



CANVAS  
February, 2013

SUBJECT: Analysis of the situation in Yemen, February 2013.

INTRODUCTION: This analysis tends to cover Situation (I), Pillars of Support (II) Key Opposition Stakeholders and their allies (III), List of potential issues in the campaign (IV) in Yemeni society in the face of the uprising aftermath and based on news reports as well as academic and institute papers. The goal of this paper is to provide the basis for a more detailed planning model for by interested activists and people interested in supporting pro-democracy effort in the country.

#### BRIEF ANALYSIS:

With the ratification of the Gulf Co-operation council plan signed on Nov. 23, 2011 Ali Abdullah Saleh, ruler of Yemen agreed to step down from power after 33 years of rule and paved the way for the country's transition period. The plan set the rules for the months to come. Saleh was to immediately hand down its powers to VP Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi who became President *at interim* until new elections scheduled to be held within 90 days. Elections were actually held on Feb. 21, 2012. In accordance with the Gulf plan Hadi would have been the only candidate at the ballot, voters would not even be granted the choice of voting "no" and the only way the express dissent was through abstention as the Shia Houthis groups, who want independence, did. Nevertheless Hadi was elected with 99.8% of the votes and a 65% turnout and took office on the 25<sup>th</sup> and will serve only until new elections planned in 2014 in order to oversee the draft of the new Constitution and electoral law.

In order to counterpoise the balance of forces and give to process a an aura of democracy the Gulf initiative ruled that the post of Prime Minister shall be granted to opposition forces, then a national unity government would be formed with ministers equally distributed between the ruling and opposition party on a 50/50 basis. Mohammed Basindawa was chosen, he was named PM by Hadi on Nov. 27, 2011 and took office on Dec. 10 in concurrence with the inaugural day of the newly elected Parliament.

The 301 seat assembly is still dominated by former's President party, the General People's Congress (GPC) holding 238 seats. In fact Saleh still holds the position of Party Secretary General and a huge influence is overall given to the number of loyalists who occupy key positions. He returned in Yemen one day before the presidential appointment ceremony, after being in the United States for several months for medical treatment. He is still in the country where he enjoys immunity from prosecution, granted to him by the Gulf plan in order to counterweight the concessions.

The Gulf plan also states that the President is to convene the National Dialogue in order to discuss Yemen's crucial issues and get to a compromise between parties and factions before the next round of elections in 2014. Among its duties the draft of a new Constitution, electoral law, as well as the political system of the State:



whether presidential or parliamentary. The national dialogue should not start before February/March 2013. The committee supposed to organise the preliminary talks is stated to be going well but delegates from South Yemen are boycotting it. If no agreement with south is reached the country risks to fall back into a spiral of violence.

Dealing with the demands of pro-independence groups and movements are Yemen's current top priority. In the wake of the uprising people in the south took to the streets calling for separation from the north. South Yemen was an independent State from 1967 to 1990 when it unified with North Yemen after a brief conflict at the beginning of the seventies. Apart from southern separatists the Houthis control a good share of territory on the eastern border with Saudi Arabia. Other issues include armed Islamists groups and the military that will be discussed further.

### I: SITUATION

Key Elements of Actual Situation (Political, Socio/economic, International and military):

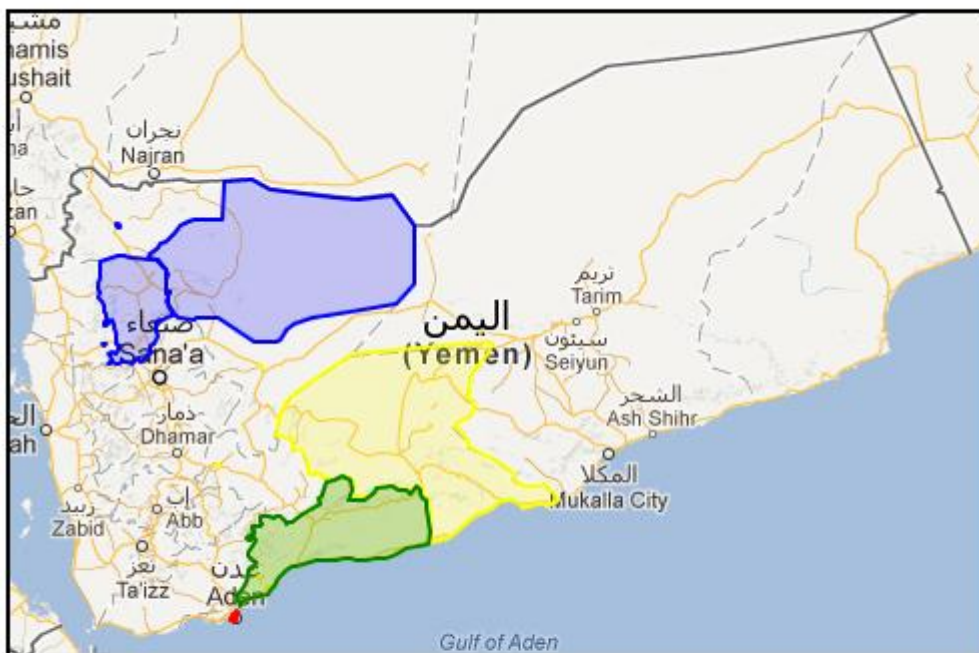
#### *Political:*

1. Given the general situation in the country, ruling is far from being easy. Hadi has endeavoured to govern without much independent legitimacy but is nevertheless the only elected representative of the country. It is for this reason that some of his decrees became effective only after external pressure was applied. This was the case with the removal of some top-tier officers and politicians linked to the former president that was possible only after diplomats threatened to freeze their foreign bank accounts. In the current situation the central government is extremely weak and can hardly claim to be in control of Sana'a, save the rest of the country.
2. Currently the State is representative only of its core élite, the Zaydi Qahtami of the Hashid tribal confederation. The oust of the President and its replacement did not change the power structure (Sharp *docet*) with most minorities and marginal sectors of society (e.g. women) being left out.
3. Opposition. The main opposition block is the Joint Meeting Party (JPM) alliance. The JPM includes very small parties but the leading role is undisputedly held by the Islah (Islamists) and Yemeni Socialist Party with the latter in a subordinate position. Islah's dominant position makes it hard to reach broad based compromise over those issues, like women's rights, where break between sectarian and secular are deeper. The cross-ideological nature imposed the JPM to adopt strategic silence on many issues that might foster dissention in its ranks. However this led to dissatisfaction and disillusionment in its lower ranked members who felt their demands sacrificed. Southern constituents felt a tilt towards the northern community, Islamists felt their requests being bargained because of the socialists etc. Also, it is reported that some of JPM's leaders maintained dual loyalties, like Shaykh al-Majid al-Zindani, a leader of Islah who nevertheless had strong clientilistic ties to Saleh. Opposition parties *per se* do not seem to pose a serious alternative to the State's structure but rather seem to be keen on playing at the same rules.
4. The southern movement, al-Herak is an umbrella organisation that combines several groups that feel marginalized by the central government which is dominated by northerners. The movement contains many

factions each one with its own vision of tomorrow and sometimes they are at odds. Some want full independence, other just a federal setting for the country. Their protest began in 1997 and the initially peaceful movement was met with brutal repression. Hence, the situation escalated. Al-Herak seems to be confusing Saleh's regime with the northern part of the country in broad terms blaming the latter for the crimes of the former. It is also worth noting that the leaders of al-Herak are the same that ruled South Yemen with an iron fist. Within the plethora of groups composing al-Herak there are also armed branches that in recent months secured an agreement with al-Qaeda to get weapons and other forms of support.

- Hadi is in fact a southern, but he fled to Sana'a in the 1980's and he is regarded as a traitor by many in the south.

**The power struggle for Yemen, areas controlled by major parties, excluding Government**



Legenda:

- - al-Qaeda
- - Ansar al-Shari'a
- - al-Herak
- - Houthis

Source: Aljazeera

*Social and economic:*

1. Yemen faces a severe economic situation, and is appropriately considered the poorest country in the region. All indicators taken into exam in this survey confirm such claim (see the attachment to this report).

- The GDP fell a striking -10,5% in 2011, the worst performance in the region in the last four years as well as in average. The situation was no better in 2008 and 2009 with growth rates among the lowest in the region, the only exception being 2010 with a +7,7%.
  - Yemenis are undisputedly the poorest population in the area with a GPD per capita of only 1361,2\$ which is less than half the income of the second worst, Egypt, and far away from the top ranked. Averaged data just confirms the situation.
  - Inflation is the second worst for the second year in a row while it has the highest unemployment rate overall. Although most recent data is unavailable, the trend seems to be even throughout the years.
2. The economy is highly dependent on the – declining – oil resources. Petroleum accounts for 25% of GDP and 70% of government revenue. Yemen has tried to counter the effects of its declining reserves by diversifying its economy through a reform initiated in 2006 designed to stimulate non-oil sectors and foreign investments. Despite these endeavours the country continues to face difficult long-term challenges, including declining water resources and a high birth rate.
  3. Human insecurity was already a problem in Yemen but the situation was exacerbated by the political instability and violence of the past two years. Clashes between opposing factions as well as the risk of terrorist attacks is still very high as is the chance (among the highest in the world) for foreigners of being kidnapped.
  4. Since the uprising started in 2011 Yemen also faces an acute problem with IDPs (internally displaced persons). Their number has exceeded 700,000. In addition there are 7.5 million people in need of direct food assistance and over one million children and nursing mothers in state of malnutrition.
  5. Corruption is endemic in the country and any economic activity is practically impossible without having to pay some “extra”. Transparency international gave the country a score of 23/100 placing it 156<sup>th</sup> position on 176 analysed. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace corruption is the root cause for Yemen’s poor economic performance which threatens the country’s future and wastes vital resources, time, and human capabilities on a national level. Some observers point out that corruption might be a major threat to the existence of the country than al-Qaeda itself. One of the major features of Yemeni society that makes it difficult to combat corruption is the fact that it became part of the country’s culture. Corruption is so entrenched and pervasive in Yemeni society that many citizens feel as though they are powerless to do anything about it.
  6. Yemenis society is based upon local tribes. Such structure prevented the formation of unified and functional state structure but hindered the complete control and subjugation of the population by the central government. 55% of the population is Sunni and the leading establishment is drawn from their ranks
    - Many of them have their own armed militias and clashes with regular forces are common. Quite often local tribes to blow up pipelines in case of quarrels with the government or because they want the release of imprisoned comrades.

- Tribes are all but loyal to the central government and have no sense of the State, as an old tribal motto goes: “my state is anyone who fills my pocket with money”.
  - Among the most problematic are the Houthis, Shias living in the northwest of Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia. Long discriminated they launched a rebellion against the central government in Sana’a, a ceasefire agreement was reached only in 2010 but the level of tension remained hard. They demand a higher level of autonomy for themselves but don’t have a clearly defined agenda. Some analysts stress that all they probably want is for the discrimination to stop and to be treated as equals with other Yemeni citizens.
7. Media and press. Independent media are allowed to operate with relative freedom but there are borders they cannot cross, which are quite blurry at times. Taboo subjects include direct criticism of the president and his family, discussion of Saudi funding as well as any idea that distorts the image of the Yemeni, Arab or Islamic heritage. Also, in May 2009 the Special Press Court was established with the sole purpose of punishing journalists who violate the regulations. In spite of that many journalists, among them Sami Ghaleb, Jamel Amer and Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani have taken in recent years great risks in order to offer a deeper and less biased investigative reporting.

As far as broadcast media is concerned the government maintains a near-monopoly. Indeed there do exist some independent televisions like Suhail TV and there are also the pan-Arabic transmitters Aljazeera and al-Arabiya but those who work with those station are often targeted by the government.

#### *International and military:*

1. At the time of Hadi’s appointment as president the military was still divided. some branches were still held by members of the Saleh family. His son, Gen. Ahmed Ali Saleh led the Republican Guard and the Special Forces while his nephew Yahla Saleh directed the Security Forces. In the past months there have been violent clashes between the Republican Guard and regular army units.
  - By presidential decree the military was centralized into five renewed branches. Both Yahla and Ahmed Ali were removed from their posts. The Republican Guard and Special Forces were broken up ad brigades distributed among the newly established branches.
  - The decree could potentially unify the military and turn it into a force suitable to cope with Yemen’s multiple threats. Most of it rests on how the new military will be used, if for settling personal accounts, as was the case in the past, that would lead only to a chain of retaliatory actions that would affect the whole settlement.
2. Al-Qaeda is present in Yemen since the late 1980s and has established several training camps in the country. In 2009 according to the US National Counterterrorism Centre, Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qaeda merged creating al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It is considered one of the terrorist’s organization most





active franchises, blamed of numerous attacks including the one on the USS Cole in 2000 and some attempted attacks on airplanes. Their aim is the establishment of an Islamic caliphate.

- AQAP has the strongest presence in Abyan province but it is also active in Marib and Shabwa provinces that are located on the seaside of the country and stretch eastwards and north-eastwards from the city of Aden.
  - In the wake of the 2011 uprising AQAP launched an offensive and took control of at least two towns, Zinjibar and Jaar.
3. Ansar al-Sharia (Partisans of Sharia) are an armed Islamist group operating in Abyan province. It is believed it was founded in 2009. Its relationship with al-Qaeda is unclear, some consider them separate entities, others do not. Whatever the case, they gained the support of local tribes that were alienated by the Saleh regime and the US drone war. They want to found an Islamic state with a strict interpretation of Sharia.
- In some small cities and towns, Ansar al-Sharia is functioning as a de facto government, and it is winning the loyalty of at least some of the population. The militants are working from an established playbook, offering the services that the government has failed to provide. They are giving food rations to civilians and providing some sense of security with their own police force and court system based on strict interpretations of Islamic law.
4. Relevant international relations are held with the USA and Saudi Arabia.
- Yemen and the United States have a long established partnership, fighting alongside against al-Qaeda. This approach mirrors the White House's global counterterrorism strategy: to employ small numbers of Special Operation troops, CIA agents and drone air strikes against selected elements of the terrorist group while arming and advising indigenous security forces to tackle costlier long-term campaigns. In exchange Yemen receives financial aid from Washington. Funding was suspended in the wake of the 2011 turmoil but is now being resumed.
  - Saudi Arab has historically had a hand in the internal affairs of Yemen, and a policy that aims to secure influence by "paying" salaries to many of Yemen's most powerful figures within the government, the military and among the tribal leaders. In a state poor as Yemen, any source of cash is welcomed, especially by low ranking officials. In regard to the current situation SA pursues to main objectives, first to secure the status quo interfering (as in Bahrain) or at least mitigating (as in Yemen) the changes brought by the Arab Spring. The monarchy in Riyadh fears a domino effect that might threat its existence. Second, as the stronghold of Sunni Islam, Saudi Arabia looks with concern to the activities of any Shia group, as is the case with the Houthis who are right on the border between the two countries and are said to be manoeuvred by Teheran.
5. Iran is moving from behind the curtains. It is confirmed that Teheran's government proposed funds and weapons to the al-Hirak movement that refused as a condition to the deal was to regulate the flow of money and arms



through the Huthi tribes in the north which are allegedly being supported by Iran who is trying to increase its influence as a regional power by financing any Shia insurgence or government in the region.

## II. Pillars of support

Yemenis current power structure is polycentric, there are at least four centres of power: Hadi's government, armed groups (AQAP and Ansar al-Sharia), northern tribes and southern separatists. For each one the main sources of power will be identified. The way they should be addressed depends chiefly on who looks at the situation and what is his vision of tomorrow. CANVAS approach should therefore make all efforts in avoiding simplistic black and white formulas as the context on the field is extremely complex. Caution is mandatory.

### *Central government*

1. Military (at least officially) and police
2. Sana'a population and its mayor
3. Religion (Sunnis)
4. Economic élite
5. Broadcast media
6. Foreign actors: USA and Saudi Arabia (will back anyone who support their raids against AQAP/the status quo)
7. The Zaydi Qahtami tribe

### *Armed groups*

1. Religion (fundamentalist preachers)
2. Local tribes tired of the marginalization they endured for many years
3. International al-Qaeda network

### *Northern tribes*

1. Shia minority, long marginalized
2. Iran (allegedly)

### *Southern separatists*

1. Former South Yemen population (encompassing at least the religious and economic élites of the region)
2. Al-Qaeda

Youth was intentionally omitted, they do not seem to recognize in any of the following parties and in spite of that do not have an organized opposition that capable of becoming a "fifth power".



### III Key Players and Potential Allies

Individuals considered by this analysis are coming from different sectors of society, but are considered to be important for their long record of opposition to the regime and because they seem to represent, although with a varying degree, an alternative to the established socio-political system in Yemen. It is worth noting that among the “youth” only one leader emerged, at least in the eyes of western press. That is probably partly due to the fact that Tawakkol Karman being awarded a Nobel shadowed any other leader and partly because by means of western geopolitics Yemen is a country of lesser interest than say Egypt or Syria. It must also be stressed that not all of them seem to be fully committed to nonviolence and the rules of the “democratic game”.

1. Tawakkol Karman, class 1979, is a journalist, politician and senior member of the Islah party. She is also a human rights activist and heads, and is co-founder of, “Woman Journalists Without Chains” a group involved in promoting human rights, particularly freedom of opinion and expression, democratic rights and women empowerment. She was involved in first person in organising many demonstrations and sit-in requesting the implementation of human rights, press and speech related freedoms and against corruption. A fierce oppose of Saleh’s regime she was one of the leaders and organisers of the 2011 uprising, and was arrested two times following their beginning. Although part of Islah, a party viewed as Islamist, her position must be considered that of a moderate. She proves to be a strong willed woman, independent and pragmatic, it is not by chance that she is being called by Yemenis the “Iron Woman”. She strongly criticised the GCC plan, demanding there be no immunity for Saleh. In 2011 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights, becoming the first Yemeni, the second Muslim woman and the youngest person to win a Nobel Peace Prize up to date.
2. Sheikh Sadiq bin Abdullah bin Hussein bin Nasser al-Ahmar is a politician and the leader of Islah and the Hashid tribal federation (the most important tribal group in Yemen). He became tribal chief and leader of Islah after the death of his father who held those positions before him. He had an active role in the 2011 protests in which fighters under his command attacked and seized government facilities in Sana’a. Although supporting Saleh’s policies in fighting al-Qaeda he remained critical of the former President in general terms. In 2011 he left the General People’s Congress in solidarity with the uprising. Initially he tried to mediate between the two barricades, but after the incident on March 18<sup>th</sup> in which peaceful demonstrators were shot by military forces, he broke up any relation with the government and joined the opposition calling for other tribal leaders to do the same.
3. Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani is a human rights activist and journalist. He was the former editor-in-chief of the online newspaper Al-Shoura, a pro-democracy news platform through which he denounced civil rights abuses and government corruption. Because of that, he was often harassed, bet up, kidnapped and imprisoned. In 2008 he was sentenced to 6 years in prison for allegedly conspiring with a terrorist organisation. In June 2008, a week after being sentenced to six years in jail, Abdulkarim received the UK’s Special Award for Human Rights Journalism under Threat from Amnesty International.





4. Sheik Hamoud Saeed al-Mikhlaifi is an emerging leader in the opposition rows. A committed dissident of the Saleh era, he became the chieftain in Taiz, Yemen's cultural capital and is filling the gap left by the absence of effective judicial institutions in the aftermath of the conflict. He is in sharp contrast with the tribal leaders in Yemen's north who Yemenis say care more about stuffing their pockets than helping their tribes. He lives a modest life with his wife and 12 children, all of whom, unlike their father, speak English well. During the conflict he led the local tribesmen insurgency against the central government and Saleh, but is now standing up for the rights of his citizens. Mr. Mikhlaifi's secular critics point out that he is an Islamist, a member of the Islah Party. Wary of Islamists' rising influence and concerned about what they say is the increasing impunity of Islah leaders, they portray him as a religious warlord who is promoting tribalism instead of the rule of law. But Mr. Mikhlaifi's resists easy generalization. His eldest daughters are medical doctors, and some of his close friends, from whom he takes advice, are secularists. Another famous Islah Party member, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman, is his first cousin.

List of potential opposition allies to be considered:

1. Sami Ghaleb, Jamel Amer and any other journalist actively promoting independent media and freedom of expression and press.
2. Friedrich-Erbert-Stiftung (Foundation) in Yemen
3. Women Journalists Without Chains
4. University of Sana'a
5. Any NGO working in Yemen, for a comprehensive list see <http://www.ngodirectory.org/yemen/>

#### IV List of issues with potential to be exploited in the campaign:

1. Territorial cleavages: should be the first issue in anyone's political agenda. Ideas and prospects for the future. A federation, a confederation, a consociation form of government, milder forms of autonomy? Whoever wants to represent Yemen must state clearly that he is the representative of the whole country or be ready to bear the consequences.
2. Crime and insecurity: improving the situation with kidnappings will positively affect the economy in two ways: improve tourism, Yemen is a hidden gem, Sana'a's architecture is unique and Socotra features a distinctive flora that might attract tourists. Also, a better internal security should boost foreign investments in the country.
3. Youth and education: Young people, who are the major age category in the country need to be assured that there will be a better future for them, that they will get a job, a chance to emancipate from their fathers (Yemen's society is highly paternalistic). Also illiteracy is extremely high, improving the school network should be prioritised.
4. Economy: a new way to redistribute oil-related income more equally among the population. Growth stimulating measures, like energy sources different from fossil fuels might have the double effect of liberating Yemen from its dependency to oil and create new jobs.
5. Corruption: tackling the issue should be a top priority but it is unlikely that significant changes will occur quickly.
6. Government and Parliament: equal distribution of seats between gender, tribes and north/south axis.



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