

Independence in Southern Yemen: An STC Perspective

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Brief Analysis

With the failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement, Yemen's Southern Transitional Council calls for independence as the best means of ensuring south Yemen's peace and stability.

Since 2015, the international community has expressed a clear desire to stop the humanitarian tragedy in Yemen, calling for an end to the ravages of war and the suffering of the Yemeni people. The United States and other global powers have claimed that Saudi Arabia had the right to build an alliance to keep the Houthi threat away from its borders, and that all nations must defend themselves when under attack. Regardless of these international concerns, the people of southern Yemen have been driven to fight the Houthis by a single goal: to achieve independence for southern Yemen.

For the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and many southern Yemeni people, the human costs of years of war are only the most recent chapter in a long and painful history that our people have endured. This painful history has confirmed the belief that we must establish an independent southern Yemen and return to the process of building a southern state with a democratic foundation, capable of serving the people of the South after decades of marginalization and oppression.

Since the beginning of the war and the destabilizing Houthi attacks in Yemen, the crux of our struggle against the Houthis in the South has been to achieve independence and reestablish the state of southern Yemen. Since 2013, this goal has brought scores of southern Yemenis into the streets of the South in protests. We were once a sovereign independent nation, and although we have tried unity, the past two decades have demonstrated that integration into a unified government means despotism, murder, corruption, and the unjust theft of the rights and resources of the people of southern Yemen. Though the international community has only recently started paying attention to the human suffering in Yemen, the South has faced these challenges for a long time.

The lack of action from the Hadi government after we signed the Riyadh agreement in November 2019 recalls what

happened decades ago with the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in the early 1990s after unification. Although we took one step forward in achieving our people's dreams of independence and our right to sovereignty over our land through the Riyadh agreement, the Hadi government has avoided implementing key portions of the agreement.

In fact, deliberate neglect of the South has grown recently. The Hadi government has held control over the land and resources belonging to the South during this war while we have endured hunger, floods, and the rampant spread of disease—including a new struggle with coronavirus on top of our region's ongoing malaria epidemic. Meanwhile, we have been unable to achieve our rights not only with regard to political representation and decision-making, but also regarding international aid, oil revenues, and access to waterways that would improve living conditions in our cities.

When the STC initially declared self-administration in April in an effort to take steps towards rectifying the matters that the Riyadh agreement did not successfully address, the Yemeni government adopted behavior reminiscent of the northern Saleh government's actions after unification, namely threatening the people of the South with force. However, what is different today is that the STC, which is committed to achieving independence for the southern Yemeni people, now has the power to stand up to regime forces that have long oppressed the South while the Riyadh agreement continues to go unimplemented.

We believe that this pragmatic path of transition will make it possible for southern Yemen to finally achieve its rights. This can only happen through southern independence, for we will not be led by the "Axis of Resistance," nor the false slogans of the Houthis that link their rule by force and violence with Iran's malicious influence in the region. Neither will we be led by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and the various interests and powers that wish to help extremist groups.

Even the much-discussed relationship that we have built with Abu Dhabi is a purely practical relationship based on the Emirati conviction that our project is centered on our people's aspirations, posing no threat to regional interests and showing no desire to prolong continuing wars. Our relationship with the UAE is a key part in our approach of being open towards all who believe in the right of our people to achieve their dreams, dreams that have endured through years of tyranny.

We believe that an independent southern state will positively contribute to calming volatile regional dynamics and serve as a force for stability against extremist groups such as al-Qaeda. We consider these groups operating in southern areas of Yemen to be the product of the regime of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh rather than a reflection of the character of the South. The existence of these groups in the South is used today by the regime of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to prevent the southern region and its people from forming a nation, though many southerners believe in moderation and coexistence. We thus resolve to end the rule of terrorism in the southern regions and to implement anti-terror campaigns against the extremism brought on by years of oppressive governance.

Indeed, the South has long been a pluralistic society, and should not be perceived only through its struggling cities, which have experienced deep economic challenges since the unfortunate unification of 1990. It is true that Yemen, northern Yemen included, has not enjoyed any period of general affluence under the Saleh or Hadi regimes. However, the South in particular has suffered from complete and intentional economic paralysis. Despite the oil resources that exist in southern Yemen, our cities have not seen any oil revenues reflected in our living conditions.

While working to address these internal challenges, we extend our hand to all members of Yemeni society, and we will strive to engage all of society in dialogue, and to accept any group that wishes to join the STC in its efforts to achieve independence. We have found positive responses from intermediary countries in the region and the world to support this effort and we believe that we are headed on the right path towards independence.

The language of force was the only language used with us for decades, and so it is through rectifying this imbalance

of power that we can change the future. We continue to be open to the regional and UN suggestions to establish peace and stability and to pursue a just and peaceful consensus that will serve our people. In sum, we have asked for our most basic rights, and this is why we have now returned to our dream of independence, for the generations of Yemenis who have not seen a sovereign, independent nation but still know what history cannot deny—that Aden was once, and must again become a center of coexistence and stability. ❖

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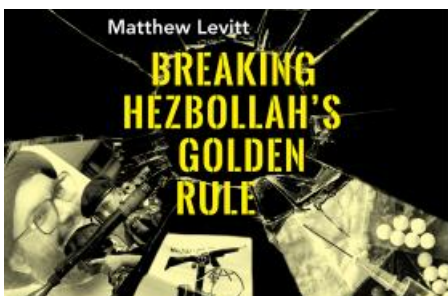
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