second: the challenges facing the legitimate government.**

**Third: The desired peace agreement from the viewpoint of the legitimate government and the facts of reality.**

## **First: The authority of the legitimate government**

During the five years of war, the authority of the legitimate government, led by President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has eroded, unlike the period between 2012-2014. The government was more powerful and extended its control over many areas that were under the control or the influence of Al Qaeda. By the end of 2019, the authority of the legitimate government in the "liberated" areas from the Houthis is not complete and some areas are subject to the influence of military generals or military formations, supported by external parties, and this has led to a set of factors that have caused the erosion of the legitimate government, most notably:

**1- Non-return of the legitimate government to the country:** The Yemeni president continued to manage the country's affairs from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and he did not return to the country since 2015 except short visits that lasted for weeks and then he left to Riyadh again. Also, most of the government officials, who are supposed to be in Yemeni lands, live in Riyadh, and the last government - led by Moeen Abdulmalik - tried to stay in Aden, but it was under pressure from the southern transitional council<sup>[3]</sup> militias that impeded the movement of ministers and officials pushing most of them to stay outside the country.

In addition to the return of the government, the Yemeni Parliament should return to the country and to hold its sessions in the city of Aden to confirm the authority of the government as an executive authority in the name of the people. The Parliament held a session in the city of Sayun in Hadramawt in mid-April 2019, but it was lifted one day after the start of the session, as there are parties within the legitimacy and in the coalition that are afraid of the parliament restoring its supervisory and constitutional performance.

**2 - The government's inability to control revenues:** The legitimate government does not have the ability to impose its control over revenues, including oil, communications and customs revenues, as it faces some obstacles. The most important of which are the following:

- The first obstacle is Arab Coalition: The Saudi-led Arab Coalition, the UAE in particular, has prevented Yemeni oil exports in the period of 2014-2018 and when the exports started, the pipelines in Shabwa suffered multiple attacks. The forces loyal to the Emirates are accused of being behind the attacks.
- The second one is the Houthis: Most of the revenues from the ports pass through the port of Hodeidah, where the Houthis receive the revenues in light of the continued disruption to the international port of Aden, in addition to the state of corruption of local officials due to weak government oversight as a result of the ongoing war.
- The third one is that the Houthis group still controls telecommunications companies without any real measures by the legitimate government to stop the flowing of millions of dollars to the hands of the group in Sana'a, in addition to the group's policy of compulsorily collecting tax, customs, and Zakat funds, while the government is not able to convert liberated areas into ideal areas that can absorb people in areas under the control of the Houthis.
- The fourth one is the rampant corruption at the top of the legitimacy pyramid. Some officials and their relatives control some of the state's executive apparatus, manipulate revenues, create corruption alliances within the legitimacy system, build loyalties based on mutual personal interests, and exploit the war for wealth.

What indicates the government's inability to control revenues is one of the provisions of the Riyadh agreement between the government and the "Southern Transitional Council" that arranges the economic aspect, most notably the management of the State's revenues. It stipulates that the collection and deposit of all the State's revenues, including oil, tax and customs, must be in the Central Bank in the interim capital of Aden and that disbursements must be paid in accordance with the approved budget according to the Yemeni law, ensuring that a transparent periodical report on revenues and expenditures must be presented to the Parliament for evaluation and monitoring.

Once the government can collect all its revenues and deposit them in the Central Bank in Aden and spend funds according to the budget and in accordance with the law, this will give the government an opportunity to control its resources and fill the black hole in the expenses, which will support the Yemeni riyal that collapsed more than double during the war years, and to improve the economic situation in general.<sup>[4]</sup>

**3- The proliferation of parallel institutions and armed militias:** During the war years, the UAE established paramilitary formations loyal to it, in addition to parallel institutions such as the "Southern Transitional Council",<sup>[5]</sup> which presents itself as a parallel government that has its own parliament.

The most prominent challenge is the paramilitary formations that are not subject to the legitimate government, such as "Guards of the Republic," "Giants Brigades", "Security Belts", "Elites" and "Abu Al-Abbas Brigades", which are affiliated with the Emirates. This force, estimated at more than 100,000 fighters, who are deployed in eight southern governorates, in addition to Taiz, are not subject to the orders of the Yemeni General Staff, but rather to orders from various leaders who are subject to the UAE. Saudi Arabia also has its own military brigades of Yemenis who are fighting against the Houthis on its borders. They are not subject to the Ministry of Defense in the legitimate government as well. The legitimate government cannot also control the army even in its units, with conflicting orders between the leaderships.

At the same time, the government does not have the ability to arm itself, and the weapon provided by the coalition is very limited.

The government cannot resolve battles without the will of Saudi Arabia or the UAE, and recently there was a clear lack of financial and military support for the Yemeni army in an attempt by Saudi Arabia to pressure President Hadi to accept an agreement with the Southern Transitional Council in preparation for a similar peace agreement with the Houthis.

What further weakened the legitimate government was the control of the UAE-backed Transitional Council over Aden on August 10, 2019. The Transitional Council forces moved towards the city of Zanjibar, the capital of Abyan governorate (adjacent to Aden). The UAE-backed forces managed to take over the city and expelled the legitimate government, which made the government at the face of a new coup after the Houthi coup, amid fears to be legitimized.

This what really happened in early November 2019 with the signing of the Riyadh Agreement between the legitimate government and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC), which kept the STC as a recognized entity, as the agreement gives it seats the legitimate government, and enables it to participate in the government delegation for any comprehensive peace consultations with the Houthis. Security Belts and Elites forces may become under the orders of the General Staff after the "Riyadh Agreement"<sup>[6]</sup>, in case it is implemented, but the rest of the brigades are not subject to it and this is a major challenge for the government.

**4- Increasing Houthi influence:** The continued Houthi control over Sana'a and other northern governorates makes the government's ability to negotiate difficult, and its failure to provide a good model in Aden and other southern governorates makes the government's popularity much weaker than the Houthis.

The fighting fronts are suffering from a continuous stalemate in progress, as the Yemeni government and its allies stopped them on the outskirts of the capital, Sana'a since 2017, and on the outskirts of the city of Hodeidah since 2018. The progress in the Saada and Hajjah border regions with Saudi Arabia has not changed significantly over the past two years, making the Houthis a stable and coherent force.

**5- External interventions within the Arab Coalition:** Interventions of the Arab Coalition in internal Yemeni issues have confused the political and military scenes and this has been reflected in the ability of President Hadi's government to assert the exercise of its authority, duties, and responsibilities in the liberated areas, as the coalition exaggeratedly controlled the liberated areas and the national goals of the government crossed with Abu Dhabi's own goals. This is due to the fact that the legitimate government has put "all eggs in the Riyadh basket", not only in managing the liberated provinces but also - in leading diplomatic efforts abroad in support of the government.

Relations between the government and the UAE have deteriorated since 2017, and this was more apparent in May 2018, when tension arose between former Yemeni Prime Minister Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher and the United Arab Emirates over Socotra, as Abu Dhabi sent military forces to the archipelago in the Arabian Sea under the presence of the government on the island.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia mediated again in this crisis, which eventually led to the expulsion of the new Emirati forces that reached the island to establish an advanced military base on the island. A Saudi military presence was also added to Socotra. Bin Dagher was dismissed from his post in October 2018.

At the end of June 2019, the UAE announced its withdrawal from fighting with the Houthis. Abu Dhabi said it would begin the transition to the strategy of "peace first" in the war-torn country. The UAE forces really withdrew from the fighting fronts with the Houthis, leaving Saudi Arabia alone to face the Houthis. Abu Dhabi also committed a heinous act against the Yemeni government by bombing the Yemeni army forces at the end of August 2019 on the outskirts of Aden and accused the government forces of terrorism. This has transferred the battle between Riyadh, which supports the government, and Abu Dhabi, which supports separatist militias in the south of the country, to a new point in the disputes that began to escalate.

The withdrawal of the United Arab Emirates from confronting fronts with the Houthis,

and the disintegration of the Arab Coalition<sup>[7]</sup> represented a great pressure on the kingdom - which leads the coalition - and a greater pressure on the legitimate government despite its desire that UAE leaves the whole country, not only from the fronts of the fighting with the Houthis. The UAE withdrawal indicates that war has become close to end without achieving any of the coalition's goals other than more disintegration for Yemen, after Saudi Arabia found itself alone in the coalition facing the Houthis. After targeting the oil installations of the Saudi economic giant company, Aramco,<sup>[8]</sup> Riyadh is obliged to consult with the Houthis.

**6- The persecution of the government and its allies:** During the past three years, the Southern Transitional Council continued its defiance of the government in all liberated areas in the south. Government officials have been the target of hostilities by members of the Southern Transitional Council, where the Council has organized continuous demonstrations to topple the previous government "which was led by Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher," and besieged the legitimate government in the presidential palace with "Ma'ashik" and vowed to kill or displace its members who belong to the northern governorates, in addition to exposing thousands of people from the northern governorates to the risk of kidnapping and imprisonment, and banned northerners from entering the country's interim capital, Aden. The "Southern Transitional Council" and its armed formations launched military campaigns to deport people from northern governorates and confiscated their properties.

The legitimate government was, and is still, persecuted and not given the opportunity to manage the provinces that are supposed to be under its control. The government forces that fight the Houthis in areas such as Taiz, Marib, and Al-Jawf do not receive appropriate military support, and the last salary they received was in March 2019.

Three senior officers in Taiz complained that they were forced to smuggle weapons from other areas of the government or buy weapons from the black markets because the coalition stopped supplying them with weapons, and the Yemeni General Staff depends entirely on what Saudi Arabia provides. Despite this, officers say that the UAE and its allies, such as the Abu al-Abbas Brigades and the Guards of the Republic, led by Tariq Saleh, or the "security belts," confiscate weapons being smuggled into the city of Taiz in check points under their control in southern Taiz.<sup>[9]</sup>

Entities and people who support the government have also been persecuted in the liberated southern provinces, especially members of the Islah party, President Hadi's main allies. The Islah Party was one of the parties that signed, in November 2011, the Gulf Initiative that led to the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh, and therefore the Islah party is extremely important for the legitimacy of President Hadi, who gave the Arab coalition the right to intervene in the country to confront the Houthis. Party members have been subjected to a wave of excessive violence by the UAE and its allies in the south, to the extent that the UAE hired a company of mercenaries to assassinate leaders, imams and preachers of mosques in southern governorates, most notably Aden.

The UAE and its forces do not publicly condemn the Islah party, but the Southern Transitional Council considers it a terrorist group!

Targeting the allies of the legitimate government and its members makes its popularity very weak and this makes it fragile and not a full representative of the Yemeni people, if we exclude the supporters of other parties that hold hostility against the government.

## Second: The challenges facing the government

By mentioning the most prominent factors that led to the erosion of the "legitimate government", we point at the same time to a number of challenges facing it, which are difficult to confine to these factors, as it is clear that the legitimate government is struggling to face a set of challenges that affect its position as a representative of the Yemeni people and holder of the consensus national project against other parties that represent factional and regional projects. The most important challenges are the following:

**1- Yemen Unity:** The legitimate government faces the crisis of dismantling the country and its deviation from the national consensus that Yemenis reached in the National Dialogue Conference (2013-2014) to undertake the project of a federal state from six regions.

The war resulted in the emergence of a number of banners calling for separation of the country, most of which appeared in the southern governorates, such as:

**A: The restoration of the southern state:** This project is adopted by the Southern Transitional Council that raises the flag of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the southern state (1969-1990). Any visitor to the southern governorates which are under the control of the Southern Transitional Council can notice the presence of the flag everywhere. The security belt forces in Aden, Abyan, Al-Dhale and Lahj, and the elite forces in Hadhramaut and Shabwa, have been seen raising the flag of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the slogans of the Southern Transitional Council during graduation ceremonies of military recruits and during deployment in Abyan, Aden, Al-Dhale, Lahj and Hadramout.

Tension remains between tribal elements and the Southern Transitional Council in the two governorates of Mahra and Socotra. This tension hampers organizing similar supporting manifestations.

In fact, the Southern Transitional Council has not a big popularity in the southern governorates, including other southern movements which also call for the secession of the south from the north, such as the Southern Movement, which is the oldest advocate for the return to the pre-1990 state in the south, and is still demanding its restoration, but it rejects Emirati and Saudi interventions in the south. Hassan Ba'um (leader of the movement) has previously considered the Emirati presence in the southern Yemen as an occupation. There are continuous demonstrations in Aden and the rest of the governorates that adopt peaceful struggle until the restoration of the southern state. In addition, the southern opponents abroad do not agree with the Southern Transitional Council.

The positions in Shabwa, Hadhramaut, Al-Mahrah, Socotra, and Abyan give a clear vision of what is expected in the case the "Southern Transitional Council" attempts to impose its hegemony on the governorates as the situation may turn into a state of new internal war, which adds a new complexity to the conditions in the southern governorates.

**B. The Restoration of the Sultanates:** The "Southern Transitional Council" inspired the families of old sultans to raise calls for the restoration of the sultanates in the south from which the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was formed.

In addition, the Sultanate of Oman encourages the descendants of the sultanates to restore their sultanates in the south to face the Emirati and Saudi influence. In an interview with the son of the last Sultan of Mahra and Socotra (1967), after half a century, Abdullah bin Isa al-Afar talked about the intention of his family to revive the Sultanate to confront attempts by the Emirates and Saudi Arabia[10] to control the two governorates. It is the dream of some descendants of Sultanates in Hadhramaut, Shabwa and Abyan.

This dream may be popularly supported by residents of those governorates, if they feel the danger of being controlled by the Southern Transitional Council, which they consider as an Emirati tool to control their governorates.

**C. The states of militant factions:** Some of militant factions say they had joined confrontations against the Houthis in the northern governorates such as Hodeidah to have a seat on the table after the Houthis leave their provinces. For example, Abd al-Rahman Shouei, a leader in the Tihami Resistance, said, "When the Houthis go, we want our place at the table of the future government." Tihama has used to be independent since 1921, we consider ourselves under occupation!" Shouei refers to the short-lived Tihama kingdom that existed and ended after a harmony between the Saudis and the kingdom of Imam Yahya Hamid al-Din in the north. Shouei threatened to negotiate with the government with weapons.<sup>[11]</sup>

Such accusative ambitions began to appear in Taiz, where a tribal sheikh recently announced the opening of a camp for those recruits who are ready to withdraw from the fighting front in the southern border with Saudi Arabia after mysterious incidents that resulted in the fall of a full military brigade in hands of the Houthis in al-Buqe that borders Saudi Arabia months ago. It is not yet known whether those returnees have joined camps in coordination with Sheikh Hamoud al-Mikhlafi, leader of the Popular Resistance in Taiz, or it is just an act stemmed from regional bases that were consecrated during war due to intended targeting of Taiz by the Houthis in the north, the transitional in the south, and the forces of Tariq Saleh in the west.

**2- The legitimacy of the Arab Coalition:** One of the challenges that face the government is the legitimacy of the presence of the coalition, and the need of the legitimate government for support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in order to continue fighting against the Houthi coup and factions that are trying to control the legitimate government and end its existence.

The legitimacy of the Arab coalition intervention in Yemen is being shaken because the erosion of the legitimate government. This makes Saudi Arabia's use of the coalition as a cover to intervene under the pretext of fighting the Houthis vulnerable.

What further increases the vulnerability of the "intervention cover" is the UAE attack on the Yemeni army in August 2019, its support for "armed rebellion" in Aden, and Abu Dhabi's announcement of its withdrawal from confronting the Houthis. Accusing the army of terrorism as much as it hurts Yemen, it affects the legitimacy of war against the Houthis, as the legitimate government is accordingly "supportive to terrorism." They are the same justifications that the Houthis claim, so the UAE accusation against the national army increases the credibility of what the Iranian-backed armed group says. It makes the internationally recognized government that gave Saudi Arabia the legitimacy to lead a coalition in Yemen to fight the Houthis a supportive to "terrorism." Accordingly, the government cannot administer the state while "terrorist" organizations are part of its military forces and its military tactics. The Saudi disregard about the Abu Dhabi project in Yemen will make the Yemeni people consider the Saudi-led coalition as a force of invasion and occupation in the country. This will have major international consequences on the legitimate government and its Saudi ally in the future.

**3- Previous Agreements:** One of the challenges facing the legitimate government is the two agreements they signed with the Houthis and the Southern Transitional Council as follows:

**A. The Stockholm Agreement:** The legitimate government signed it with the Houthi armed group in December 2018. It includes the "Hodeidah Agreement", "Taiz Understandings" and "The Exchange of Prisoners and Detainees." There was no progress in these three agreements, despite the international pressure and the role of the United Nations to facilitate the implementation of the agreement.

The legitimate government requires that the agreement be implemented before proceeding with comprehensive consultations with the Houthis.

**B. The Riyadh Agreement:** The legitimate government signed it with the "Southern Transitional Council" in Riyadh under Saudi sponsorship and the presence of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed - the actual ruler of the UAE and supportive of the Southern Transitional. But this agreement, which Saudi Arabia is supposed to supervise, is suffering from obstruction against its timetable, and its fate goes towards stalemate, like the "Stockholm Agreement."

The most prominent clauses that were supposed to be implemented within fifteen days since the signing date, on November 20, have not been done: the return of all forces that moved from their main locations and camps towards the governorates of Aden, Abyan, and Shabwa to their previous positions; the collecting and transporting of medium and heavy weapons from all military forces in Aden; and appointing a new governor and security director for Aden.

As for the items that are supposed to be implemented within a period not exceeding 30 days, i.e. their term ends on the 5th of December, have not been implemented: Forming a government of political competencies for 24 ministries that should be divided between (northerners and southerners), in addition to appointing governors for Abyan and Al-Dhale.

Without the Riyadh agreement, despite the disadvantages it presents, the alternative is an internal conflict in the liberated governorates, and the Southern Transitional can continue to monopolize sophisticated heavy weaponry and external support. It also means going to peace with the Houthis with weak and shaky papers.

**4- The Congress Party:** Another challenge for the legitimate government is the fragmentation of the Congress Party, which is part of the transfer of power agreement in 2011 which is one of three references that the legitimate government emphasizes on (the Gulf initiative and its implementation mechanism, Security Council Resolution 2216, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference). The Congress Party participates in two of them, the outcomes of the National Dialogue and the Gulf Initiative. But this party suffers from an unprecedented disintegration in its history, and President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi needs it to increase his political influence.

Since the killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh in December 2017, the Houthi leadership has pursued the GPC, as did their opponents. It is noted that there are five factions within the party:

- **The Sana'a faction:** It is led by Sadiq Amin Abu Rass, and this faction believes that the alliance with the Houthis in power is the least of the losses.
- **Abu Dhabi faction:** This faction is supported by Abu Dhabi and it focuses on the return of the Saleh family to power. It revolves around Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh as a political wing, Tariq Saleh is a military wing and Ammar Saleh is a security wing.

- **Cairo faction:** It is led by leaders who made Cairo a headquarters for GPC, such as Abu Bakr al-Qirbi, former Yemeni Foreign Minister, former intelligence chief Hamoud Khaled al-Sufi and former Sana'a Mayor Ahmed al-Kohlani. This faction enjoys an external support and an Emirati interest. It has communication with both Saudi and the Houthis.

- **The Riyadh faction:** It is led by Sultan al-Barakani, who became Speaker of the Parliament. He sees that the alliance with Saudi Arabia is important and believes that the Houthis are the first enemy. This faction does not object to return to alliances with political parties, especially Islah party, and has a middle view regarding the party's leadership. It sees that it is possible to accept President Hadi as the leader of the party with limited powers.

- **Legitimacy faction:** It is affiliated with President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and believes that he deserves the leadership of the party. It includes advisers to the President Dr. Rashad al-Alimi and Dr. Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher.

Therefore, the party needs to exert a lot of efforts to be reunified - if possible - and to be dealt with as a major political party. In case it reunified, it should decide whether to be with "Hadi" or "against his legitimacy" as that will have a positively or a negative impact on the "legitimacy" of the government.

**5- International influence:** One of challenges that face the Yemeni government is the increasing number of international players. The government is also under an increasing pressure to make "compromises" with the Houthis, and its legitimacy is eroded with the imposition of a fait accompli that depends on the hierarchy of power on the ground.

The matter goes another dimension, as the United States of America and Britain have managed behind the curtains negotiations between the Saudis and the Houthis through at least two channels. The first is in "Muscat" and the second is in "Amman", away from the internationally recognized government. The legitimate government relies on international recognition of its legitimacy, so by diminishing part of that international recognition, the legitimate government will be pushed to a narrow angle, as Saudi Arabia will do. There will be no choice from the international community other than to recognize the de facto authority on the ground, the Houthis in the northern governorates and the Southern Transitional Council "in some southern provinces. The country will suffer the beginning of new states and new wars.

This dangerous scenario is neither favored by the international community nor by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and certainly not by the legitimate government.

The international pressure is not only on the legitimate government, but the pressures on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are increasing as well with a distorted stereotype among its allies in the West. It is one of the reasons that prompted the UAE to announce the withdrawal of its forces from the battle against the Houthis. These pressures either through the parliaments of countries to prevent arms deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which was already done in Norway and Germany. With the suffering of the British and American governments, US President Donald Trump used his veto to block a bill in Congress preventing the White House from conducting any arms deals with Saudi Arabia.

The United States and Britain are not under pressure. Russia, too, has an ambition in Yemen to obtain an advanced military base on Yemeni beaches. Russian military experts believe that establishing a naval base in Yemen is a strategic goal because it allows Russia to view the Red Sea and the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, which connects that sea with the Gulf of Aden, after Djibouti and Somalia refused to have a Russian base there. It is an old struggle between the United States and Russia, as Russia spoke of a military base in Socotra in 2008. In 2010, the United States spoke of a conversation with Ali Abdullah Saleh about the same island.<sup>[12]</sup>

Socotra remained the seat of a Soviet military base during the rule of the Socialist Party of the South in Aden, until the collapse of the Soviet Union, and then the establishment of Yemeni unity between the north and the south in 1990.

### **Third: The anticipated peace agreement from the viewpoint of the government and the facts in reality**

Despite challenges that face the internationally recognized government, it continues to confirm its intention to reach a comprehensive peace agreement with the Houthis, providing that any solution should be in accordance with the three references (the Gulf initiative and its implementation mechanism, the outcomes of the national dialogue, and resolution 2216). The Houthis and the UAE-backed "Southern Transitional Council" reject the three references and consider them to be completely finished. This seems to be believed by the international community, according to the initiatives and visions presented for a solution in Yemen.

**The Yemeni government has set its conditions for peace in Yemen as follows:**

- **Handing over arms:** The legitimate government requires that the Houthis handover their heavy and medium weapons and withdraw from cities before forming a new government in which the Houthi group will have some seats. It is an important condition for preventing the group from taking power by force again, as this is the essence of "Security Council resolution 2216", but the existence of heavy sophisticated weapons in the hands of the UAE's paramilitary formations in areas under the control of the legitimate government makes this condition include all parties. But the Riyadh Agreement granted the Southern Transitional Council seats in the new government to be formed, a seat on the negotiations table with the Houthis, and an international recognition, so it appears that the delivery of heavy weapons and the dismantling of the STC forces will not happen. Even if those forces are added to the lists of the Ministries of Defense and Interior, they will remain integrated. They represent good solutions for the Houthis, but their ambition is much higher as they will try to keep weapons and the hierarchy of the armed group in its current leadership arrangement.
- **The legitimacy of President Hadi:** The Yemeni government refuses to discuss or diminish the powers of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, while the Houthis reject the presence of the Yemeni President and the leaders of the legitimate government in any coming stage. Some diplomats believe that the formation of a "presidential council" from all sides will solve the problem with the presence of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi within it, but this does not seem possible. In every attempt to undermine the legitimate government by its regional and western allies - and even by presumed local bodies such as the Southern Transitional Council - they remain unsatisfactory solutions that will not be accepted by the legitimate government and President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi.
- **A state of six regions:** The government seeks for a federal state of six regions without modifying the shape of the state according to the outcomes of the National Dialogue, which is rejected by the Houthi group that demands a special region with a port. The Southern Transitional Council also rejects the six regions project and demands the complete secession of the south from the north. It suggests a federal state from two regions in preparation for the secession of the south of the country, although most of the southern movements reject this idea.

The United Nations plays a prominent role in trying to push the Houthis and the legitimate government into comprehensive peace negotiations, despite the stalled Stockholm agreement. At the same time, the UN mission in Yemen and Western diplomats believe that the representation of the "Southern Transitional Council" in any upcoming peace consultations with the Houthis, according to the Riyadh agreement, obstructs the dissolution of the legitimate government / Arab coalition camp. This may be true. But by assuming this, another hypothesis is possible: each party that has an armed force and a region under its control can do the same to obtain a seat at the comprehensive negotiating table, which began to form in south and west of Taiz, where the family of Ali Abdullah Saleh is seeking to establish a special influence region with support from the Emirates in order to press for their inclusion in any consultations and for lifting sanctions on "Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh," who presents himself as Vice-President of the General People's Congress Party.

These accelerating new complications on the Yemeni scene make reaching a "comprehensive peace agreement", based on fragile foundations that do not guarantee the state's monopoly of arms or the restoration of state institutions, a failed permanent experience.

**It can also be mentioned that a set of initiatives and roles appeared in the second half of 2019. Some of them are making progress:**

### **1- Houthi / Saudi consultations:**

Direct and indirect consultations are taking place between Houthi and Saudi officials in Muscat under the auspices of the Omani government and American diplomats. This comes after targeting two Aramco oil plants in (September 2019). The attack resulted in a temporary halt of Saudi exports of oil and maintenance cost estimated at more than half a billion dollars.

The Houthis adopted the operation, but Riyadh, Washington and several European countries have accused Iran of being behind the attack. This major attack may be a motive for Saudi Arabia to negotiate, especially after the Houthis announced a unilateral initiative to stop launching ballistic missiles and drones just days after the attack.

## **Perhaps the most prominent features of the progress in these consultations are as follows:**

- A) It is officially announced by the Omani authorities.<sup>[13]</sup>
- B) Saudi Arabia released 200 Houthi prisoners and partially lifted the ban on Sana'a airport.<sup>[14]</sup>
- C) The visit of Saudi Deputy Minister of Defense Prince Khaled bin Salman to Muscat, November 2019. He manages the Yemeni file and considers himself as fire extinguisher in Yemen after his success in the "Riyadh Agreement". He reportedly held direct consultations with the Houthis.<sup>[15]</sup>
- D) The visit by Omani Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi to Washington and his meeting with the American Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and his confirmation about peace in Yemen<sup>[16]</sup>, followed by a visit to Tehran where he met with Iranian officials. The Yemen file was the most prominent one.<sup>[17]</sup>
- E) Bin Alawi statements to the Washington Post newspaper that "all parties want to find a solution in Yemen."<sup>[18]</sup>

What indicates progress between the Houthis and the Saudis in the US-sponsored consultations was the shift in the statements from US envoy to Tehran Brian Hook at a press conference on December 5, 2019: "Iran does not control the Houthis." He cited the Houthis' initiative to stop launching ballistic missiles and drones on Saudi Arabia, and because Iran wants to continue attacking Saudi Arabia - according to Hook - the Houthi cease-fire means "they are not Tehran's agents." <sup>[19]</sup>

That contrasted with what Hook said in September in an article he published in the American Wall Street Journal, describing the Houthis as "the group acting on behalf of Iran." He also described the Iranian / Houthi relationship as a "strategic alliance".

According to leaks in the Gulf and international press, the consultations are focused on: a long-term truce, opening Sana'a International Airport, and stopping Houthi attacks on Saudi borders. The proposed American initiative indicates: "A long truce for a cease-fire in Yemen under an international auspices and the United Nations, in addition to the deployment of international peacekeepers for a period of six months to maintain security and foster a cease-fire." In addition to "disarming and handing over the Houthi weapons, and rehabilitating and restructuring the Yemeni army to accommodate all armed formations under the umbrella of the Yemeni state, dismantling any armed militia, and handing weapons stores to the Yemeni army." The initiative "includes the establishment of a Yemeni national unity government that includes the Yemeni society spectrum, with Houthi participating by no more than 25 percent, and that it operates under the umbrella of the Yemeni state. It says that there shall be an exchange of prisoners and kidnappers gradually, with the completion of a new constitution, and holding presidential elections."<sup>[20]</sup>

It does not appear that Saudi Arabia is discussing with the Houthis the files related to the internal fighting fronts or a political agreement with the legitimate government, which the Houthis are pressing for.

## 2- United Nations principles:

Martin Griffiths, the UN envoy to the country, developed a set of principles in his vision of a comprehensive political solution in the country.<sup>[21]</sup>

A) The monopoly of power must be returned to the Yemeni government. No Yemeni outside the country should be allowed to use violence to achieve goals. Griffiths considered it a simple but very important requirement, and the militias fighting on Yemen's land must be replaced by the exclusive authority of the state. This can be achieved through a UN-supervised process of gradually transferring weapons from the militia to a new government.

B) The government must be more than just an alliance. There must be a comprehensive partnership between the political parties that now take various aspects, and the existence of this government will require that the differences be resolved through politics.

- C) The government should ensure that Yemen cannot be used for attacks on neighbors or any external aggression. This agreement must be between the new leaders of Yemen and its neighborhood.
- D) The government will adopt and abide by its historical responsibility to ensure the safety of trade that relied, thousands of years ago, on the security of the seas. Yemen will guard its borders, and it will be supported by those who benefit from this assertion.
- E) The Yemeni people will eliminate the terrorist threat that is seen now and ban it from entering their lands.
- H) Yemen's neighbors will ensure the prosperity and stability of Yemen's population through trade and generosity that will eliminate the scars of this war.
- I) The future form of Yemen can and should only be defined by Yemenis away from the stress of war. Yemenis must be ready to negotiate the future of their country in good faith

These principles mean that there is no plan and that Martin Griffiths seeks to find a plan that satisfies all parties as agreed by international actors; and this deferred plan, which belongs to a long series of bureaucratic decisions within the United Nations, seems difficult to rely on unless it is integrated with previous movements occurred in Muscat.

## Conclusion:

### Scenarios:

There is no time for the legitimacy of President Hadi and he must re-read the field situation differently, and realize that the Arab coalition, led by Saudi Arabia, has practically ended its missions in Yemen, and it will not finance or support the current government with money or arms to confront the Houthis in the north or the Transitional in the south.

Therefore, President Hadi has only limited scenarios to create new balances:

- **The first scenario:** the search for other regional and international allies to obtain support and progress militarily towards Sana'a.
- **The second scenario:** Accepting to engage in dialogue with the Houthis and sign a comprehensive agreement that includes Riyadh's agreement with the transitional, but with emphasizing on the condition that the state has the right to exclusively possess weapons, and that the Southern Transitional and the Houthis declare their abandon of violence and form political parties.
- **The third scenario:** the acceptance of partial solutions and a fragile peace agreement that enables Houthi and the Transitional to control the state or disrupt its decisions, and this will push the country to more fragmentation and wars and encourage more polarization and regional and international competition on Yemen.

## B) Recommendations:

- **To the legitimate government:** The Yemeni government and President must return and work from within the country by choosing which city can be secured because making any political solutions for a government that stays outside the country undermines its legitimacy. The government must also fight corruption at the top of the state's pyramid and the war economy in the liberated and non-liberated areas by paying the salaries of the legitimacy-affiliated military employees, who did not receive their salaries for nearly a year.

Depending upon the main factors and challenges that face the legitimate government, it would be better to accelerate the end of war in Yemen and open the way for the national project that should contain all small projects so that the country cannot be divided into states and powers that lead to permanent small conflicts. At the same time, the state has the right to monopolize heavy weapons, and it must hurry out of the transitional phase by regaining an organized army, and ending quotas according to any expected political agreement, whatever the size of the government. The return of state institutions will not take place until after the holding of comprehensive elections.

- **To the Southern Transitional Council:** the movements lose their existence and presence when they become a tool in the hands of foreigners, moving for their own interests. The Southern Transitional Council should change into a movement like other southern movements instead of presenting itself as a parallel authority to the authority of the legitimate government. The Transitional could not present itself outside the triangle of (al-Dhale / Lahj / Aden), what provokes the bad conflicts of the past and pushes society to fight the Transitional in objection of the guardianship and hegemony of one movement as it was before 1990.
- **To the Houthis:** It is not possible to obtain equal citizenship in light of a hierarchical militia that targets the state and society, falsifies the minds of young people and believes in a proxy revolution against its people. The path to citizenship and political participation passes through the ballot boxes, elections and consensus among the people of the same homeland, and this begins with giving up arms and ideas of monopolizing power in a one family or ancestry. Otherwise, a series of wars against the group could turn into successive wars of identities whose bad and shameful consequences cannot be expected.
- **To the Arab Coalition, led by Saudi Arabia:** The Arab coalition must abandon the imposition of the interests of its countries, taking advantage of the weak position of Yemen. Any common interests can be achieved through understandings with the upcoming elected governments. Saudi Arabia should limit the UAE's ambition in Yemen and prevent its interventions in supporting and forming militias parallel to the Yemeni government. Saudi Arabia should also avoid falling in traps that are being set up to enter into what looks like "Taif Agreement" to be between the Houthis and the internationally recognized government that will give the Houthis one third of any future government. Finding a tool to measure the Houthis' dissociation from their Iranian supporters is very difficult, and does not. The Houthi statements about exiting from the Iranian cloak and the European promises to pressure on the Iranians to get out of Yemen and moving away from the Houthis do not mean that such dissociation is possible. The Kingdom must deal with Yemen through the state and to support the state's monopoly over the weapons to be in the hands of the military and security establishment only. Saudi should cooperate with the Yemeni government in disciplining anyone who tries to target the legitimacy of the Yemeni state or threatens regional or international security.

- **To the United Nations:** Going step by step may lead to a lasting peace, but it needs a long time with a deeper understanding of the nature and dreams of the Yemeni society, as compromises in Yemen often end up with new civil wars and may be worse than previous ones on the Yemeni humanitarian situation and on regional and international security.
- **To the United States and Russia:** It is possible to deal with the Yemeni government in combating terrorism and concluding security, military and economic agreements and deals. Yemen does not need further escalation, and it is now ineligible to host new military bases and any competition or race between the two countries in Yemen will give an opportunity for extremist groups to exploit the regional and international interventions to fill any gap, and this increases the chances of turning Yemeni into a focus of threat to regional and international security and increases the opportunity for chaos and wars in this country and neighboring oil countries.

## Margins:

[1] Ali Abdullah Saleh ruled Yemen for 33 years and established a wide network of interests during his rule, the United Nations estimates his wealth to be at least \$ 62 billion. This large network contributed to obstructing the transition period.

[2] The Presidency Foundation is the only modern legitimate institution, as the last elections to Parliament were in 2003 and it was extended by political consensus between the parties, and the extension continued according to the Gulf initiative and its implementation mechanism.

[3] The Southern Transitional Council, supported by the United Arab Emirates, was announced in May 2017). It includes former leaders of the Hadi government who have been dismissed, and paramilitary militias founded by the UAE, numbering 90,000. It signed with the government, through Saudi mediation, the Riyadh Agreement in early November 2019 to participate in power in return for the government's return to the interim capital of Aden, however, this agreement still faces difficulties in its implementation.

[4] Comment by Abdulwahid al-Awbali on the economic understandings- Al-Araby al-Jadeed

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/2019/11/10/%D9%81%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AB-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-1>

[5] For more information on the southern factions and fighting in southern Yemen, read the report by Abaad Center: Open war in southern Yemen

Arabic: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59816.html>

English: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59817.html>

[6] You can read the provisions of the Riyadh Agreement and an analysis by Abaad Center in a report entitled: Agreement between the government and separatists... way to peace in Yemen on ruins of sovereignty

Arabic: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59822.html>

English: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59823.html>

[7] Morocco and Jordan withdrew from the Arab Coalition without any official statement and Qatar was kicked out the coalition at the beginning of the Gulf crisis in 2017

[8] American dangerous game with Houthis and Saudi – Report by Abaad Center in October 2019

Arabic: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59820.html>

English: <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59821.html>

- [9] The three military officers talked to Abaad Center in the city of Taiz in November 2019
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- [11] The Ongoing Fragmentation of Yemen <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/war-and-pestilence-the-ongoing-fragmentation-of-yemen-a-1243730.html>
- [12] HOW TO FIGHT THE OTHER JIHADISTAN  
<https://www.newsweek.com/how-fight-other-jihadistan-70925>
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<http://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/35471>
- [14] Yemeni: Arab coalition releases 200 Houthis and allow injured to travel for treatment
- [15] Can a Young Saudi Prince End the War in Yemen? <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/20/can-khalid-bin-salman-young-saudi-prince-end-yemen-war-mohammed-mbs/>
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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/belligerents-in-the-persian-gulf-are-trying-something-new-diplomacy/2019/11/26/2f7cd13e-1093-11ea-b0fc-62cc38411ebb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/belligerents-in-the-persian-gulf-are-trying-something-new-diplomacy/2019/11/26/2f7cd13e-1093-11ea-b0fc-62cc38411ebb_story.html)
- [17] دکتر روحانی در دیدار وزیر خارجه عمان: کشورهای منطقه باید در تأمین امنیت منطقه حضور و نقش آفرینی فعال داشته باشند
- [18] Belligerents in the Persian Gulf are trying something new: diplomacy
- [19] In shift, State's Hook says Yemen's Houthis independent from Iran <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/12/state-department-hook-shift-yemen-houthi-independent-iran.html#ixzz67ep15KSf>
- [20] Kuwaiti newspaper reveals "provisions" of American mediation to end war in Yemen  
<http://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/35510>
- [21] The Secret of Yemen's War? - The New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/16/opinion/yemen-war.html>



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