



## Yemen and the Middle East Conference The Challenge of Failing States and Transnational Terrorism

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Yemen's ongoing domestic crisis has profound regional and global implications. This is due to the country's unique combination of a geostrategically sensitive location, the stubborn weakness of state institutions, linkages with transnational terrorism, a prominent role in the regional weapons market, and, crucially, the suspected existence and use of nerve gas. These inter-related challenges might constitute a serious impediment to the short-term success and long-term sustainability of the Middle East Conference (MEC). This gathering on the establishment of a regional zone free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery vehicles (DVs) was mandated by the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In this context, Yemen's ongoing domestic crisis thus requires urgent attention by policy-makers in the region and beyond.

### The Importance of Yemen in the Context of the Middle East Conference

While in a geographical and political sense Yemen is far from being a central actor in the envisioned MEC, its political future could easily shape the gathering on several levels. First, the Middle East Conference aims at establishing a WMD/DVs Free Zone. On the one hand, Yemen is a party to all three legal documents banning weapons of mass destruction: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). In addition, Sana'a has embraced the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) call for a Gulf WMD Free Zone, independent of Israeli nuclear policy. On the other hand, when it

comes to the problématique of WMD and proliferation, Yemen might store chemical weapons, depending on whether rumors about the use of nerve gas against anti-government protesters in early 2011 turn out to be true. In addition, Yemen imported various WMD-capable aircraft and missiles and probably still operates most of them (see Table No. 1). In the aircraft realm, Yemeni decision-makers from the North, the South, and the unified country alike have mostly received Soviet/Russian fighter jets and bombers.<sup>1</sup>

The current level of instability and the threat of further deterioration could thus spoil any serious arms control effort in Yemen. This is particularly troublesome since the country, given its history and affiliation with the Arab League, will have to be part of far-reaching regional disarmament initiatives. The prospect of an Arab state with an uncontrolled chemical arsenal is likely to affect Israeli and Iranian calculations with regard to the MEC. Both states are suspicious of the Arab League and tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which is particularly influential in Yemen, have recently worsened.

Second, with a long history as one of the region's eminent weapons markets, Yemen has the potential to serve as a major gateway for illicit weapons, both conventional and unconventional, entering the Arab peninsula and other parts of the Arab East. If the situation escalates, states with an interest in such technology might, for instance, try to obtain missiles and their spare parts or attempt to gain access to sensitive material from the country's suspected chemical warheads. This could contribute to the proliferation of delivery systems as well as WMD

### Abstract

*The preparatory debate of the Middle East Conference is dominated by major regional actors. Politically and geographically, Yemen represents the regional periphery and is not the focus of significant non-proliferation concerns. Sana'a has ratified all three legal documents against nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. However, it is not altogether clear whether Yemen has consistently lived up to all its commitments. The regime of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh stood accused of having used nerve gas against protesters demanding his ouster. In addition, Yemen possesses a number of aircraft and missiles which might be used as delivery vehicles for weapons of mass destruction. The mandate for the Middle East Conference requires their abolishment as well – a task that could be made more difficult by the current instability.*

*Moreover, Yemen's status as a failing state at a geostrategically sensitive location poses profound challenges to regional and global security. Should Yemen become a failed state, human trafficking as well as weapons and drug smuggling could increase. The potential access of terrorist groups to chemical weapons or the means of producing them could seriously undermine regional and global security. The ongoing tensions in the country's North also raise the specter of Yemen being drawn into the wider competition over regional influence between Riyadh and Tehran. With Iran's traditional vehicles of power projection engulfed in the fall-out of the 'Arab Spring', Yemen's instability offers Tehran an alternative route for pressuring Riyadh and its Western allies. Thus, addressing Yemen's domestic crisis is of concern for the success of the Middle East Conference. ■*

**Table No. 1: Yemen's Military Holdings in the Delivery Vehicles' Sector**

Name	Type	Number in Possession	Year of Delivery
MIG-21	Fighter bomber	15	1972; 1979–1981; 2006–2007
MIG-23	Fighter bomber	?	1979
MIG-29	Fighter bomber	18	1994; 2002–2003
Su-7B	Fighter bomber	30	1979
Su-22	Fighter bomber		1980; 1995; 2006–2007
Luna-M/ Frog-7	Missile launcher	12	1983
OTR-21/ SS-21 Scarab	Missile launcher	10	1988
9M79/ SS-21 Scarab	Short-range ballistic missile	?	1988
Scud-B	Short-range ballistic missile	33	
Scud-C	Short-range ballistic missile	45	2001–2002

Source: Modified and updated from Michael Haas and Bernd W. Kubbig (2012) 'Appendix: The arsenals of actors relevant to a missile free zone in the Middle East/Gulf', in Bernd W. Kubbig and Sven-Eric Fikenscher (eds) *Arms Control and Missile Proliferation in the Middle East*, London: Routledge, p. 326.

thereby undermining the MEC. In 2011, protesters seized an army base in Sana'a, while Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) has, on a frequent basis, been able to temporarily control several cities and launch deadly assaults on military bases in the southern province of Abyan. Such developments could offer AQAP the chance to use existing dual-use laboratories or even to build their own facilities capable of producing biological and chemical material in remote areas under their control.

Third, Yemen has the potential to play a more prominent role in the ongoing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Riyadh has a long history of attempts to shape the course of political events in Yemen with which it shares a 1,800 km-long border. Saudi Arabia's different reactions to domestic calls for change in Bahrain and Syria have made clear that it is viewing the 'Arab Spring' primarily through the lens of its long-running conflict with Iran. From a Saudi point of view, instability in Yemen opens up the specter of increased Iranian influence at a time when Tehran's foothold in the Arab world's northern tier comes under strain in the context of the popular uprising against the Assad regime in Syria.

Fourth, a number of narrowly foiled terrorist attacks on U.S. targets and the 2009 Fort Hood shooting in Texas have shifted global attention towards Yemen's status as the home to Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula. Continuing instability in Yemen allows AQAP to regroup and pose a direct threat to the security of Saudi Arabia and other countries on the Arab peninsula. It also puts AQAP into a position to intensify its support for the 'home-grown' attempted terrorist attacks the United States has witnessed over the last couple of years. In short, Yemen's instability has the potential to allow transnational actors to undermine the security arrangements which the region's state actors might contemplate as part of the envisioned MEC.

### The Risks of Yemen as a Failed State

The Republic of Yemen faces various political challenges, persistently endangering its unity and stability. The political landscape is deeply divided across tribal confederations, Islamist movements, and economic as well as military interest groups. For most of his rule, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh skillfully employed a policy of divide-and-rule that included patronage

to curry favor with individual tribes or the effective manipulation of tribal customs to turn them against each other when necessary. Saleh once described his way of governing as "dancing on the head of snakes."<sup>2</sup> This approach effectively determined and characterized politics and decision-making processes more than the formal governmental and administrative structures. It has contributed to inefficient, underdeveloped, and corrupt state institutions and eroded the state's capacity to fulfill its key tasks such as providing safety and security for its citizens, basic social welfare, or safeguarding the rule of law and political participation.

The resulting crisis appears almost overwhelming: in 2011, the 'Failed State Index' of the Fund for Peace ranks Yemen as 13th of 177 states.<sup>3</sup> In addition to thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa, almost half a million Yemenis have been displaced by fighting in the South and North of the country. One third of the population faces chronic hunger. In 2008, the UN World Food Program reported that 97 percent of Yemeni households saw family members either foregoing meals or taking up second jobs in order to pay their bills.<sup>4</sup> This crisis will escalate further if expectations prove correct that see Yemen's population double to more than 40 million within the next two decades. The prospects of Sana'a being able to tackle these challenges look bleak. Not only is Yemen forecast to run out of water by 2015, two years later it will also cease earning income from oil exports which currently support 75 percent of the annual budget. The lack of educated and reliable partners and the general weaknesses of state structures have made international donors reluctant to provide the kind of financial assistance that could help tackling the crisis. According to the most recent World Bank data, Yemen receives about a third (\$21) of the average per capita aid granted to Sub-Saharan countries (\$54).<sup>5</sup>

### The Impact of Yemen's Crisis on Saudi-Iranian Relations

Riyadh has a strong interest in the continued unity of Yemen to serve as a central bulwark against transnational or other regional actors using Saudi Arabia's vulnerable southern flank to undermine its security. In addition, sufficient stability would open up the possibility of establishing the port of Aden as a central gateway for Saudi oil reaching the global market. This would make Saudi Arabia independent from a possible Iranian threat to the Strait of Hormuz.



For Saudi observers, AQAP is just the latest ideological threat to emerge at its southern border following former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's Arab nationalism and South Yemen's socialism. Most of the estimated \$1 billion of annual aid which Saudi Arabia allocated has been spent on direct patronage of tribes.<sup>6</sup> It is thus not surprising that Saudi Arabia's key contact in Yemen was Sheik Abdullah al-Ahmar whose tribal confederation's militia helped safeguard Riyadh's interest during the war in Sa'da. That is why Saudi Arabia is eager to see Yemen's tribes sufficiently represented in any future political scenario. The direct engagement with leading tribes is explained by some as reflecting Saudi concerns about the ineffectiveness of Yemen's security services and about their sympathies for radical Islamists. Critics have blamed this approach for retarding the development of a civic culture that could support modern political institutions.

Saudi Arabia's strong presence is a double-edged sword for the international community. On the one hand, Western and other governments can benefit from an extensive range of informal ties between Saudi officials and key Yemeni decision-makers to work towards the common goal of a stable and unified Yemen. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's vision of Yemen's political future is at odds with the call for genuine political change put forward by the country's reform movement. This became evident in a New York Times opinion article by Tawakkul Karman, the 2011 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. For her, the American aid to Yemen's security services made the U.S. responsible for the killing of innocent women and children at the hands of the regime. She also accused Saudi Arabia of engineering a limited change at the top of the regime while trying to keep the corrupt and authoritarian political and security infrastructure intact.<sup>7</sup>

The ongoing rebellion in Yemen's North has raised the specter of creating yet another theater for the ongoing competition over regional influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is led by supporters of late Sheikh Hussein Badreddin Al-Houthi, a former member of parliament who was killed in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Like other tribes in the Northern province of Sa'da, the Al-Houthis are following a Shia version of Islam as practiced by the Zaidi Imams who had ruled parts of Northern Yemen from 892 until 1962. Constituting one of the most powerful non-state actors within

Box No. 1: Map of the Republic of Yemen



Source: [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen\\_tribes1.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes1.pdf) (February 18, 2012).

Yemen, the Al-Houthis justify their violent struggle for more political independence and religious self-determination with the expanding power of Saudi-sponsored Salafis, which are supported by Sana'a as a counterbalance against the Houthis. Sa'da is Yemen's poorest governorate and stands economically and politically neglected by the central government, while suffering the socio-economic consequences of the bloody war between 2004 and 2010. Saudi Arabia also played a role in exacerbating tensions by helping to set up the Dar Al-Hadith center which was founded by Saudi-educated cleric Sheikh Muqbil Al-Wadi'i who converted from Zaidi Islam to the Wahhabi interpretation dominant in Saudi Arabia. The Dar Al-Hadith, where several thousand students from around the world are taught strongly anti-Shia religious doctrine, is part of the village of Dammaj which lies in the immediate vicinity of Sa'da, the capital of the Shiite dominated Yemeni province. The political context of the Houthi rebellion thus highlights how Saudi Arabia's attempts to safeguard its national security interests by trying to spread its particular interpretation





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of Islam is increasing the risk of domestic strife in Yemen.

### Iran's Role in Yemen

For Iranian observers, Tehran's role in Yemen is to a large extent a function of Saudi-Iranian relations. They admit that, ideologically, Tehran may feel an obligation to help other Muslims in general and Yemen's Shiite Muslims in particular in overcoming state failure and bloodshed. At the same time, they describe Yemen as too far from the strategic calculus of decision-makers in Tehran. However, current events in the region have the potential to change these perceptions as Tehran increasingly perceives a coordination of hostile activities against its vital interest by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. While the United States is seen as shaping and leading the international coalition to put political, diplomatic, economic, and military pressure on Iran, their Saudi partners are seen as applying the same logic at the regional level. Tehran increasingly leans towards the belief that there is a division of tasks between the two. This is important as perceptions have an obvious influence on shaping political deliberations and decision-making.

If Iran sees its regional influence increasingly under threat, particularly in Syria and Lebanon, influential elites might become more willing to engage in areas of previously secondary or even tertiary concern. Such a decision would have important ramifications for the region. Iran then may find Yemen an important strategic space for challenging Saudi interests and influence. This means that, at the moment, Iranian contemplation of building important infrastructures for deterrence and retaliation cannot be ruled out. In fact, media accounts have highlighted new U.S. concerns about increasing signs that Iran is becoming more active in the Sa'da conflict. Local tribesmen describe both warring parties as relying on a comparatively unlimited supply of weapons which can only be explained by outside assistance.<sup>9</sup>

For Yemeni observers, Iranian involvement goes beyond funding and also entails the provision of training facilities for Houthi veterans in Hezbollah's training camps in Lebanon. They also point to the provocative presence of Iranian warships and submarines in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Yemen. The chances of implementation for a proposal put forward by some Iranian observers of a Track II endeavor, which would bring together Iranians, Saudis, and Yemenis in

an attempt to explore the possibilities of better management of their relationships, thus appear increasingly tenuous.

### The Impact of Yemen's Crisis on Regional and Global Counter-terrorism Efforts

Yemen is of special importance to Al-Qaeda. The Hadramawt province in the country's Southeast is the ancestral home of Osama Bin Laden's family. As a failing state, Yemen is highly attractive as a basis for AQAP and its affiliates due to the easy accessibility of weapons. The Yemeni society is highly armed with six to nine million weapons in private hands.<sup>10</sup> Since Yemen is not able to secure its long land border and coast lines of approximately 3,650 km, it also serves as a flourishing international black market for all kinds of weapons. A further challenge stems from the fact that effective counter-insurgency operations require active support by the local population. This runs into the problem that many Southerners resent the presence of the Northern military which is widely seen as an instrument of repression. Southern calls for greater autonomy or even independence are based on a history of political distinctness that saw many Southerners develop a sense of cultural difference.<sup>11</sup> The South was controlled by the British from 1839 until 1967 and allied itself with the Soviet Union as the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen. Post unification, the failure of Northern elites around the Saleh regime to adequately address Southern demands for equal political rights has hardened their positions regarding independence. Many Southerners resent the North's greater religious conservatism as represented by the Islah Party and Saudi-sponsored Salafis. Tackling the specter of radical Islamists consolidating or even expanding their control over parts of Southern Yemen thus requires the rebalancing of relations between the North and the South.

### AQAP in Yemen

The strength and roots of AQAP nowadays are deeply intertwined with Yemeni history. While Sana'a failed to establish full executive control over large parts of its territory, a network of radical fundamentalists managed to create parallel structures mainly in the Northern areas, providing people with schools and social care. This network was further radicalized when Yemeni and Arab Mujahidin returned to Yemen from their fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan in



the 1980s. In that decade the regime used the Salafi network and radical Afghanistan veterans to fight the remnants of the Shiite monarchy in the North and also during the civil war in 1994 against a Marxist secession attempt in the South. Through this, radical militants have developed and maintained close ties to the regime and even became integrated into the security apparatus. The close links between the regime and radical Islamists are exemplified through the persons of Tareq Al-Fadhli, a prominent Islamist, and his brother-in-law, General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, who both sided with the opposition against President Saleh in early 2011. In the past, U.S. observers have criticized Ali Mohsen for his perceived unwillingness to actively pursue those deemed responsible for the attack on the U.S.S. Cole in 2000. Tareq Al-Fadhli stands accused by some American observers of having been involved in the 1992 attack on a hotel in Aden which housed U.S. troops who were on their way to support the UN peacekeeping operation in Somalia.

While the old Yemeni regime's closeness to the Arab-Afghan generation of radical Islamists is well-documented, Al-Qaeda's current operatives in Yemen pose a more direct threat. Al-Qaeda's Yemen branch was set up by the Yemeni national Nasser Al-Wuhayshi, a former confidant of Osama Bin Laden, and two Saudi nationals, Sa'id Al-Shihiri and Mohammad Al-Awfi, both of whom had been in detention at Guantanamo Bay and subsequently graduated from Saudi Arabia's deradicalization program. International observers put the number of AQAP members in Yemen somewhere between 100 and 600 while Yemeni official estimates are in the range of 500 to 700. The group's international relevance is larger than these numbers suggest. This is highlighted by reports about Saudi, Iraqi, and Sudanese nationals among AQAP members. In an indication of transnational cooperation, spokesmen for Somalia's Islamist Al-Shabab have pledged to support AQAP in the wake of the increasing number of U.S. strikes against the group.

Hardly any country in the region is currently more concerned about AQAP's role in Yemen than Saudi Arabia. Some of the weapons and explosives used in various terrorist attacks in the Kingdom are alleged to have come from Yemen. After having seemingly succeeded in stopping the spiral of terrorist violence which gripped the country from 2003 to 2005, Riyadh is now

facing the prospect of AQAP members and sympathizers using Yemen's instability to regroup in preparation for another attempt at AQAP's ultimate goal, the toppling of the House of Al-Sa'ud. The increased professionalization of AQAP has widely been attributed to the influx of Saudi radicals. The immediate nature of the threat became evident in August 2009 when Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula failed in its attempt to assassinate Prince Mohammad Bin Nayef who leads the kingdom's counter-terrorism efforts.

### **The U.S. Focus on Yemen**

The reemergence of a terrorist threat also explains why the United States began to refocus on Yemen after a longer period of inattention. This was prompted by the realization that radical Islamist Anwar Al-Awlaki had been in contact with Major Nidal Hassan, currently awaiting trial for killing 13 people at the Fort Hood military base in Texas, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab who pleaded guilty for trying to bring down an American airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009. Since then, more and more politicians and counter-terrorism officials began to expect future attacks on U.S. soil to emanate from Yemen rather than from Afghanistan or Pakistan. In reaction, the United States dramatically increased its military aid from \$5 million in 2006 to \$150 million in 2010. Wikileaks cables showed that some U.S. support had been diverted by the Saleh regime to fight the Houthi rebels in the North. This reflects the differences in threat perceptions that long plagued the American-Yemeni relationship. Whereas the U.S. and other international actors are preoccupied with the threat posed by AQAP, for the Yemeni government this issue has long been less important than the Southern secessionism or the Houthi rebellion.

The inability or unwillingness of the Yemeni regime to address the perceived menace posed by AQAP has prompted the United States to look for other ways of responding to this ever more urgent security threat. First, the U.S. increased its cooperation with Saudi Arabia which provides crucial intelligence gathered through its extensive network of contacts. Second, Washington made use of this intelligence by employing the same military instruments it began to rely on in confronting the terrorist threat in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Wikileaks cables published in 2010 indicated that President Saleh had consented to the use of U.S. airplanes against suspected



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## Box No. 2: Important Dates of Yemen's Modern History

1839–1967	South Yemen under British rule (Aden Protectorate)
1918	North Yemen's independence after the fall of the Ottoman Empire
1962	Establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen)
1962–1970	North Yemen Civil War between Egypt-backed Republicans and Saudi-backed Royalists
1967	British withdrawal and South Yemen independence
1970	Establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in South Yemen
1978	Ali Abdullah Saleh becomes President of North Yemen
1986	South Yemen Civil War
1990	Unification of North and South Yemen as the Republic of Yemen with Saleh as President
1994	Yemeni Civil War
2004	Beginning of the Houthi Rebellion in Yemen's north
2011	The Yemeni Uprising: major popular protests, Ali Abdullah Saleh resigns

terrorists, but opposed employing cruise missiles. The resulting increase in pressure on AQAP was also privately welcomed by Saudi counter-terrorism officials. In summer 2011, U.S. drone strikes supposedly helped Yemeni army units that had found themselves under siege by AQAP-linked fighters in the Southern governorate of Abyan. Shortly thereafter, further drone attacks led to the deaths of Anwar Al-Awlaki and Samir Khan, the Pakistani-American editor of the English-language AQAP publication Inspire, in September 2011. One month later, U.S. drones killed Awlaki's son Abdul-Rahman and the media chief of AQAP, Ibrahim Al-Banna.

## Yemen's Unrest and the Imperative of Genuine Political Reform

The uprising of the Houthi movement in the North since 2004, increasing calls for autonomy or even independence in the South since 2007, and a broader protest movement inspired by the 'Arab Spring' since January 2011 exemplify the political crises which Saleh's authoritarian rule has brought about. When Yemen's youth reacted to the events in Tunisia and Egypt calling for President Saleh's resignation, his regime unleashed a wave of violence. In the most notorious incident, snipers shot and killed dozens of unarmed civilians on March 28, 2011.<sup>12</sup> In reaction to this bloodbath, many senior army officers and parts of the army followed General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar and defected to the opposition. Their decision did not necessarily signal enthusiasm for the demands of the youth movement. Rather, they reflected a long-simmering conflict within the ruling elite that was caused by President Saleh's attempt to centralize power in the hands of a small number of family members. Before his defection, General Ali Mohsen had been in charge of the repression of the Houthi rebels in the North of Yemen and coordinated support for Yemen's Arab volunteers in the Afghan War of the 1980s. His break with Ali Saleh highlighted the fact that Yemen's military cannot be considered a truly national institution, but merely an agglomeration of different fiefdoms.

Tribal opposition to Saleh's rule is personified by Sadiq Al-Ahmar, the sheikh of the Hashid tribal confederation, Yemen's second largest. Sadiq's brother Hamid Al-Ahmar, a wealthy businessman who serves in a prominent role in the Islah Party, and the prominent radical cleric Sheikh Abdul-

Majid Al-Zindani represent the Islamist opposition. The latter is named by the U.S. authorities as special designate global terrorist. The U.S. Department of the Treasury accuses Zindani of using the Al-Iman University in Sana'a, which he founded, for recruiting and financing militant Islamists. Already in the 1980s, he and General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar coordinated the mobilization of Yemenis for the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation.

## The GCC Proposal and Power Transition

With these leading military, tribal, and Islamist figures distancing themselves from the Saleh regime, the youth movement's call for genuine political reform became increasingly overshadowed by the bloody internal battles among members of the old elites. The Gulf Cooperation Council's proposal, which included immunity for Saleh and his family members, was at first broadly supported by the opposition groups. Only after massive violence against protesters did large parts of the opposition reject this version of the deal and demand President Saleh to be charged for the deadly shootings. Saleh was forced to be medically treated in Saudi Arabia after he was seriously injured in an attempted murder. During his absence, Vice President Abdrabah Mansor Al-Hadi took over as Acting President.

In early July 2011, the government rejected the opposition's demands, including the formation of a transitional council with the goal of formally transferring power from the current administration to a caretaker government intended to oversee constitutional amendments as well as presidential and parliamentary elections. With its stalling tactics the regime hoped to undermine the opposition's unity and unveil their internal cleavages. Tensions have emerged, in particular, between Yemen's established opposition of the Joint Meeting Parties, dominated by the Islamist Islah Party and the considerably less influential Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), and a younger generation of activists that took a leading role in the protests erupting since 2011. Islah had a history of close collaboration with the Saleh regime before taking a more confrontational stance since the late 1990s. The YSP largely represents the leadership of the former South Yemen. While Islah and YSP shared the youth movement's call for change, their ideas for a future Yemen diverge from the emancipatory and liberating visions of a new civic



political culture that has been a hallmark of the early 'Arab Spring'.

On November 23, 2011, President Saleh finally signed the GCC deal, handing over power to Vice President Al-Hadi. This transition was reaffirmed in a national referendum held in March 2012. Yet, the Yemeni crisis is far from being solved. An important step has been taken, but there are still key problems that could see the country descend even further towards instability. It remains an open question what level of influence key political and military figures from the old regime will play in a post-Saleh Yemen. Al-Hadi himself is a former general from South Yemen and belonged to President Saleh's inner circle since 1994. The youth movement's promise to institute a new political culture not only threatened the Saleh regime, but also the tribal norms that, along with Saleh's undermining of effective formal political institutions, have for a long time contributed to Yemen's lack of political progress. The weakness of state institutions, the division of the security apparatus through defection during the protests, and the fact that only some groups of the opposition signed the GCC deal, will undermine the ability of Al-Hadi or any successor to preserve unity and establish stability. The international community and regional actors in particular can play a crucial role in facilitating an inclusive political transformation by offering mediation and monitoring services.

Yemen's government must now live up to the task of creating and expanding effective central authority in order to address the country's various security and socio-economic challenges at a time when such expanded control is resented by people in Sa'da and the South alike. With Yemen further descending into a security vacuum, supporters of Southern independence will be strengthened by the increasing appeal of the model set by Somaliland which separated itself from the failing rest of Somalia. Addressing widely shared demands for greater political freedoms in the context of a more federal political structure could thus help diminish the prospects of Southern secession and a new escalation in Sa'da. What is needed is a genuine institution building and a rebalancing of civilian-military relations in favor of the former. Genuine political reform would also mean that funds generated by Yemen's diminishing oil and considerable, yet limited, gas resources would actually be

used for the development of the country and not to shore up a corrupt system of patronage.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As described, Yemen is more important for the Middle East Conference than generally recognized, for four reasons:

- Yemen might store chemical weapons and has imported various WMD-capable aircraft and missiles.
- The country is one of the region's eminent weapons markets with the potential to serve as a major gateway for illicit weapons of conventional and unconventional nature.
- In the ongoing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Yemen could play an increasingly prominent role.
- Yemen's instability provides a basis for Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula, posing a direct threat to its vicinity and fueling 'home-grown' terrorism in the United States.

In the context of the stated aims of the MEC, the Yemeni government would need to ensure that any existing stockpiles of chemical weapons within the country are secure and that a strategy to destroy all existing material covered by the BTWC and CWC is developed. Yemen's compliance would be facilitated if Israel and Egypt were to agree to sign and/or ratify both conventions. The international community also has a role to play in ensuring close cooperation between the regional member states and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as the implementing institution by pushing for on-site inspections of the declared facilities. International technical support and assistance should focus on training and capacity building in terms of securing and protecting chemical weapons, on implementing the obligations of the relevant conventions as well as the aforementioned national destruction program. Finally, multilateral coordinated security cooperation and active technical support is required in the fields of anti-terror strategies, border control, regional anti-smuggling, security sector reform, anti-corruption programs, and sustainable rehabilitation initiatives for former militants.

The momentous long-term task of setting Yemen on a course towards political stability requires that all factions refrain

## Endnotes

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8. The Zaidi branch of Shia Islam was named after Zayd Bin Ali, the great-grandson of Fourth Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib. Ali's followers became known as the Shiat' Ali, Shiites, i.e. the partisans of Ali. However, Zaidis are closer to Sunni Islam than Shia Islam because they reject the notion of the Hidden Imam, which Ayatollah Khomeini skilfully instrumentalized to argue for the rule of jurists in the Imam's absence, and because they are open to the opinions of Abu Hanifah, the founder of one of four Sunni schools of jurisprudence.
9. Robert Worth (2011) 'Yemen on the Brink of Hell', The New York Times, July 20.
10. Derek B. Miller (2003) 'Demand, Stockpiles and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen', Small Arms Survey Project, Graduate Institute of International Studies Geneva, Occasional Paper No. 9. Online, available at: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP09-Yemen.pdf> (October 12, 2011).
11. International Crisis Group (2011) 'Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question', Middle East Report, No. 114, October 20.
12. Tom Finn (2011) '45 protesters killed in Yemen', The Guardian, March 18.



### Further Reading

- Gabriel Koehler-Derrick (2011) 'A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen', *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, October 3, 2011. Online, available at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/a-false-foundation-aqap-tribes-and-ungoverned-spaces-in-yemen> (February 18, 2012).
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- Sarah Phillips (2010) 'What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building', *Carnegie Papers No. 107*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
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from any actions that lead to further violent escalations. It is incumbent upon all political actors to engage in institutionalized constructive (and transparent) talks over a stable political future of Yemen. This is crucial to build confidence in the near term and ensure an inclusive and peaceful political process, considering peoples' demands for a more democratic and transparent political system, in the long term. The aim should be to develop a binding and realistic plan to approve amendments to the constitution and the election law which make future parliaments as inclusive as possible and strengthen active issue-based political parties as the central ingredients of robust democratic processes.

Regional and international actors have an important role to play as well. First, they need to stop all military support to the government and oppositional non-state actors that could reasonably be expected to be used against civilians and protesters or escalate the confrontation. The international community and Western governments have to recognize that policies aimed at making Yemen a less hospitable place for transnational terrorist organizations

need to address the underlying causes of instability by investing in socio-economic progress, rule of law, and democratic governance. This requires bringing security and development assistance into balance and safeguards against the abuse of military and security assistance for the suppression of dissent.

Such long-term approach needs to cover investment in Yemen's educational system to ensure that the current and future generation of Yemenis will be sufficiently qualified to gain entry into the job markets of Arab Gulf states and can interact with international donors in implementing domestic development projects. Economic reform proposals need to be tailored in a way that they support political progress towards democracy and address the social crisis associated with food and water shortages. The international community should also indicate awareness of the grievances of Southerners through dialogue and provide tailored development assistance in an effort to preserve the internationally supported unity of the country and to sustain Southern cooperation against Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula. ■

### About the ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST (APOME)

The ORCHESTRA is the follow-up project of the "Multilateral Study Group (MSG) on the Establishment of a Missile Free Zone in the Middle East". The ACADEMIC PEACE ORCHESTRA MIDDLE EAST is a classical Track II initiative: it consists of some 70 experts – mainly from the Middle East/Gulf, one of the most conflict-ridden areas of the world. The ORCHESTRA is meeting regularly in working groups (CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS) on specific topics in the context of a workshop cycle from 2011-2014. The main goal of this initiative is to shape the 2012 Middle East Conference on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles agreed upon by the international community in May 2010.

For this reason, these experts develop ideas, concepts, and background information in a series of POLICY BRIEFS which are the result of intense discussions within the CHAMBER ORCHESTRA UNITS. In this framework, the broader normative Cooperative Security Concept will be further developed, embedded, and institutionalized in the region. At the same time, the ORCHESTRA meetings serve as venues for confidence building among the experts. The networking activities of PRIF's Project Group are documented by the ATLAS on Track II research activities in or about the Middle East/Gulf region.

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