

# Stabilizing Yemen's Government

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Brief Analysis

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**The ongoing process of stabilizing Yemen's political, military, financial, administrative, and economic spheres will require expanded U.S. governance and development efforts.**

In a series of decrees signed on December 19, Yemeni president Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi announced a fundamental reorganization of the country's military. Although these initiatives address many of the opposition's demands for reform, various challenges will persist as the process of political consolidation and stability moves incrementally forward.

## REPLACING SALEH

In 2011, Yemen became embroiled in a political crisis between then president Ali Saleh, who had ruled for over thirty years, and opponents who criticized his regime's corruption, leadership failings, and lack of services. As the crisis unfolded, opponents mounted a series of protests; Saleh responded by initiating limited reforms, but his efforts did not satisfy the opposition's demands.

Following a protracted standoff in which the regime frequently used violence against protestors and Saleh himself was seriously injured by a militant attack, the parties eventually agreed to a transition overseen by the Gulf Cooperation Council. Central elements of the agreement included a power-sharing arrangement between Saleh's party and opposition groups, with equal distribution of cabinet positions, a restructuring of the military, and an early presidential election to determine Saleh's replacement.

Following his February 25 inauguration as Yemen's new president, Mansour Hadi undertook a series of reforms to professionalize the government and reassert sovereignty over areas seized by al-Qaeda and other groups. The result was a successful military offensive in the south against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) -- the most salient example of how new leadership and military reforms combined to reenergize government efforts against Islamist

militants.

At the same time, however, Mansour Hadi is still struggling to reform the civilian government at the national and provincial levels. Despite forcing AQAP out of areas overrun in 2011, Sana's ability to provide follow-on services to these regions has been limited, as have efforts to continue the pacification campaign into AQAP's historic safe havens. U.S. economic, military, and political assistance has helped address some of these problems, but challenges persist. This summer, U.S. Agency for International Development chief Rajiv Shah visited the newly liberated Abyan province to announce an aid package.

Meanwhile, the political reform process explicitly prevented the wholesale removal of the ruling party and kept many members of Saleh's ruling family in power. Mansour Hadi's power is therefore hamstrung, since many members of his government served in the former regime and do not have an incentive to help him succeed. For their part, many of the new officials who were previously in the opposition are inexperienced with governing and dissatisfied with the inclusion of former Saleh supporters. As a result, the president has been forced to rely on support from Washington and its international partners, which has not been viewed favorably by many Yemenis.

## REFORMING THE MILITARY

One of the main reasons why political reforms have been slow or stagnant is the continuing standoff between various factions of Yemen's military, with some still supporting Saleh while others back Mansour Hadi. This week's decrees, which restructured the Ministry of Defense and the army, highlight the president's determination to continue his previous reforms of security institutions while removing the remaining military opposition that has hampered his ability to govern effectively.

Although the public nature of Mansour Hadi's latest move reflects his growing confidence in openly confronting Saleh, it also indicates that the quiet struggle for political control is still unresolved. This week's decrees disbanded the Republican Guard (led by Saleh's son, Ahmed Ali), dismissed Saleh's nephew Yahya Saleh as head of the Central Security Forces, and removed Saleh's brother Muhammad and seven other deputy chiefs of staff. The president also abolished the 1st Armored Division, led by his erstwhile ally Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar; unlike Saleh's relatives, however, the general has been moved to a senior position in the Defense Ministry.

The decrees are a bold effort to consolidate Mansour Hadi's authority as commander-in-chief, and Saleh's supporters will likely respond with demonstrations of military power such as attacks on public infrastructure and government buildings. These gestures should be dealt with firmly but peacefully (e.g., with blockades or similar steps); Sana should avoid escalation in favor of measures that leave room for nonmilitary solutions. Then, as the political rancor of the reforms diminishes, follow-on military proceedings should be pursued against those military personnel who violated their oaths of service.

## U.S. OPTIONS FOR BUILDING THE YEMENI STATE

The U.S. effort to assist the Yemeni government requires expanded governance and development initiatives. In particular, Washington should focus on helping Mansour Hadi expand his authority while more firmly rooting the state in a stable financial, administrative, economic, and political setting.

*Strong public backing for military reforms.* Washington should support Sana's military reforms publicly and repeatedly, adjusting U.S. military training, equipping, funding, and advising efforts to reflect Yemen's new defense structures. The White House took an encouraging step in this direction today, with Assistant to the President John Brennan calling Mansour Hadi to express support for his efforts during the political transition and convey President Obama's congratulations for the new decrees. Washington should also privately encourage Saleh to accept these changes and channel any opposition he may have into peaceful political efforts.

*Rebalanced embassy staffing.* U.S. embassy staff in Sana are not well equipped to help with the types of tasks that Mansour Hadi must carry out in order to professionalize the government, expand its presence and services to the provinces, and address irredentist movements in Sana and the countryside. A rebalancing of U.S. personnel is required, with greater emphasis on additional governance and development officers.

*Advisors in the ministries.* Many of Yemen's new ministers are inexperienced with handling the technical aspects of their portfolios and leading large organizations. Additionally, Saleh loyalists may not be following through with Mansour Hadi's wishes as thoroughly as they could. For these reasons, Washington should partner with the international community to establish a robust ministerial advising program.

*Local governance initiative.* Al-Qaeda's influence in parts of Yemen has a lot to do with the highly centralized government's lack of presence in the provinces -- a problem exacerbated by the national leadership's current distraction over political struggles in Sana. In response, Washington should propose a dedicated local governance initiative in partnership with the Yemeni government, working with provincial officials to reestablish Sana's presence and facilitate delivery of basic services to the people.

*Daniel Green, a Soref fellow at The Washington Institute, has served as a tribal and political engagement officer for the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq.* ♦

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