



## **YEMENI WAR AND SHIFT OF POWER: A REFLECTION ON THE HISTORY OF SOUTHERN ISSUE AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS IN SOUTH YEMEN**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper sheds some light on the Southern Issue with reference to 2015 war in Yemen and shift of power. It has briefly surveyed the history of Southern Issue and the conflict relating to this issue, passing by 2015 war and shift of power. It has presented the history of this period impartially and neutrally and then reflected on the possible political scenarios in South Yemen in the light of the present war. It concluded with some recommendations that may help the concerned politicians involved in the Yemeni crisis to bring peace and stability to Southern Yemen particularly and Yemen generally.

**Keywords:** Southern Issue, war in Yemen, South Arabia, Southern Transitional Council, Hadi' legitimacy

### **1. Introduction**

Since 2015, Yemen has been undergoing a civil war of multi-agendas and various national and international players are involved in. The war is still ongoing and there is no hope for its end in the near future as major parties of this conflict represented by president Hadi's legitimacy backed by Arab coalition and Huthi's rebels backed by Iran have no interest to stop such war or to come into a peace negotiation to share the power. While Hadi's legitimacy wants to exploit the support of Arab coalition to get victory and to control Sana'a, Huthi's rebels consider themselves the real legitimacy that control the capital Sana'a and most of the Northern governorates and can't get rid of their dreams to be the masters of the country especially as they believe that the head of the group, Abdulmalik AL-Huthi, has a divine right to be the ruler of the country. We don't forget that there are many members in both parties who are doing business from this war in their own way. Some international forces also do business as they sell arms to both parties of the conflict.

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During this period of war many major changes have taken place on ground, among them the decline of ousted president's, Saleh, military power and the rise of Southern Resistance forces as the most powerful military force in the South. When Saleh threatened to withdraw himself from his three year coalition with Huthi group and called his supporters to go against Huthis, he found himself seized in his house and to be killed within a few days while most of his supporters showed their support to Huthies. After murdering Saleh by Huthi rebels in Sana'a on December 2017, Saleh's power came down and succumbed to Huthies while few members led by His nephew, Tariq, fled to the South to start building up their military force in the Western coast with the help of Arab coalition.

In the South, Southern Resistance Forces, led by General Aidroos AL-Zubaidi, are considered as the main player on the ground. These military forces were formed during the last two decades and most of them during the last 2015 war as they gained some financial and logistic military support from the Arab coalition and Hadi's legitimacy during their war against Huthi – Saleh' ally in 2015. Though these forces are fighting against Huthi – Saleh and give support to Arab coalition and Hadi's legitimacy in their war out of the Southern borders, they don't consider themselves a part of Hadi's legitimacy and don't believe in Hadi's political view to have Yemen of six regions. They consider themselves as the future military and security forces of the South. Before going on to explain more details, it will be better to have a look of the short back history of the failed Yemeni unification.

## 2. Yemeni Unification: Why did it fail?

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen or what was called South Arabia) had gone into a unification with Arab Republic of Yemen (North Yemen) in 1990 to form, for the first time in their history, a new country so-called Republic of Yemen. As the two countries had undergone different political and social scenarios during the past centuries and with a huge difference in population and wealth, such a sudden merging unification, declared on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1990, was expected to fail. According to Dunn (1994) Yemeni unity was precipitate decision as South and North were in need for more time to overcome some unification obstacles and he described Yemeni Unity between the two Yemens as a marriage that was always a troubled one, with many unresolved quarrels and some of the neighbors cheering for an early divorce<sup>[1]</sup>. Among these numerous obstacles, Dunn (1994) mentioned that:

*"...the south was under British domination for centuries (particularly around the port of Aden, with the hinterland less directly controlled) and evolved in a very different way from the north. The north was a monarchy until 1962, went through a long civil war with foreign involvement, and then came under the rule of a series of conservative military rulers. The south fought a struggle against the British, then became [one of the few Arab world's Marxist-Leninist states] for nearly a quarter century. While the*

*Yemen Arab Republic (the north) was conservative and Saudi-backed, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (the south) was rabidly secularist, provided the most progressive guarantees for women's rights in any Arab country, and sought to eliminate tribal and traditional practices. (Southern leader Ali Salim al-Baidh was once disciplined by the party for taking a second wife.). Two such different states cannot be united easily. There are other distinctions as well: the north is more Zaydi than the south, and the Zaydi-Sunni division (and the mountain-coastal-plain divisions) are important dynamics in Yemeni history"<sup>[1]</sup>.*

Dunn (1994) added that Yemenis underestimated such differences mentioned above and some other differences such as *"Sanaa's writ often does not run outside the major cities of the north, and while the southerners (with their communist willingness to impose centralism by force) tolerated less regional autonomy, they too have had their problems in controlling the hinterland"*<sup>[1]</sup>. He also added that the two countries are very different in population as Northerners outnumbered the Southerners by perhaps four to one. Such a big difference in population increased northerners' expectation that southerners would simply submerge themselves in a bigger northern tide. It is for this reason that Dunn (1994) considered the insisting on merging unity and the rejection of the federal state a main factor for the failure of the Yemeni unity. He also added that Saleh, the Yemeni president, *"has even failed to implement the limited guarantees given to the southerners in the Amman accords earlier this year. Northern rejection of federalism of some sort has been a major factor in making it impossible to resolve the dispute"*<sup>[1]</sup>. He also mentioned that rushing for unity without making fit constitution, retaining the old leaderships, unworkable coalition, failure to unite armies, failure of leadership, oil distribution troubles and underestimating outside forces were all mistakes that led to the failure of the Yemeni unification<sup>[1]</sup>.

As far as the Islamic conservative groups are concerned, Al Ahmer (2008) has mentioned in his memories that they consider socialists in the South as a part of the communist movement and should not be given a control over the capital Sana'a<sup>[2]</sup>. According to Al Ahmer's (2008) memories, he and some other tribal shaikhs and religious personals were against the unification with the socialist party in the South but he, later on, realized that communism was at its way to death in its home in Soviet and he believes that the socialist party as a follower to communism would remain no longer. He added that his party (Islah) was also created by a demand from Saleh, the Yemeni president, in order to act in confronting and rejecting the unification agreement statements that his party (General people' congress) had signed with the socialist party but do not meet their own interests in Sana'a<sup>[2]</sup>. Such bad wills and conspiracies against the South and socialist party were absolutely major factors behind the failure of the unification in 1994.

During the short age of the unification (1990-1994) more than 150 socialist politicians were assassinated and no investigations had been done to sentence the criminals but reports mentioned that Islamic extremists who were not happy with

socialist party stand behind such assassinations as there were speeches in the mosques that urge people against socialists. This what has been confirmed by 1994 Fatwa during the civil war in which Islamic leaders like AL Dilami declared that fighting against the socialist party in the South is allowed and legal and they considered socialist southerners as non-Muslim that should be killed<sup>[3]</sup>.

In 1993, there was a parliamentary election. Unification optimists were thinking that such an election will solve such troubles and be considered as a reinforcement for the unification continuity but such an election came up with results that feed the conflict and reject the unification as General People's Congress and Islah party didn't win a seat in the South and Socialist party didn't win a seat in the North and these results can prove the absence of unification in reality and that these parties were still controlling their old states.

*"The first election after unification was shocking," says Ahmed Omar bin Farid, from al-Hirak southern movement. "It was a binary election. The People's Congress won a majority, the Yemeni Islah party won a majority in the north and the Socialist party left no seats for anyone else in the south"*<sup>[4]</sup>.

Political troubles continued after the election and signs of war were recognizable. The number of southern socialist leaders assassinated increased to exceed 160 and socialists kept patient in order to keep the unification attempt as the leader of the socialist party emphasized in his speech after signing Amman accord (Document of Faith and Agreement) that he signed the treaty while he was watching the blood of his socialist martyrs but he signed because he considered Yemen and continuity of Yemeni unity more expensive than their blood<sup>[5]</sup>.

*"Nine individuals, including seven supporters of the YSP, were killed in election-related violence on April 27, 1993, and some 150 members of the YSP were killed in political violence from 1991 to 1994"*<sup>[6]</sup>.

Unfortunately, Amman accord failed on the ground and 1994 summer war broke out few months after signing this treaty. The war ended by the victory of the North. As AL-Baidh declared the restoration of the Southern state 'Democratic Republic of Yemen', Saleh's regime claimed that his war is for protection of the unity and considered his victory as a gain for the Yemeni unity though in reality *"The restored unity of Yemen is a unity of conquest, not the negotiated merger of 1990"* <sup>[1]</sup> as southerners were deprived from their rights to work in diplomatic filed and other positions in the army and forced for an early retirement while sharing authority with the southerners was limited to some individuals that Saleh provided them some positions to keep them as representatives for the South in front of the world while in fact they have no power and they were loyalist for Saleh and Sana'a.

### **3. Southern Issue**

Southern issue refers to southern people's political and economic suffering under the Northern regime. It began after taking over the South in 1994, deploying Northern military forces in its cities and mountains, excluding southern diplomats and army generals and soldiers from their works, distributing Southern land and wealth among northern leaders...etc. Such a situation created a kind of unfairness against the Southern people and made them feeling that they were citizens of a second degree. Most of the Southerner could not express the discontent of the situation for some time due to the huge Yemeni military forces surrounding them but such a suffering was getting worse more and more and Southerners began their peaceful revolution by forming 'Military Pensioners' Association' and then 'Southern movement' in 2007 through which they demanded for equality with the northerner and returning to their work. This movement began as demanding for equality, financial rights, justice in distributing wealth and returning what has been robbed, which then developed into demanding for their political rights and restoration of their colonized state.

Though Southerners can use arms to fight for their rights, they chose a civilized and peaceful way for their struggle which was confronted by armed forces as the government did not want southerners to start such a movement and want to keep them under its mercy forever. Such a movement with a short period of time became a ship for all the southerners (Southern Movement) and not only for military pensioners as most southerners whether forced retired, unemployed or those occupying lower positions in local service were all suffering the bitter of the colonizers. During these years of struggle, many civilians were killed while they were participating in gatherings and demonstrations to express their rejection of unfairness and demanding the restoration of their state. More details about the political and armed conflict between South and North after 1994 will be given in the next sections.

### **4. South – North Political and Armed Conflict from 1994 – 2014**

As it is mentioned earlier and as a result, the situation came to a point of war between the two combined regimes people's democratic republic of Yemen (south) and Arab Yemeni republic (north). The war was announced at time by the president Ali Abdullah Saleh in his special sermon speech on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1994 at Maidan Al- Sabaeen (Alsabaeen Ground). The northern forces started attacking the southern brigades which were in Sanaa and Dhammar governorates and then congregated a huge number of military forces, militias and sounded Fatwa by their religious Sheik namely Al-Dilami and others for all people of north to fight (Jihad) against south<sup>[3]</sup>. The war took approximately three months to the exactly date of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1994 when northern forces took over Aden city and the whole South. This matter creates a new situation and status quo in the South, particularly after Fataw of 'Jihad' allowing to kill children, woman and men of southern people and plunder all the properties of south as war spoils.

After that, all the Northern political and armed leaders dealt with the Southerners based on the rule of 'winners and losers'. All southern political and military leaders were expelled and exiled where sixteen high characters of them were absently sentenced to death. Therefore, Southerners did not surrender to such a new humiliated situation. They expressed their rejection and unacceptance politically and militarily. In the political side, as mentioned earlier, the former president of South, Ali Salem Al- Beidh, announced secession from Arab Yemeni Republic during the war and declared the reestablishment of the former state of South Yemen. In regard to this point there were two decisions issued by the Security Council no. (924) and (931) called the two parties of the conflict for an immediate ceasefire and reminded them that their political differences cannot be resolved through the use of force and urging them to return immediately to negotiations which would permit a peaceful resolution of their differences and a restoration of peace and stability<sup>[7][8]</sup>. These two decisions are still under the open eyes, so not closed and those exiled Southerners began their struggle based on these decisions and Al-Beidh declaration of the Southern state.

Leaders, educated elite and the most common people of South considered that 1994 war cancelled the unification agreement and changed it into an occupation. Due to the powerful military domination on ground, southern people couldn't explicitly resist against northern army. However, some southern groups began form secret resistance against Northern forces and instituted secret resistant groups such as Taj and Hatem inside the Southern homeland and Moug (self-determination movement) a political movement in Britain.

The 1994 war left negative impacts on Southern approach of life in general such as changing and replacing the united constitution into a new one, dismissing most of military and security leaders and soldiers from their jobs and bring them into a compulsory retirement as it was approximately about 82200 military leaders and soldiers in addition to civilian workers in about 68000 (sixty eight thousands workers) who were forced into an early retirement<sup>[9]</sup>. A short time later, the Yemen president, Saleh, began distributing large land areas and oilfields of South for his family members, relatives, tribal Shiekhs, merchants and military characters as gifts in return to their contribution in the war against South. These behaviors and so many others led to the generation of Southern issue and Southern movement.

In 2007, the Southern movement initiated to emerge to the surface to demand at first moderations "*equality with citizens in the nation's North; jobs; greater local decision-making power; and more control over the South's economic resources, including Yemen's largest oil field at al-Maseela in Hadramaut province*"<sup>[10]</sup>. Military retiree officers who were forced to a compulsory retirement after 94 started to protest by using means of sit-ins and demonstrations in the streets to demand better compensation because their pensions were too little worthless. Actually, they play a major role and put the starting point of launching the southern movement. Day (2010) stated that "*these officers had been forced into early retirement after the 1994 war. Their pensions were virtually worthless, so they demanded better compensation. The role of former southern military officers in creating the*

*Southern Movement is significant because the officers symbolize South Yemen's loss of statehood in 1994, when the northern military occupied southern territory*"<sup>[10]</sup>.

The regime in Sana'a was not serious to address the grievances and meet the needs of this faction of southern people but its rely was in adjuration and repudiation. Not only this but also the government accused the demonstrators as being anarchists to riot stability. Over time the area of protest continued to include different factions of southern society; military retiree officers, dismissed workers of their jobs in various sectors, out of work young men and then finally the whole predominant human being in south homeland. Protests increased from limit number of hundreds, thousands to hundreds of thousands attended demonstrations. The protestors announced on the tongue of military retirees' association that the peaceful option is the strategy they would follow to take out southern rights.

After having failed to shatter the diffusion of southern sit-in streets and demonstrations, Sana'a regime ordered that leaders of coordinating retirees' military council must be arrested and put in jails. This procedure led to negative results when the land of protests increased, the security forces shot and killed two protesters, one in Al- Dhalea and one in Hadramout. A terribly crime had been committed by the security forces against southern peaceful protesters in the celebration on October 14<sup>th</sup> - the day of independence from Great Britain- when shooting and killing four young men and injured a number of demonstrators in Radfan. During passing time, the regime security forces came to the gaspillage killing and injuring and arresting activists in all over the south homeland. Day (2010, p.9) supported and claimed that:

*"a turning point came on the eve of the country's October 14 holiday, which commemorates the start of South Yemen's revolt against British rule in the 1960s. Security forces shot and killed four young men in the same streets where British colonial soldiers had killed seven Yemenis on October 14, 1963. This echo of violence and oppression from more revolutionary time's ignited massive anti-government protests across the South, and Saleh was powerless to stop them"*<sup>[10]</sup>. He added *"the next month security forces killed two protesters at an opposition rally in Aden. Less than four months later, government forces killed and injured dozens of southern youths "*<sup>[10]</sup>.

Southern rallies continued weekly, monthly, yearly without taking holidays, from 2008 and up, demonstrators started waving the former southern flag which had not been longer used since 1994 war. Protests began to be more organized and systematized around the name "southern movement" or "the peace movement of the south" led by Southern military and civilian leaders. Southern movement came to the point of losing the glimpse of hope in Sana'a's regime and a step of no retreating and the only thing was to demand secession forward to reestablish the former southern state with its boundaries of 1990 before the combined unification with North Yemen.

Sana'a's regime invented so many means to tear the southern movement such as fitting tribe against tribe and faction against faction but all these attempts went in vain

and failed. From 2007 to 2014, southern movement became more and more powerful and the number of people joining it was increasingly continuing. A more organized armed resistance, under the leadership of Aidarus- Alzubidi (the currently southern transitional council president) and some other military leaders, was formed. Resistance forces led many battles against the Yemeni Army in some southern districts especially during the period between 2011 and 2014 and achieved some victories against the Yemeni army.

## 5. 2015 war and Shift of power

In 2015, Huthi militants with the support of Saleh's army attacked the Yemeni capital Sana'a and seized the first Southern President for Yemen and his government for couple of weeks before he managed in an unknown way to flee to Aden. When he fled to Aden, Huthi militants pounded the presidential palace in Aden by many air-strikes then began a military coup in Aden using Salah's army in the southern governorates of Aden, Lahj, Abyan and Al-Dhalea and their militants who came to Aden. In a few days they could arrest the minister of defense general Mahmmoud AL-Subaihi and two other generals. Hadi requested Saudi Arabia to intervene and give support to him, then he fled to Oman Sultanate. Saudi Arabia led an Arab coalition and started air-strikes against some military spots in Sana'a in the same day in which Hadi was on his way to Oman Sultanate on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in what was so-called Decisive Storm.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

Southern resistance forces were ready to fight against Huthi-Saleh's alliance as they have no way but to protect their land and religion from such invading forces and battles were hot in AL-Dhalea, Lahj, Aden and Abyan from the first day those militants arrived. With the beginning of Arab coalition to strike Sana'a and to give support to southern groups fighting against Huthi-Saleh's ally, southerners found themselves more powerful to confront these invading forces and they could achieve their first victory in AL-Dhalea when it was declared as the first governorate to kick out Huthi-Saleh' forces and to become free under the control of the Southern Resistance Forces led by Aydroos AL-Zubaidi. Other Sothern Resistance Forces were fighting against Huthi-Saleh's alliance in Belah, AL-Andad, Lahj, Aden, Abyan and Shabowah. This victory in AL-Dhalea gave such a power and motivation for the Southern Resistance Forces in other places to spend more efforts and to get rid from those invaders.

After five months of fighting against Huthi-Saleh's ally and with the military support provided by Arab coalition, Southern resistance forces could restore their capital city on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Then on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, UAE deployed ground forces (Southerners who were trained by UAE with some UAE officers), tanks and armored vehicles, to the southern port of Aden to assist pro-government forces (Southern Resistance and some southern military personals) fighting Houthi-Saleh' ally and to capture the largest Yemeni air-base in AL-Anad<sup>[13]</sup>. In few days, these forces backed by UAE could capture Lahj and AL-Anad air-base and then went in the direction of Abyan.



During this war period, Hadhramout, the largest Southern governorate, was under the control of what is so called AQAP. There might be some agreements between AQAP militants and Huthi-Saleh' alliance especially as Saleh's military forces were controlling Hadhramout before the beginning of the war and Huth-Saleh's alliance did not go to fight there though this governorate is very important for them as it is a wealthy governorate and has a strategic geographic location.. Anyway, later on in April, 2016, a military campaign led by the Southern General 'Frag Albuhsni' and Hadhrami Elite forces (which is a branch of southern resistance forces) and backed by Arab coalition could win a war against AQAP in the capital of Hadhramout AL-Mukala and the surrounding districts and the members of what was so called AQAP were killed while a number of them fled to other places in Hadhramout Wadi and other Northern governorates.

Major power shifts that took places during this war were the rise of the Southern resistance forces as well-organised military forces with a high fighting proficiency and the decline of Saleh's army. It is due to this war that southern resistance could organize itself and recruit thousands of new members more freely after many years of being just armed militants who were staying on mountains where Yemeni army had no control. Southern Resistance forces are more organized and consist of many branches today such as security belt, polices forces, resistance forces, elite forces and some military brigades and each of which has its own tasks. They are viewed by southern people as being the military and security forces of the upcoming southern state. These forces are currently working in collaboration with Arab coalition and Hadi's legitimacy in their war against Huthies outside the South thought they have their own unique agendas that contradict with Hadi's legitimacy. It seems that Arab coalition has some agreement with leaders of the Southern resistance and southern transitional council and understand that they sacrificed the lives of thousands of their members in order to get their South free from Huthi-Saleh's militants and for this reason, such championship and sacrifices should be respected.

As far as Saleh's military power is concerned, Saleh declared his withdrawal from his three years alliance with Huthis and called his supporters to resist against Huthis after three years of his alliance with them. Such a call did not receive an attention from his supporters as most of them became loyal to Huthi group for sectarian and beneficial reasons especially as Huthis could buy some high generals of Saleh and made them leaders in the army of their group. Saleh was then killed by Huthis at the beginning of December 2017 after few days of his call for resistance against Huthis and a few group of his soldiers and generals led by his nephew, Tariq, fled to the South and began building up their forces in the Western Coast under the support of the Arab coalition.

To sum up, the military situation in Yemen generally and South particularly can be described in six local military groups fighting right now with six different goals; vis, Huthi forces, Southern resistance forces, Salfist forces, Isalh party forces, republican guards' forces and Hadi's legitimacy forces. While Huthis control most governorates of

the North, those forces that are more loyal to Islah party are controlling some districts of Ma'areb, Taiz and Hadhramout Wadi. Republican guards are still under preparation and they control some districts of Hudaidah. Salfist in the North are controlling some districts in Taiz and Sa'ada while the Salfist of the South were merged themselves within the Southern Resistance forces. Southern resistance forces (the military branch of Southern Transitional council) are controlling the Southern governorates, except Hadhramout Wadi, and are considered as "*de facto authority over Yemen's southernmost governorates*"<sup>[14]</sup> though officially these governorates are viewed as under Hadi's exiled legitimacy; but in fact, Southern resistance forces are controlling them military and southern transitional council is acting as "*a self-styled breakaway southern government in waiting*"<sup>[14]</sup>. It is only the efforts of Arab coalition that convinced the leaders of Southern transitional council and southern resistance not to kick Hadi's legitimacy out of the scene and to keep its peripheral presence, especially as their war in South and North was begun by a request from Hadi's government. There are also some of southern resistance military brigades who are running war in other Northern governorates such as Hudaidah and Sa'adah. Hadi's military forces are led by his old southern and northern generals who are loyal to him and seem to be more neutral and keep similar distance to all other forces that fight against Huthis. They have their own bases in the South and in some few northern districts. They work in collaboration with the other military forces that fight against Huthis regardless of their political agendas.

## **6. The Rise of Southern Transitional Council (STC) as a Political Representative for Southerners**

Southern Transition Council (STC) was declared officially on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in Aden as a council included 26 members with a major aim to manage the South and to represent the southern people internationally and locally<sup>[15]</sup> <sup>[16]</sup>. It was declared just a few days from the hugest rally in the southern history organized in Aden on May 4<sup>th</sup>, to express the southern will aimed at getting their independent state and to protest against conspiracies held against South and its people and Hadi's decision to fire the head of Southern Resistance, Aidroos AL-Zubaidi, from his position as a governor of Aden<sup>[15]</sup>. This huge rally of southern people authorized Aidroos AL-Zubaidi to form a council that represents the southern people, defend their rights, secure their land, and then lead them to their independent state<sup>[15]</sup>.

*"On May 11, 2017, Aden's former governor, Aidrous al-Zubaydi, stood in front of the flag of former Southern Yemen and announced the creation of a 26-member Southern Transitional Council (STC). According to Southern Movement members, the announcement was the culmination of discussions that had been going on for several months"* <sup>[17]</sup>.

Two of the most significant points that STC stressed regarding its relation with the external players in his declaration statement were the emphasis on continuing a combined relationship with Saudi-led Arab coalition in its war against Huthis and on continuing relationship with the international community in fighting against terrorism<sup>[16]</sup>. A clear evidence to confirm the STC claim is the presence of southern resistance forces which follow the STC in the Western coast, AL-Hudaidah, and different provinces of north to fight against Huthis and the great battles that security belt and elites forces run against terrorism.

Though the general goal of STC is totally different from Hadi's government's. The temporary alliance between STC and its resistance with Hadi's exiled government is only to emerge the Southern issue that was deliberately neglected to the surface and to be clearly seen in front of the neighbors and the world. It is worth mentioning that STC members are doing their best in building bridges of relationships on the locally, regionally and internationally sphere. In this respect, in logical activation, STC is systematically formed its branches in all the southern governorates and districts and continued in preparing security and military forces with the assistance of Arab coalition, especially UAE. In regional and international interaction, Al-Zubaidi and his deputy Hani bin Bureik were flying to various Arab and European countries, while other delegated members flew to Egypt and reportedly met Western officials. In addition to the meeting with the UN special envoy to Yemen, Griffith, to discuss the possible solutions for southern issue. It is observed that the intellectual and wised steps and strategies that are practiced by STC become more acceptable to the major regional and international players in the Yemeni crisis.

## **8. Challenges Southerners face in present time**

It is true that Huthi-Saleh's alliance was forced to leave the South and Southern resistance is currently fighting against Huthis together with Arab coalition out of the Southern borders, deeply in the Northern land, there are still some challenges that Southern people face in their semi-liberated land. In the following lines, we will identify some of these challenges:

### **8.1 Terrorism**

During the last four years, we heard about many terrorist actions targeting southern resistance leaders, southern politicians and military and security spots. After many of these incidents, terrorist organizations such as ISIS claimed responsibility for them and stating that such action targeting tyrants and enemies of Islam<sup>[18]</sup>. Many of those extremist groups were killed and arrested and some fled to their main location in AL-Baida and Ma'arab. The issue of terrorism in South Yemen is viewed by Southern politicians as a kind of political game especially as such extremist groups were/are closer to Northern leaders and those leaders motivate them to disturb the security of the South whenever they wanted to do so. We will not go deeper in discussing this issue

but we can say that such extremist groups were mostly kicked out the Southern governorates and only few individuals who are now still present in secret places and attempt to disturb the security from time to time. The terrorist attack actions are too reduced and there is a huge difference between the terrorist actions conducted in 2016/2017 and those actions conducted in 2018 due to such efforts for security belt and Elite forces in fighting terrorism and kicking such extremist groups out of the southern borders and we hope that 2019 will be a year free of terrorist actions.

### **8.2 Absence of living services**

People of the South are still facing a sever lack of electricity and water, and sanitation problems. In the coastal areas like Aden where temperature is too high, people are suffering a lot during summer season. This issue was addressed many times by the governors of Aden and local authorities in Aden and some other governorates and they plead the government and the president, Hadi, to get over this obstacle but have not solved yet. The problem is still there and citizens claiming that Hadi's government intends to torture the Southern people for their political views and that Northern political parties ruling Hadi government do not want Southerners to have stable and luxurious situation at a time southern resistance forces controlling these governorates militarily.

### **8.3 Economic collapse and Humanitarian crisis**

Due to the collapse of Yemeni riyal, southern people are leading very bad situation as their low salaries don't enable them to get the basics of living. Most southern people who work as teachers, nurses, doctors, clerks, soldiers...etc. are paid salaries between 40000 -80000 YER which has become, with the collapse of Yemeni riyal, approximately 70 – 140 U.S. dollar in comparison to 200 – 400 U.S. dollar before the war. Such little salaries made most citizens unable to provide food, water, medicines and education for their children and that is why we heard reports about famine in some Southern districts<sup>[19][20]</sup>. Such an economic crisis is there in South and North and caused a serious humanitarian disaster though there are huge humanitarian aids provided for population by Emirati Red Crescent, King Salman's Center and some international NGOs.

*“About 8.4 million of Yemen's nearly 28 million residents are “severely food insecure and at risk of starvation.” And according to a [May 24 statement](#) from the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Mark Lowcock, that number could jump by another 10 million by the end of 2018 “if conditions do not improve”<sup>[21]</sup>.*

These crises exhausted citizen because of the unwise management of Hadi's government to collect revenues of oilfields, airports, ports and all various resources of the country to be deposited in the central bank. In addition to that, there is a huge governmental corruption that led to a bad economic situation.

## 9. Southern Issue and the Possible Scenarios in the South

Based on researchers' observations of the situation in Southern Yemen and in Yemen generally, their meetings and discussions with some academicians and politicians and their reading and listening to speeches of political leaders and those specialists in Yemeni situation, they have summed up four possible scenarios that may take place in the South in the future. One scenario could be peaceful and satisfy the Southern will while the other three may complicate the situation and open new stages of war as they don't pay attention to the southern issue and to the power change that took place in the South. As being optimistic of peaceful future, we will begin by the peaceful scenario, and then we will move to other options:

### **The First Scenario: Integrating Southerners in real peace talks with other Northern players and giving them their Right for Self-Determination**

As we have mentioned earlier, today southerners have their own representative for any future negotiation and even if it doesn't represent the whole southern nation but it represents the majority of the nation and its major aim at getting the independence is the option of all southern movement sections. So for the sake of peace in Yemen generally and in the South particularly, Southern Transitional Council should be engaged in any negotiation to guarantee acceptable outcomes for the Southern nation.

Southern Transitional council has selected democratic option for the southern issue and in many speeches by its leader; there was a call for giving southerners their right for self-determination. Such a democratic option will be a new experience in the history of the Yemen especially as Yemenis did not vote for the unification in the past and it was only a sudden decision for Socialist party and people's congress party. Such an antidemocratic merging unification caused Yemenis to pay its bill in the past and still till today. We as researchers believe in democracy and in the freedom of the nations to select what they think to be good for them and based on these views we urged all Yemeni political parties, Hadi's legitimacy, southern transitional council and all international actors who are concerning the situation in Yemen to push for this peaceful and democratic option and to accept its outcomes.

There was an agreement among all Yemeni parties that southern issue is the key to Yemeni crisis and that it should be properly solved but what happened in 2013 Yemeni National Dialogue was absolutely the opposite when Sana'a regime involved southern individuals who are loyal to the North as a representative for the South and to accept outcomes that contradict Southern will. This was a kind of deception and cheating the southern will according to southern activists. If the Yemeni government is really to solve the southern issue, they must involve those real actors on the ground who got the trust of the Southern people.

Unfortunately, this scenario, till now, seems to be ignored by Hadi, his government, Yemeni parties, Huthis and the UN envoy to Yemen. Southerners' call for involving them in Stockholm dialogue was rejected and Hadi intended to send unreal

representatives for the southerners from those members that his government recruited for participating in the national dialogue in 2013.

In 2013, southern movement was not called to participate in such a dialogue and even that faction that participated under what is called “Congress of Southern People” led by Mohammed Ali Ahmed withdrew themselves when they felt that the negotiators were not seriously dealing with the Southern issues and they were pressurized to accept Yemen of six regions as an outcome against their request of Yemen of two regions based on 1990 borders. When they withdrew, Hadi’s government convinced his advisor Yaseen Makawai, with some other individuals, to act as representatives for the southerners though such individuals have no weight in southern society on the ground and can’t call hundreds of southerners for a gathering to support him.

This time the issue is more serious as the southerners have sacrificed thousands of its people in 2015 war against Huthi-Saleh’ alliance and the possibility of having a unified Yemen has become more impossible. There is also another important issue to mention here is that Southerners have today more powerful armed resistance forces who are ready to fight for the right of their people in getting independence. We hope that all those people concerning on Yemeni crisis should take all these inputs into their minds and to support such a peaceful and democratic scenario for the future of Yemen.

### **The Second Scenario: Ignoring Southern Calls and Forcing NDC’s Outcomes or any other Northern Agenda agreed by Northern political players**

As we have mentioned earlier, any attempt to overpass the rights of the southerners by enforcing Sana’a national dialogue outcomes in the South or any other agendas that southerners are not involved in its preparation will lead to violence as southern people and its powerful resistance forces will not keep silent. Such an attempt will lead to new stages of war and violence that will never end. When South Yemen was invaded in 1994, Saleh and his government thought that such a victory will last forever but the opposite was proved as southerners started fighting against Yemeni army and demonstrating in streets demanding their right for restoration of their state. Then, again, they proved their will to fight against Yemeni army invading their South in 2015, that is why they have been bravely fighting against Saleh-Huthi’s alliance though Arab coalition and Hadi’s legitimacy have different agendas.

We hereby emphasize the importance of involving STC in any future negotiations and giving Southern people their right for self-determination and in the same time we alert all those international actors involved in the Yemeni crisis that any attempt to overpass southern people’s will be costly and will lead to nothing but bloodshed.

### **The Third Scenario: Arab coalition’ loss of war against Huthis and leaving hot borders between South and North**

The third option is the least possibility to be. There are few people who think that Saudi-led coalition will not be able to achieve any success in the North as most people

there are supporting Huthies, and the other Northern actors are not seriously fighting against Huthis. Four years passed and Northern resistance backed by Arab coalition are stuck in their own positions in some districts of Ma'arab and Taiz. Only few districts in Taiz got free of Huthi militants. In Sa'ada and Hudaidah, some districts were freed from Huthi militants by the efforts of the Southern resistance.

Northern resistance against Huthies are represented by conflicting parties those in Ma'arab led by Islah party and those in the Western coast led by Tariq (General People's Congress). In Taiz, the northern resistance is also divided into two divisions, Islah party and Salfist and many times there were armed clashes between those two forces who are both pretend to be part of Hadi's legitimacy and are fighting against Huthies under Hadi's legitimacy. Such kind of conflicting agendas in the North made the Arab coalition's efforts useless and too hard to achieve any victory. It is for this reason that some academicians and politicians think that Arab coalition may reach one day to a closed point and decides to withdraw from this war.

In such a situation, both South and North will not be stabilized as the presence of Huthis leading the North will constitute a huge danger for not only for the North but for the South and the whole region. Huthis are not different from Saleh's regime and they have their own greed in Southern wealth. Huthies are also backed by Iran and Iran has its own interests to control Bab-al-Mandab and Aden gulf as such positions are very important for Iran in its future conflict with Gulf countries. South will not be stabilized unless wise forces are controlling the North and instability in the North for sure will affect the South.

#### **The Fourth Scenario: Southern Resistance Forces may decide to kick out Hadi's legitimacy and to control the whole South**

Due to the Humanitarian crisis in the South represented by shortage of fuel, absence of services such as electricity, water and health, collapse of Yemeni riyal against U.S. dollars, many Southern citizens are pressurizing Southern Transitional council to stop its cooperation with Hadi's legitimacy as they don't do their duties towards the Southern nation. They consider Hadi's government as burden on the Southern nation as such a government does not respect their humanity and punishing the southern people for their political views. If such suffering continues and Arab coalition kept silent, Southern Transitional Council and Southern Resistance Forces may find themselves one day obliged to fight against Hadi's government and to create a southern government.

This scenario could be bloody too as Hadi has some military forces in the South that will resist and they will gain some supports form those Northern forces as they share the same goal which is how to keep the South under Sana'a control. Such a situation will be so difficult and will place Arab coalition in a critical situation and may lead to its loss of the whole battle. It is true that Southern Resistance Forces may gain the war as they are the most powerful player on ground and backed by southern people but war will cost all the conflicting parties a lot of blood and the situation will be more difficult and unstable.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

Southern Issue has appeared after the invasion of South in 1994 and controlling it by force, then applying compulsory exile and retirement to Southern military, diplomatic and political leaders as well as soldiers. The Yemeni merging unity converted into a forced union with different unfair policies that made Southerners feel that they are citizen of second degree. Such a situation created a lot of peaceful and violent conflict between the Southerners and the Yemeni government. Ignoring such unfair issues accelerates the situation in the South and led to more and more upset. When 2015 war began and Arab coalition started fighting against Huthi-Saleh' alliance (Sana'a regime), Southerners found it a good opportunity to fight against Huthi-Saleh's alliance and take revenge for their past and that is why in few months Southern resistance forces backed by Arab coalition could win the war in Southern governorates and kick Huthi-Saleh's armed forces out of the Southern borders.

From this context presented in this study, it seems that Southern people don't accept any kind of unification with the North due to the past history of unification in which southerners encountered death, forced retirement, exile, humiliation, deconstruction of their factories and cities and plundering their land and wealth. Therefore, this study recommends all those politicians engaged in the Yemeni crisis to understand the nature of the Southern issue and to work in giving southern people their right for self-determination to decide what they think to be good for them. The researchers urges all the Yemeni political parties to sit on a table of dialogue and to solve their political problems through dialogue and talks as armed conflict will lead to nothing but more violence. The study hereby emphasizes the need for North-North dialogue to solve their northern problems and South-South dialogues to close southern views about the future of their South. Then to have South – North dialogue to agree about some guidelines for solving past issues and sharing power for a transitional temporary period till Southerners decide what their state should be through voting boxes. The researchers believe that forcing any political agenda such as merging unification (old form of state), federal state of six regions (Hadis' view of future Yemen), federal state of two regions for temporary period then giving Southern people their right for independence (Some southern political factions' view) or immediate secession (most southern political factions' view) by any political armed power will lead to more violence and war. They urge for North – South's serious dialogues and talks that lead to a conclusion that satisfy the Southern people and give them their right for self-determination in a democratic way in which the majority of the Southerner will decide what is good for the South.





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