



From dream of unity to fragmentation
Political transitions in southern Yemen

special life
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focuses on politics, intellect, democracy, election, political parties, terrorism, freedoms as well as economic and social issues.

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Summary:

The research deals with the most important political transformations in southern Yemen in the period of (1990-2020). In its preface, this research addresses the south in the period prior to unity with the north, the period that followed the liberation of the south from the British colonialism and the declaration of its independence on 30th of November 1967, until the declaration of unity in 1990. It deals with circumstances and challenges that affected the political, economic, cultural, and social path of the southern state.

The preface includes the topic of relationship between south and north Yemen before achieving the unity, and the conditions that prevailed during that period. The relationship between north and south witnessed many changes and it was strained so that conflict broke out between the two parts twice and then the situation developed positively into internal and external deals that led to the establishment of the Yemeni unity.

The research sheds the light on the most prominent factors of change in Yemen in general and in the south in particular, negatively or positively, with reference to the political forces that contributed, in one way or another, to that change - not to ignore the circumstances, consequences and repercussions during the period targeted in this research. The transformations include the Yemeni unity, the war that followed, the most important stages of political conflict and wars, the popular revolution - the Yemeni version of the Arab Spring that led to the power transition and the holding of the National Dialogue Conference, and then the coup, led by the Houthis and its allies, which led to a comprehensive war that has not yet ended, despite the fact that five years have passed since its outbreak.

The importance of this topic comes in the context of transformations that Yemen experienced in general and studying all its aspects in order to get a knowledge of the situation that can dismantle the structures that have been semi-closed for a long period of time, and to clearly read the current reality and the local, regional and international circumstances, as well as the consequences.

To achieve the desired goals, the researcher used the historical method to track historical changes and events, as well as the descriptive and analytical approach being the closest and most useful in dealing with the topic and presenting its contents through description and analysis.

Research Entry:

The South... from revolution to unity

The Southern Yemen witnessed several changes and lived in different conditions and stages, starting with getting its national independence from the British colonialism in the late 1967s through the time period that followed the independence, until the declaration of unity with the northern Yemen before the outbreak of war between south and north that changed the Yemeni scene in general and the situation of the south in particular.

After the departure of the British colony from southern Yemen, and the announcement of the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the National Front, the largest faction of the revolution that declared armed struggle in the October 1963 revolution against the British colony, took over the country through a variety of leftists, nationalists, military personnel, trade union figures, and intellectuals whose roles emerged during the revolution phase.



Accordingly, the first round of internal confrontation erupted soon between two major factions of the front, which ended in June 1969 with the control of the leftist movement over the power in the south. The movement adopted the leftist trend as the political option, in contrary to the neighboring regional systems. Thus, the regime in southern Yemen became accused of hostility against the oil-rich neighboring countries, which are linked to an alliance with the West in general and with America in particular¹. It was the only Arab system that officially adopted Marxism and began the stage of applying the Marxist regime to tightly control all the power, the state institutions and society. But then a new dispute arose between the two parties of the government, the first was led by President of the Republic Salem Rubai` Ali, known as (Salmeen), and the second party was led by Abdel Fattah Ismail,

the Secretary-General of the National Front. They disputed over the model of socialism should be applied in the south.. While Salmeen's party wanted to apply the Chinese Mao Zedong thought, the other party wanted to follow the Socialist Theory of the Soviet Union. In addition to what was going on within the leadership of the ruling front in the south, the involvement of the ruling regime in Aden in the assassination of president of the northern Yemen, Ahmed al-Ghashmi, in June 1978, played a decisive role in igniting internal conflict in the south, as opponents of Salmeen saw that the assassination of al-Ghashmi was a good opportunity for them to get rid of President Salmeen, especially since the killing of al-Ghashmi was done with a suicide bomb bag, conveyed to al-Ghashmi by an envoy from the ruling regime in Aden.

The confrontations in the south led to the killing of President Salmeen and a number of his aides. The opponents of Salmeen took over the government under the leadership of AbdulFattah Ismail, who did not complete two years in power as he found himself surrounded by critics from his comrades, so that he submitted his resignation from the power and the leadership of the Socialist Party, (founded in October 1978 by the National Front and leftist parties that allied with it). Then Ali Nasser Mohamed was the successor of Ismail in the power and the leadership of the Socialist Party, but soon another dispute broke out between the president who holds power and the ruling party, and the prominent military leader in the southern Army, Ali Antar.



This dispute led to a round of a conflict that was the fiercest and the bloodiest in the history of the south, in January 13, 1986, in which thousands were killed - some sources estimated them as 10,000 - during ten days of battles. The followers of Ali Nasser were eventually defeated, and at least 30,000 of them fled to the north, where they formed an alliance with President of the north Ali Abdullah Saleh. Most of associates of Ali Nasser were from the governorates of Abyan and Shabwa, while most of their opponents were from al-Dhale and Lahj. The division between the two groups remained to be an important political rift until today².

The opponents of Ali Nasser assumed power, and Ali Salem al-Baidh became the Secretary-General of the Socialist Party, which means that he became the first man in the state. The negotiations on the unity between north and south began, and resulted in the November 30, 1989 agreement that was followed by the declaration of Yemeni unity in May 1990.

Relationship between South and North

The British colony worked hard to separate the South and keep it under its control through erasing the Yemeni identity, creating new local names outside the recognized Yemeni identity, forming tribal entities, almost 22 entities, emirates, and sheikhs, so that the colony can group all these entities under the name of (Arab South), in an attempt to split the Yemeni identity³.

The imamate regime in the north worked to isolate the north from the south, committed to its agreements with the British colony to guarantee his stay in power. But the national movement that was crystallized in north and south, realized early the dangerous British policy to dedicate the separation with support from small forces and entities to meet the desire of the British colony in the south and imamate tyranny in the north. Therefore, the issue of Yemeni unity topped

the list of national issues in the agenda of the Yemeni political movement that opposed colonialism and imamate. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the position from the Yemeni unity was a standard of nationality, integrity and affiliation for every political force that appears in north and south. The forces and organizations that did not adopt the unity either disappeared or stood against it⁴.

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The issue of Yemeni unity topped the list of other national issues in minds of the Yemeni political movement members, who opposed the British colonialism and the Imamate. The armed conflict between the two parts in the seventies was an impetus to enter into consultations on achieving the unity
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With the fact that the Yemeni unity was important for the political elites in south and north, the outbreak of internal conflicts in each part- the September 1962 revolution against the Imamate rule in the north and the October 1963 revolution against the British occupation in the south hampered the achievement of the unity. However, the unity remained on the agenda of political dialogues and national literature. It had also overwhelming presence in minds of the Yemeni people and their aspirations as it comes in the forefront of the goals of the revolution. What confirms the strong attendance of the unity, after two rounds of armed conflict between south and north in 1972 and 1979 were immediately followed by direct engagement in negotiations

on achieving the unity. In the first stage, the two leaderships signed the Cairo Agreement in October 1972, and the Tripoli / Libya Statement in November of the same year. In the second stage, negotiations resulted in the signing of the Kuwait Statement in March 1979. All agreements included the commitment of the two parties to striving for the unity, even though each regime was supporting the opponents of the other regime. Sanaa embraced the opponents of the regime in Aden, which also supported the socialist opponents who were involved in an armed struggle against the Sanaa regime since the mid-seventies, under the banner (the National Democratic Front), which was formed in Aden in 1976 by a number of left-wing parties that opposed to the Sanaa regime,

In that also supported the socialist opponents to Sana'a regime under the banner 'National Democratic Front', but after events of January 13, 1986, when the south witnessed a bloody conflict between two ruling factions [Zumrah and Tughmah], in which thousands of people were killed, the balances changed and divisions increased between the two factions. The conflict resulted in an apparent political rift that remains until now

including the Revolutionary Democratic Party, the Revolutionary Resistance Organization, the Labor Party, and a faction from the Baath Party. The Front aimed to topple the regime in Sana'a and to achieve the Yemeni unity⁵.

In the beginning of the eighties, tension between the two regimes eased, and support to opposition activities in both countries stopped. In the late eighties, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen faced (south) growing crunch as a result of the civil war and the loss of the Soviet care following the collapse of the Soviet Union's economy. On the contrary, the north was in a relatively stronger political and economic situation than the south. This was the background on which the unity was founded⁶.

"The cold war ended for the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union, the traditional ally of the southern Yemen, and the subsequent unification of eastern Germany with western Germany⁷.

The Unity and War (1990-1994)

The unity agreement signed in 1989 included an arrangement to share power equally between the General People's Congress and the Yemeni Socialist Party at all levels of government during the transitional period. A presidential council, consisting of five people, was formed. Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of northern Yemen, presided the council, and Ali Salem al-Baidh , President of southern Yemen, was Vice-President⁸. The structures of an integrated system were formed: the constitution, the parliament, elections, and merging bureaucratic institutions, opening the way for freedom of political expression. The press flourished, and parties and unions were established⁹, and conferences were held, after all this was prohibited in both parts before the unity.



On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place to open a new stage, at the Arab and international levels. Yemen had to choose either to stand by Iraq and its invasion or by Kuwait and with Arab and international support to Kuwait issue. As a result of the positions of the Yemeni diplomacy in the Security Council, in which Yemen was a non-permanent member, especially when Yemen disagreed with the Security Council's decision in November 29, 1990, to use force against Iraq unless it withdraws from Kuwait within the deadline, Yemen's relationship with the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, has worsened, and the reaction was disastrous for Yemen, as the Gulf States suspended all direct loans to Yemen, through Gulf and Arab funds, the Western support to Yemen decreased, especially the US support, and more than 700,000 Yemeni expatriates were deported from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Yemen lost an important source of income,

represented by expatriates' remittances to their families, which reached at the end of the eighties about US \$ 500 million annually¹⁰. This means that more burdens were added to Yemeni, in addition to internal and external challenges to the young state, which was established only 70 days ago before the Gulf crisis.

Soon differences began to appear between the partners of the unity (the General People's Congress party in north and the Yemeni Socialist Party in south). Although they agreed on a formula for sharing power approximately 50/50, but the two parties were preparing retreat strategies and contingency plans in anticipation of any expected conflict, according to Michael Hudson*, professor of international relations at Georgetown University, who believes that "each side sought to enhance its military capabilities and only verbally contributed to the unification of the armed forces, and each party sought to secure external support for it,

and it appears that both parties had an implicit interest in impeding the development of independent political forces and in spoiling the efforts of the emerging civil society, aiming to enter into Yemeni politics in a serious manner."¹¹

The two parties blamed each other for the crisis, but the positions and statements from the two parties a few months after the declaration of the unity reveal that each party was seeking to achieve its own goals and to generalize its previous experience of ruling at the level of Yemen in general. Each party worked in two parallel lines. The first line was the commitment to the unity agreement, the new constitution, and the integrated institutions, and the desire to obtain the greatest degree of popular support, given the fact that the unity was important in the popular sentiment of all Yemenis in north and south. The second line was to work in all possible ways, according to their own vision to enhance their capabilities, expand their influence, and enable their elements to be exist in the most important positions in the central state's institutions.

While each party continued to monopolize the local authority centers in each part of the country. The General People's Congress party controlled local authority centers in the northern regions and the Socialist Party controlled local authority centers in the southern regions, except very few cases, where the two parties gave way to limited participation of other political forces, under certain circumstances.

It was expected that the parliamentary elections in April 1993 would contain the transitional period disputes and establish a new era of relationship, but the quarrels have deepened further. In June of 1993, the political crisis began to cloud the atmosphere of the political scene in the capital, Sana'a, where the president, government and parliament and in the second capital, Aden, where the vice president decided to stay and announced a number of demands and conditions, later known as "the 18 points", including the demands of financial and administrative reforms, the merging of the armed forces, and the prosecution of perpetrators who committed political assassinations

(Ali Salim al-Baidh and his supporters accused the Saleh regime of being behind the assassination of a number of the Socialist Party's leaders), the adherence to the state's general budget and not to exceed it, the subjection of the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry to the decisions of the cabinet alone, not to interfere in the state's bodies and institutions, correcting the status of the General Prosecutor and the Judiciary and ensuring their independence, establishing an advisory council that oversees the judiciary, the media, and the civil service, carrying out an administrative change and establishing a local government with financial

and administrative powers. The demands, from the viewpoint of observers, aimed to "deprive Saleh from most of his powers, and stop his spending from the public budget – in some years Saleh randomly spent almost one-third of the budget¹².

All demands were publicly accepted, so Saleh announced his approval of it. However, the crisis continued and mediation committees between the two parties were formed and later expanded to become dialogue committees between all forces. All political efforts ended with the document of "covenant and agreement,"



which was signed by Yemeni parties and political organizations in an official ceremony held in the Jordanian capital, Amman, in February 1994, under the supervision of King of Jordan, Hussein bin Talal, at the presence of the Secretary-General of the Arab League at the time. But tension remained in some areas and there was an exchange of fire between the camps of the two sides, until the outbreak of all-out war in the beginning of May of 1994.

Days after the outbreak of the war, al-Baidh announced the secession of southern Yemen, and the formation of a new leadership under his leadership, but that announcement did not change anything, in favor of al-Baidh, in the course of the war,

which lasted nearly two months, May through July, 1994. The war ended with the victory of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who succeeded in attracting a number of southern political, social and military components, especially those that were affected by the conflicts of the past period, including the supporters of former southern president Ali Nasser Mohammad, who lost the battle of January 13, 1986, the last round of armed conflict in the south before the unity. Saleh absorbed them within the army and security institutions, and most of them were leaders of axes, fronts, and military units, led by the military commander AbdRabboh Mansour Hadi*, who then served as Acting Minister of Defense.



The Attempts of reform (1994-2006):

After a short period of the war, anti-war vision was taking shape in southern Yemen due to repercussions. Some southerners and their allies from the leftist movement in the north began to see that the war destroyed the partnership agreement upon which the Yemeni unity was based in the year 1990, and replaced it with the exclusion of southerners, especially those affiliated with the Socialist Party. The marginalization against southerners led to the emergence of the "southern issue", which is based on the post-war reality in the south, so that demands to address the new grievances in the south and repercussions of the war in general had surged.

In the period 1994-2006, the Saleh regime had unilaterally controlled all of the Yemeni areas, after the war enabled it to exclude the southern party, led by its former deputy, Ali al-Baidh. Saleh's regime's hegemony began to tighten day after day. But this did not prevent the emergence of opposition voices, accusing Saleh and his regime of excluding the southerners and preventing thousands of them from their jobs.

Although Saleh appointed a southern vice president, AbdRabboh Mansour Hadi, and southern figures assumed important positions in the government, as well as in the army and security, but the opposition began to expand, declaring its rejection of Saleh's policy of controlling the power through constitutional amendments that canceled the five-member presidential council, and replaced it with the President of the Republic with wider powers.

Saleh also began appointing his relatives in sensitive locations, particularly in the leadership of security and military institutions.

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Al-Baidh's declaration of separation in the 1994 war did not change anything in its course, but southerners saw that this war nullified the partnership agreement upon which the Yemeni unity was based in the 1990 and replaced it with a reality based on exclusion that resulted in the emergence of the "southern issue"
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The political opposition to the ruling regime began, especially from leaders in the Socialist Party and its allies from other political parties, whose position against the war seemed to be close to the position of the Socialist Party. Thus, those parties formed the Supreme Coordination Council of the Opposition Parties in 1995. The most prominent goals of the council were to achieve a national reconciliation and to remove the impacts of war and secession¹³.

The socialist and its allies continued to demand "the reform of the path of the unity and the elimination of the impacts of the 1994 war." Later, this demand became a political slogan, opposing to the authority and its practices. And then the slogan itself turned into a broad trend known as "the trend of reforming the path of the unity". The trend was led by the two socialist leaders, Mohammad Haydara Masdus and Hassan Ba'um. Many southerners, including civil and military cadres, joined the trend that opposed to the regime and rejected what they described as the exclusion and marginalization policy against southern leaders and many civil and military cadres.

Yemeni politicians believe that the effects of the 1994 war were not limited to the south, but reflected on the level of democratic openness that the country witnessed between 1990 and 1994. The crackdowns increased and the democratic margin became narrower than before, the corruption spread and tendency of plundering and looting grew up, in addition to more security and administrative instability.

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The "Reform of the Path of Unity" movement had arisen under the leadership of Masdus and Ba'um, but the opposition expanded due to what Saleh did after the war, focusing power in his hand through constitutional amendments that canceled the formula of the Presidency Council, and appointing his relatives in sensitive positions within the security and military institutions
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The repression and marginalization extended to the regime's partners in the war, including southern leaders and the Islamic Islah party, which preferred to leave the government of bilateral coalition with Saleh's party and joined the opposition against Saleh. So the Islah party suffered a lot of defamation and restrictions due to partnership with GPC¹⁴. In the 1997 parliamentary elections, the ruling General People's Congress party won the majority of seats, while the Socialist Party boycotted the elections because the results of the 1994 war.

The rejection and protest against Saleh and his regime took many shapes in the south, but demands of protesters remained within the framework of a united Yemen, and there was no call for separation from the protest movements inside, unlike those that were formed abroad, such as the National Front for the Opposition, the movement of self-determination, then the Southern Democratic Assembly.¹⁵ The latter exceeded the demands of other separatists

to explicitly claim what it called (the liberation of the Arab South), not southern Yemen, relying on the name given by the British colony to the southern governorates in the first years of its occupation, which lasted about 130 years.

During this period (1994-2006), different forms of opposition appeared in some areas of the south, expressing their rejection to practices of the ruling regime. The People's Committees were formed in August 1998 in a number of southern governorates, and then the Assembly of the Sons of Southern and Eastern governorates was formed in November 2001. These components aim to defend the rights of the people of the southern governorates of employment, housing, and the distribution of land. On January 13, 2006, the Reconciliation and Tolerance Meetings were organized between the southerners themselves to turn the page of bloody struggles for power, especially the events occurred on January 13, 1986, which were described as massacres.¹⁶

The Return of retired people and the launch of the Southern Movement

On the economic side, the state failed to address the economic crisis or to stop the deterioration in various economic sectors. The indications of that failure appeared in the first seven years after the establishment of the unity (1990-1997). The gross national income decreased significantly, especially in the agricultural sector, which declined to the half. There was an increase in imports estimated to US \$ 379 million, investment decreased by 2.8 percent, and this led to an increase in the inflation rate by 26.7 percent, and prices tripled comparing to prices in 1990. As a result of this deterioration, more than half of the Yemeni society became below the poverty line by 51.2 percent, as the average per capita income decreased, and unemployment rate increased. The unemployment rate reached 40 percent in late 1990s.¹⁷

On the level of Yemen in general, the political opposition strength declined in favor of the ruling General People's Congress party after it tightened its grip on public institutions. The GPC could strengthen its power after it managed to achieve a sweeping victory in all electoral processes, starting with the parliamentary elections in 1997, the first presidential elections in 1999, and local elections in 2001, and then the parliamentary elections in 2003, and the second presidential elections that coincided with the local elections in 2006.

To confront the broad control of President Saleh and his unilateral measures, the main opposition parties gathered to form a new bloc called the Joint Meeting Parties, including the Yemeni Islah party, the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserite Unionist Party, the National Baath Party (the faction of the Iraqi Baath party),

the Al-Haq Party and the Union of Popular Forces. The Joint Meeting Parties formed a single political case in the entire Arab region and not only in Yemen, but that did not limit the power of the ruling regime and its grip on the army and security institutions, as well as the legislative, judicial and executive authorities.

With the end of the presidential elections in the fall of 2006, the last electoral round ended and political rivalry cards were folded through the polls to start a period of high tension. The opposition felt that the horizon of political change had been blocked, while the GPC, led by President Saleh, felt that obtaining about 80 percent of the votes in the last elections gives it the absolute right to run the affairs of the country without making any concessions to the opposition. The political scene seemed to be more complicated, and the doors of dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition closed.

The governorate of Saada (north of the country) witnessed, during the years 2004 and 2005, two rounds of confrontations between the government forces and the Believers Youth, led by its founder and leader Hussein Badraddin al-Houthi, and it was known as the Houthi group. Saleh was able to put down the first rebellion in 2004 by killing Hussein al-Houthi, and the second round ended with an unannounced agreement.



In the beginning of 2007, the southern Yemen witnessed the emergence of a protest movement, led by military and civilian retirees, who complain about the forced arbitrary retirement from their jobs after the 1994 war. The protesters demanded their return to work and improving their living conditions.

In July 2007, the southern popular movement, led by the pensioners' associations, began escalating the situation and called for a political end to exclusion, marginalization, corruption and better living conditions for those affected by the 1994 summer war. The most prominent mass activities in Aden were led by the Supreme Coordination Council for Retired Associations on July 7,

headed by Brigadier Nasser Al-Noubah, in addition to a series of sit-ins and protests that were carried out by military retirees in al-Dhale governorate, under the banner of the Retired Association, led by Brigadier Abdo al-Mutari, one of the most prominent military retirees, and who was also the spokesperson of the Supreme Coordination Council for Retired Associations.

The security authorities faced those protests using the excessive repression, detentions, deformation and accusations of separation¹⁸, and it seemed that Saleh did not want to listen to any demands in light of his project of the inheritance of power to his son, Ahmed Ali, after him.

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Early in 2007, southern Yemen was on a date with a protest movement, led by military and civilian retirees. In 2011, the Yemeni popular revolution gave the southern cause another factor of victory, as there are common factors between the two revolutions
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The Southern Movement's base later expanded and included various categories of academics, lawyers, students, and journalists. The branches of political parties, led by the Yemeni Socialist Party, and local branches of the Islah, Nasserite, and Ba'ath parties quickly used their networks to support the movement, which was calling for more job opportunities for southerners, and an end to corruption, and a greater share of oil profits for the southern governorates, where there is a common complaint that southerners are excluded in the areas of business, jobs, politics and the army¹⁹.

When the rate of repression increased, the anger of the street increased and rights-related demands turned into political demands, so that the southern issue of the protesters turned into self-determination issue and a country for the southern people. This change aggravated the situation in the south in light of weak and inexperienced opposition²⁰.

In the years 2008 and 2009, tribal leaders and ordinary residents in the countryside joined the Southern Movement (Hirak).

So a number of political components were formed under the banner of the Southern Movement, including the National Authority For Liberation and Independence, headed by Brigadier Nasser al-Nuba, one of the most prominent founders of the military retired personnel societies, and the Supreme National Council for the Liberation of the South, headed by Hassan Ba'um, a leader in the Socialist Party and in the Southern Movement, and the Southern Peace Struggle Movement, known as (Najah). The Southern Movement held its first general conference in late March 2009. In the conference, it decided to rotate its presidency periodically among its leaders every six months.

The first term of presidency was assumed by the Parliament member, Salah al-Shanfara²¹. In the middle of 2009, Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli, who was one of President Saleh's most prominent allies, joined the Southern Movement and then he announced the formation of the Revolutionary Command Council, under his leadership. A number of the Southern Movement's leaders and grassroots joined al-Fadhli.

In late May 2009, Ali Salem al-Baidh, the last president of southern Yemen - vice president Saleh in a unified Yemen during the period (1990-1994), appeared in a televised speech supporting the Southern Movement and renewing his call for secession from the north, and ending the Yemeni Unity. Al-Baidh's call constituted a strong tributary for the Southern Movement at home. A few days later, al-Fadhli announced the formation of an inclusive entity for the components of the Southern Movement called the Supreme Council for the Peaceful Revolution, led by al-Baidh. The components remained to be independent and intact, while al-Baidh's council became the largest of those components, especially in the later period.

Although armed clashes between the government forces and southern gunmen in the Habailain-Radfan area of Lahj governorate, and in the city of Zinjibar, the capital of Abyan governorate, the general approach of the Southern Movement remained

the peaceful struggle, as none of the components of the Southern Movement or its leaders issued an explicit call to use violence.

The Popular Revolution and the Southern Movement's positions (2011-2014)

When the peaceful popular revolution began at the beginning of the year 2011, the Southern issue gained an additional element of victory, especially since there are many common factors between the peaceful movement, expressing the southern issue, and the peaceful revolution. The first of those factors were the struggle against a common opponent, adopting the peaceful approach to achieve goals. The peaceful revolution expressed the demands of millions of Yemenis in north and south alike. It is not true that the revolution was a northern matter and that the southerners had nothing to do with²².

The activities of the popular peaceful revolution prevailed in most of the Yemeni governorates in north and south. The revolutionaries gathered in the public squares in north and south. They set stages and held activities to express the revolution's demands and goals, which seemed to be similar to what the first waves of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt did. After the fall of Husni Mubarak's regime in Egypt at the beginning of February 2011, the enthusiasm of the Yemeni people escalated, especially in the cities of Taiz and Aden, which witnessed the killing of the first group of youth protesters on February 16, 2011. Muhammad Ali Shaen was the first martyr of the Yemeni peaceful revolution. Activities continued in Aden,

as in other major cities and governorates, but the stagnation that followed the glow of the start of the revolution made some supporters of the Southern Movement retract from supporting the revolution and its main demand to overthrow the regime. The separatist demands began to escalate again, especially after some internal and external factors interrupted the course of the revolution.

A Gulf-brokered agreement between the regime and the opposition was reached. It was called the Gulf initiative that defined the mechanism of peaceful transfer of power from president Saleh to his deputy AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi, who is a southern figure. A new government was formed, headed by the southern politician Mohammad Salem Basindwa, according to the Gulf initiative.



The Gulf initiative enjoyed regional and international support, especially from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the most prominent external actor in this initiative. For its part, Iran found it a favorable opportunity to achieve its goals in Yemen, as it is easily accessible and low in price. So Iran took advantage of the weakness of the central government to increase its support for the Houthi group, based on sectarian considerations and ideology, to pressure its Saudi opponent.

The Lebanese Hezbollah - the regional ally of Iran - provided training and financial and political support to the Houthis,

and played an important role in the links between Tehran and Saada. The Iranian role was not limited to the Houthis, as Iran also attracted figures from the southern cities, taking advantage of the momentum of the movement that demands secession. Iran contacted with the former Southern President, Ali Salem al-Baidh, and some wings of the Southern Movement. The Iranian role on the Yemeni scene increased in light of chaos and instability, as a result of the faltering political transition process, the exacerbation of internal divisions, and the government's failure to deal with political, security, economic and social problems²³.

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The Iranian role was not confined to the Houthis, as Iran also engrossed figures from the southern governorates early, taking advantage of the momentum of the southern movement demanding secession.
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Iran also supported some political parties and the establishment of others, and organized visits by hundreds of Yemeni youth with several cultural, religious and political trends to Iranian cities. Iran also launched three Yemeni TV channels in the year 2012 and published nearly a dozen of newspapers, and funded the publication of two daily newspapers, in addition to many websites in the main governorates in Yemen. It also trained media professionals in Beirut through a Lebanese organization that are being run by personalities affiliated with Iran²⁴.

In the southern governorates, the Southern Movement - the wing of Ali Salem al-Baidh in particular - benefited from the weakness of the government and political parties and presented itself to the people and escalated its demand of secession. It refused to participate in any dialogue with the government that it considers the government of "occupation."

Another southern political movement, known as "Cairo Conference",

led by Ali Nasser Mohamed and Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas, emerged. This council believes that the solution to the southern issue is in "the reformulating of the unity agreement to be a federal state of two parts, northern and southern regions, with a new constitution that contains the necessary constitutional guarantees, secures the future of the people in north and south, builds a democratic civil state on solid foundations, and guarantees all elements of success, partnership and trust for at least five years, after which a referendum can be carried out in the south to give the southern people full freedom to determine their future²⁵.

In the same period (2011-2014), al-Qaeda appeared strongly, declaring its control over several areas in southern and eastern cities, and parts of Al-Bayda governorate (center of the country). President Hadi's government tried to restore the areas from al-Qaeda in several wars, the most important of which was the war to topple the Islamic Emirate of Jaar, formed by al-Qaeda in Abyan in 2012²⁶.

With support from the United Nations and the European Union countries, the government began preparing for holding of the comprehensive national dialogue conference, which was stipulated in the Gulf initiative, with the aim to get all Yemeni forces engaged in solutions for major issues and problems in the country, in the forefront of which is the southern issue. In the context of preparations for the dialogue conference, the government formed a committee in the south to address the issues of the arbitrarily retired employees and those who have been dismissed from their jobs forcibly, and another committee to address land and property issues. The president issued decisions to return a number of those who were dismissed, and other decisions and directives to the government in the same context, while the UN Envoy to Yemen at the time Jamal Benomar and European ambassadors continued to hold meetings with leaders in the southern movement in order to persuade them to participate in the national dialogue conference. The meetings included southern leaders from various factions both at home and abroad,

and these efforts resulted in persuading a number of leaders to participate, while the majority of the Southern Movement's supporters remained on their position that reject dialogue, especially al-Baidh's wing that was the most stringent in calling for secession and rejecting the UN-sponsored dialogue.

The dialogue conference was held in the period of March 2013 through January 2014, with the participation of various Yemeni political forces in addition to representatives of independent youth and women. Members of the conference were chosen equally from north and south to ensure the participation of the southerners in the dialogue, so half of the participants were southerners, including 87 delegates that represented all factions of the Southern Movement.

Although the decisions of the dialogue conference came mostly in line with the Southern Movement's vision towards the Yemeni unity and the war that followed it, the dialogue was rejected by the largest faction in the movement, the faction that is led by former southern President Ali Salem al-Baidh, who rejected any political process related to the Gulf initiative²⁷.

The National Dialogue Conference approved a document on the southern issue, which was called (the Document of Solutions and Guarantees). The document stipulates the commitment of the political forces participating in the national dialogue to "solving the southern issue in a fair solution within the framework of a unified state on the basis of a new federal and democratic state." ²⁸

The Dialogue Conference approved a new federal state of six regions, four in the north and two in the south²⁹. Each region includes a number of governorates.

The Houthi coup:

After the dialogue conference came to end, the Houthis began military expansion activities, taking advantage of Tehran's support for them with money and weapons. They escalated the situation and most army units and tribes that were loyal to former President Ali Saleh joined the Houthis ranks. They could control a number of areas in the northern governorates, including Sa'ada, Hajjah and Amran. They moved all the way to the capital, Sana'a, which fell in the Houthis hand in September 2014. The Houthis then launched a complete coup against the government.

They controlled the state institutions, and looted the army and security weapons, although they signed an agreement with the regime of President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi and the political parties, called the Peace and Partnership Agreement hours after the invasion of the capital, Sana'a. The Houthis did not adhere to the agreement and continued to impose de facto authority. As a result of the Houthi coup, the government and President Hadi resigned at the beginning of 2015. The Houthis declared what they called the constitutional declaration, according to which they governed the country through a committee they formed for the same purpose, called the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, headed by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a relative of the group's leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi.

Although the Security Council had issued a decision in late 2014 that imposed sanctions, in accordance with Chapter VII, against former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son Ahmed Ali, as well as Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and two of his aides, because they obstruct the political process in the country. On February 21, 2015, President Hadi appeared in the city of Aden,

announcing from there that he would resume practicing his duties, and he retreated his resignation he presented in Sana'a in protest against the practices of the Houthis. A few days later, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and his new ally, former President Ali Saleh, announced the beginning of a war to complete their control of the central governorates and the south. The Houthi forces and loyalist military units moved towards governorates that had not fully subjected to them, including Taiz, al-Bayda, Hodeidah and Ibb, in addition to the southern governorates Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Hadramout, Shabwa, al-Dhale, al-Mahrah and Socotra.

The Comprehensive War and Decisive Storm

In March 2015, armed confrontations broke out in more than one Yemeni region, between the Houthi forces and their allies, who were loyal to former President Ali Saleh, and military units and armed opponents of the Houthi group, after the latter announced its endeavor to complete the control on all governorates, including Aden that President Hadi announced as a temporary capital, where he began to meet with Arab and Western ambassadors and diplomats. The Houthis and their allies moved towards Aden and could force the president and most officials to leave the city to Riyadh, especially after the Houthi group took control of Al-Anad military base - the largest military base in the country, north of Aden. However, the Houthis' joy of victory was not complete. Few hours after they took control of some eastern neighborhoods of Aden and its northern entrance,



a "decisive storm" was launched, led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and ten other Arab and Islamic countries under the what is called the Arab coalition to restore the legitimacy in Yemen from the Houthi/Saleh coup³⁰.

With regard to the position of the Southern Movement towards the developments and confrontations between President Hadi forces and the Houthi/Saleh forces, the majority continued to declare neutrality and not to advocate with any party, because they saw that the conflict only concerns the government of Sana'a. Ali Salem al-Baidh, who leads the largest faction in the Southern Movement at the time, said that the movement will counter "any attempts to pass the political conflict to the south."³¹ Al-Baidh had cut his dealings with Iran

after its Houthi allies seized the power in Sana'a, while most of elements of the Southern Movement, who had previously received support and training from Iran itself, joined the resistance forces that confronted the Houthis in the south³².

After the intervention of the Arab coalition in Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (the most prominent countries in the coalition) carried out extensive armament and recruitment operations in the southern governorates in order to confront the Houthis, who controlled parts of Aden, in addition to the two neighboring governorates of Abyan and Lahj. The coalition, units of the Yemeni army and popular resistance fought against the Houthis until Aden was liberated in July 2015. Then Lahj and Abyan were liberated in August of the same year³³.



Most of the people of Aden from various political affiliations participated in the resistance against the Houthi invasion, especially the Islamic trend, whether Salafis or members of the Islah Party. But the United Arab Emirates that controlled on Aden and the nearby governorates- in the name of the Arab coalition - began to gain loyalists from the Salafi current and supporters of the Southern Movement, and worked - in different ways and means - to exclude the leaders of the resistance who are loyal to the legitimate government.

The UAE supported its followers with money and arms, and put pressure on the government to accommodate a number of them in the state institutions, and some of them assumed high positions in the central government and local authorities, such as the hard-line Salafist Hani bin Brik, whom President Hadi later appointed as Minister of State, and the military commander, Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi³⁴, who was appointed as governor of Aden in early December 2015 to succeed governor Jaafar Mohammad Saad, who was assassinated by a car bomb.

In 2016, the UAE started to establish paramilitary formations, mostly from the "Salafists", and this force has been called the "security belt" in Aden, Lahj, Abyan, and al-Dhale and the elite forces in Hadramout, Shabwa, al-Mahra and Socotra. The new formations operated outside the Yemeni Staff. The UAE used them to achieve her goals and to carry out reprisals against its opponents, such as burning party headquarters and newspapers, prosecuting activists, and kidnapping resistance leaders and members of parties and civil organizations³⁵.

The Emirates established military formations outside the framework of the Yemeni state and used them to control the south, which led to dispute between the UAE and legitimacy. The dispute complicated when Abu Dhabi prevented President's plane from landing in Aden airport and it became more complex when an Emirati air strike targeted the state's army forces in Aden

Differences began to emerge between President Hadi and the Emirates, especially after the dismissal of Khaled Bahah - loyal to the Emirates - in April 2016 from his position as Vice President and Prime Minister, and the appointment of Ali Mohsen Saleh al-Ahmar as Vice President, and Ahmed Obaid bin Daghr as Prime Minister. The differences between the two parties increased in February 2017, when a pro-Abu Dhabi force prevented President Hadi from landing at Aden airport and he was forced to land in Socotra Island³⁶, and later an Emirati force intervened to strike a Yemeni pro-president force in the vicinity of Aden airport, it was known as "the airport events."³⁷

Forming the transitional council and confronting the legitimacy

Tensions rose as the UAE controlled vital areas in Aden, including the airport. In late April 2017, the President of the Republic issued two decisions, the first of which was to remove the governor of Aden, Aidarous al-Zubaidi,

from his position, and the second one to dismiss the Minister of State, Hani bin Brik, and refer him to investigation. The decisions sparked angry reactions from some leaders in the south. They set up a mass rally in the city of Aden on May 4, 2017, in which they issued the so-called "Aden Historical Declaration", which rejected President Hadi's decisions and renewed their demand of secession from the north. Al-Zubaidi announced a national political leadership, under his leadership, to manage and represent the south³⁸. A week later, a statement was issued announcing the formation of the Southern Transitional Council, headed by Aidaroos Al-Zubaidi, and it includes a number of southern military and civilian figures.

According to observers, the UAE-backed transitional council has become the striking force for Abu Dhabi in southern Yemen, an entity parallel to the legitimate government institutions.³⁹ Tension remained between the government

and the Transitional Council until armed confrontations erupted between the two parties in Aden and lasted for three days in January 2018. They were stopped with the intervention of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, after which the situation entered a stage of maneuvering between the two parties. It was characterized by accusations exchange, and then developed into tensions in Shabwa and Socotra and other regions in the south between those supported by Abu Dhabi and those loyal to President Hadi, who is supported by Riyadh⁴⁰.

About two months after Abu Dhabi announced the withdrawal of its forces from Yemen in June 2019, violent clashes erupted between government forces and forces affiliated with the pro-Emirati Transitional Council after the killing of the leader of the security belt forces, Munir al-Yafei (Abu Yamamah) with a missile that targeted a military party, held west of Aden on August 1, 2019. Although the Houthis adopted the process, the Vice-President of the Transitional Council, Hani bin Brik, the most prominent loyalist to the UAE,

accused the legitimate government of targeting al-Yafei⁴¹, and announced the general mobilization and moving to the Presidential Palace in Aden, and the Transitional Council raised the slogan of "the purification of the south from the legitimacy" that he accuses of loyalty and submission to the Islah party.

After three days of confrontations, Saudi Arabia intervened and withdrew the Minister of Interior Ahmed al-Misari, who was leading the confrontations against the transitional council forces, so the STC controlled on Aden⁴².

After that, the transitional forces moved towards the city of "Zinjibar", the capital of Abyan (adjacent to Aden) and toppled the government forces from there.

A few days later, the UAE-backed Shabwani elite forces moved towards Ataq, the capital of Shabwa, but they faced a strong reaction from the government forces. The elite forces suffered successive defeats by the government forces that announced the entire liberation of Shabwa governorate from the elite forces on August 26, 2019⁴³.

On August 29, 2019, the government forces had regained control of Abyan governorate and advanced to the entrances to Aden in preparation for restoring the interim capital from the STC, but they were surprised by air strikes carried out by UAE planes that killed and wounded about 300 soldiers. Then the army was forced to withdraw and move to east, and the transitional forces rushed again to control the western parts of Abyan, and tightened its control over Aden.⁴⁴ In return, the Yemeni government accused

the UAE of being behind the "military rebellion" of the transitional council, supporting it and helping it to control military camps, government institutions and the temporary capital of Aden, and attacking the government forces at the entrance to Aden.⁴⁵

The government presented an official complaint to the UN Security Council, condemning the UAE bombing of its forces, and demanding a special session for the Security Council to address what it described as the UAE aggressions and interventions in Yemen.⁴⁶



Riyadh agreement and future scenarios:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia led negotiations between the government and the transitional council, which lasted almost two months until they culminated in the signing of an agreement, called the Riyadh Agreement, at the beginning of November 2019. The agreement stipulates that a new government to be formed within 30 days, the southerners and the northerners would have equal representation in the government, and the transitional council would get a number of seats, the combination of all military and security forces of both sides under the Ministries of Defense and Interior, and the return of the current government to Aden to activate the institutions, and the appointment of new governors in the southern governorates. Some provisions of the agreement seemed easy to be implemented as Saudi Arabia holds the southern file rather than the UAE, which decided to reduce its presence in Yemen,

but the agreement collided with many obstacles that prevented its implementation, or the implementation of the most important parts of it. While the two sides exchanged and continue to exchange accusation over the obstruction of the agreement implementation, as in most of crises, Saudi Arabia did not blame any party. The Saudi position is still confirming in all official statements that the agreement will be implemented, although it is aware of all circumstances and difficulties that prevent the full implementation according to the timelines of the agreement.

The Riyadh Agreement has become the most prominent determinant of relationship between the two main parties in southern Yemen, which are the internationally recognized legitimate government that enjoys the support and patronage of Saudi Arabia, and the transitional council, supported by the Emirates. In light of the agreement, many circumstances in the south became clear, and the future situation can be easily predicted.

As long as the terms of the agreement are not translated into reality, several scenarios are expected:

The first scenario: That Riyadh seriously pressures on the legitimate government and the Transitional Council to implement the agreement, and this will lead to stability in Aden and the liberated southern governorates and the government institutions can resume activities in those governorates, and do its duties regarding the fight against the Houthi group to achieve the main goal of the coalition - the restoring of the state and national institutions from the Houthi coup. But local and regional obstacles as well as Yemeni and non-Yemeni parties and powers stand against this scenario, especially since these forces used to benefit from the conflict and aggravating the situation in the liberated areas, so it is not in their interest to end the tension and normalize the situation.

The second scenario: the explosion of military escalation between the government and the transitional council. This scenario may help the legitimacy, led by President Hadi, to resolve the battle in its favor, especially if the military operation is qualitative and rapid. But some factors should be available to make this scenario a success, including the failure of the UAE to intervene in the war directly in favor of the transitional council, whether through air cover or through specific support with weapons. This scenario also requires some coordination with Saudi Arabia, or at least a green light or turning a blind eye from Saudi Arabia.

The third scenario: the state of current stalemate in terms of the implementation of the agreement remains, which means more tension, stalking and accusations exchange. The Saudi interest in implementing the agreement may decline in favor of other issues and files which are more urgent for Riyadh,



while maintaining the Saudi presence in the south through the leadership of the Arab coalition forces in Aden, or through Saudi aid programs that have occupied a large area in a number of liberated governorates.

The fourth scenario: Reducing the influence of the legitimacy and the armed situation remains as a fait accompli, after the latest Houthi military escalations in north and west and controlling new areas in Nihm, east of Sana'a, and in Al-Jawf governorate at the expense of the government forces, in addition to targeting governmental institutions and economic establishments

in liberated governorates by armed non-governmental formations and the emergence of a clear division in the Yemeni government, and the coalition encouraging for radical changes in the legitimacy. All these events may be an indication of serious attempts to reduce the area of the government's influence to put more pressure on it to accept half-solutions, either partially in the Riyadh agreement or entirely in reaching a comprehensive peace agreement with the Houthis to stop the war, with the remaining of armed formations in north and south, and accepting them as a fait accompli.

Conclusion:

Whatever the scenario that is likely to happen in a complex situation like Yemen, particularly the southern Yemen that witnessed armed and bloody conflicts with mainly regional dimension, in addition to political and ideological conflict that has deepened with the presence of regional and international polarizations, a secure and safe separation through the Transitional Council is unlikely to happen. The transitional is only part of the Southern Movement and it does not represent all entities of the south. It does not enjoy momentum in some southern governorates, including Abyan, Shabwa, Hadramawt, al-Mahrah and Socotra, which means that any separation now will develop into a cycle of internal conflict that may divide the south into small states, and a battlefield for regional and international powers.



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³⁴ He was born in the Zabid area of Al-Dhalea Governorate in 1967, and received his primary and secondary education in it, and moved to Aden to complete his university education at the Air Force College. He graduated with the rank of second lieutenant in 1988. After his graduation, he was appointed an officer in the Air Defense and then transferred from the Ministry of Defense to The Ministry of Interior, the Staff of the Protection of Embassies and Establishments Battalion in Sana'a. He joined the Special Forces until the summer of 1994 war. He participated in the fighting in the Dufus / Abyan front, then he left for Djibouti after controlling the city of Aden. He was among those who were discharged from their work in the aftermath of the 1994 war. He later led the Self-Determination Movement (Hatm), which had armed confrontations against the government between 1997 and 1999. Al-Zubaidi emerged in 2015 as one of the most prominent leaders who were involved in confrontations against the Houthis in Al-Dhalea governorate until it was liberated in August 2015.

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