

Yemen

Revolution Suspended?

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of a UN-brokered transition agreement, in February 2012, the Yemeni President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh relinquished power to his deputy, who formed a new government which included the opposition. Unlike uprisings in other Arab countries, in Yemen, elite rivalries revealed themselves in the uprising of 2011 and shaped its trajectory. Saleh’s rivals joined the protest movement and took control of it, establishing hierarchical relations among the protesters and thus enabling themselves to exercise censorship. In certain respects, the old regime has endured in another guise, but the new president, ‘Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi, has begun to dismantle some of its pillars. In the light of a collapsed economy, a humanitarian crisis, unresolved conflicts in several parts of the country, political instability and greater U.S. involvement, he faces extraordinary challenges.

‘Our people will remain present in every institution. Two months have passed since the creation of this weak government. It won’t be able to build a thing or put one brick on top of another’. Former President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh, March 2012.¹

Following several months of protests against his rule, in November 2011 the Yemeni President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh agreed to sign a transition agreement obliging him to transfer power to his deputy. In spite

¹ Associated Press, 15 March 2012.

of declaring the deal a ‘coup’ and the uprising a ‘charade’² – after all, he had won the presidential election of 2006 – he insisted he had given up power voluntarily in order to spare the ‘blood of Yemenis’.³ Indeed, as the protest movement beginning in January 2011 grew stronger, Yemen’s long-serving president, who prides himself on having unified the country in 1990 was confronted with two choices: 1) crush the uprising causing the death of hundreds of people and facing an uncertain future thereafter, or 2) accept a deal that guaranteed him immunity from prosecution. By not following in the footsteps of his counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, nor Libya and Syria, and by announcing that he would remain leader of the party he had founded in 1982, the General People’s Congress (GPC), he had chosen a ‘third way’. He had bowed to the inevitable, but departed with his head unbowed.

Prior to Mubarak’s forced resignation in February 2011, the Yemeni political elite’s belief in its ability to maintain power was unshaken (Phillips 2011: 21). Saleh had weathered the storms of three decades. For example, because of his shrewd manipulation of jihadis, they never posed a real threat to his rule.⁴ Anti-regime demonstrations in northern and southern Yemen since 2003 were met with extreme force, and for almost a decade failed to escalate into nationwide protests. In spite of being the first ruler on the Arabian Peninsula to have introduced an embryonic democratic system, Saleh’s government retained key features of Arab military regimes such as unaccountable security agencies. Saleh preferred ‘closed-door patrimonial bargaining over inclusive participatory politics’ (Phillips 2011: 12).⁵ His ‘divide and rule’ strategies served to maintain a level of disorder paradoxically conducive to ensuring regime survival rather than state building (Wedeen 2008: 51, 179).⁶

The botched unification of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) ended in the latter’s defeat in the war of 1994. Thereafter, reforms were gradually revoked. Saleh amended the unity constitution by dismantling institutions of joint

² Personal communication with chief negotiators, 22 March 2012, London.

³ “الرئيس اليمني: ثورات الربيع العربي لوثة وتخریب”, www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2012/02/120213_yemen_saleh.shtml.

⁴ Several jihadis, some of whom had fought the Soviet army in Afghanistan during the 1980s, were incorporated into various security units (Boucek 2010: 12).

⁵ Quoting Daniel Brumberg and others, Phillips (2008: 34) notes that state-initiated political openings can be instrumental in perpetuating authoritarian regimes.

⁶ Here Wedeen theorizes an argument made earlier by the International Crisis Group (2002: 14).

governance and granting himself increasing authority to rule by decree (Day 2010: 65). In 2009, all political parties agreed to postpone parliamentary elections to initiate a dialogue on reforms of the electoral and constitutional framework that had hitherto mainly served the GPC's own interests. Instead of promoting dialogue, a few months before the uprising the ruling party suggested amendments to the constitution that would abolish presidential term limits and thus enable Saleh to seek another term after the end of his present one in 2013. Promises made by him in 2010 to implement administrative and economic reforms to tackle growing poverty and declining oil and water resources were not kept (Phillips 2011: 41). The following year, Muhammad al-Dhurafi, then assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of Finance, claimed that 'since the beginning of the 1970s . . . no new hospitals were built in San'a other than private ones. This violates the principles of a nation that is concerned with the well-being of its citizens. The level of unemployment and poverty probably exceeds that of African nations . . . Saleh's palace is only 200 meters away from the traffic light junction that is filled with beggars of all ages. It cannot be said that he is ignorant of the situation'.⁷

A 'stabilisation' project initiated by the 'Friends of Yemen' in 2010 attempted to salvage a regime that had lost its legitimacy amongst the population, but took into account neither political grievances nor Saleh's history of broken promises. Modelled on simultaneous revolts in North Africa, the uprising against Saleh's regime a year later brought those grievances into sharp focus. What was more, intra-elite divisions and rivalries within the powerful Hashid confederation from which the political elite was recruited had already become apparent during the 2006 presidential elections and Saleh's war in the northern province of Sa'da (2004–2010). These power struggles reverberated in the uprising and even manifested themselves in violent clashes between republican guards commanded by Saleh's son Ahmad and Hashid militia in the spring of 2011. In the elections, Hamid al-Ahmar, a wealthy businessman whose father was the paramount shaykh of Hashid and founder of al-Islah, Yemen's first 'Islamist' party, supported Saleh's rival candidate.⁸ In those years, tensions between the Ahmars and members of Saleh's family about the monopolisation of economic assets took on a political dimension.

⁷ 'Yemen: The stolen revolution?' YouTube (<http://www.presstv.ir>), 14 September 2011.

⁸ Al-Islah was founded in 1990 as a counterweight to the Yemeni Socialist Party. Divided internally, it is made up of tribal leaders, businessmen, hard-line Salafi groups, and religious moderates such as Nobel Laureate Tawakkul Karman.

According to one of the president's loyalists, 'Saleh encouraged and supported the Ahmars' entrepreneurial activities in order to keep them away from politics. He did not realise that Hamid was accumulating money in order to satisfy his political ambitions in the future'.

In 2009, Saleh was more occupied with outmanoeuvring his rivals than with the new threat arising from the merging of the Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qaeda (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – AQAP). The military campaign in Sa'da, ostensibly to weaken the charismatic new Zaydi-Shi'i leadership that had emerged in response to aggressive Salafi missionary activity, turned in its later phase into a theatre for humiliating Saleh's key rival, General 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar.⁹ The general, one of the biggest landowners in the country who commanded the First Armoured Division (FAD) until December 2012 and was a prominent member of the regime's inner circle, opposed Saleh's grooming of his eldest son Ahmad as successor. King 'Abdullah and Prince Nayif of Saudi Arabia, who had long been weary of President Saleh, contemplated replacing him with the general. Subsequently, Saleh had the General's brigades moved away from the capital and established new security organizations headed by his nephews who he believed would back his son. One of the reasons for rekindling the Sa'da war in August 2009 was to expose the general's poor performance on the battlefield, thus undermining his credibility. Whenever the general appeared on the point of success, Saleh halted military operations.¹⁰

Renewed warfare might also have forced Hamid al-Ahmar to abandon his plan to organize nationwide anti-regime demonstrations to fetter Saleh's power.¹¹ Such protests would have been inappropriate at a time the regime claimed to defend national unity. At that time, Hamid tried to convince 'Ali Muhsin to join the opposition.¹² However, the general defected only after he surmised the regime might unravel after the killing of over forty protesters on 18 March 2011. He exploited the uprising to launch his opposition to Saleh and to take revenge; by assuming prominent roles as sponsors and protectors of the protesters, he and Hamid were able to claim the moral high ground.

⁹ 'Ali Muhsin, who hails from a humble background in Sanhan, is not related to the shaykhly al-Ahmar family that belongs to a section of Hashid called al-'Usaymat. The Zaydi-Shi'is are a moderate branch of the Twelver-Shi'a.

¹⁰ Army commander Hamid al-Qusaybi, cited by a government official requesting anonymity.

¹¹ Wikileaks Sanaa 00001617 002 OF 003.

¹² *Ibid.*

The Uprising: A View from Within

Inspired by the fall of Ben ‘Ali’s regime, on 15 January 2011, students and unemployed graduates in Ta‘izz and San‘a took to the streets in support of the Tunisians, calling for an end to corruption and for economic and democratic reforms in their own country.¹³ Protests quickly spread to other parts of the country, including Aden where demonstrations in favour of south Yemen’s renewed separation from the north had taken place since 2007. In response, Saleh proposed constitutional amendments limiting the number of presidential terms – a move that left protesters unconvinced. In an attempt to stop the movement from gaining momentum, a few days later activist and subsequent Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakkul Karman, who was leading some of the student protests, was accused of organizing illegal demonstrations and was detained along with dozens of other activists.

At an emergency parliamentary session on 2 February, Saleh announced that he would not ‘extend [his] mandate’ and that he disapproved of ‘hereditary rule’.¹⁴ However, the next day (‘Day of Rage’), following calls by the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP – the opposition main coalition) for ‘million-man marches’ all over the country, 10,000 people gathered at San‘a University.¹⁵ Like in several North African countries, protesters shouted slogans demanding ‘the end of the regime’. Demonstrations continued until Mubarak’s resignation on 11 February. Thousands of people went to the streets to celebrate the fall of a second Arab dictator, seeing it as a sign that Saleh might be next. That night, hundreds of security forces and armed thugs attacked the protesters with knives and sticks, while police arrested dozens.¹⁶ A week thereafter, a group of students set up tents outside the gate of San‘a University and vowed not to leave the area. Day by day more people joined, until the place was transformed into a ‘tent-city’ with thousands of inhabitants: Change

¹³ Demonstrations may also have been linked to the long history of labour strikes and protests that began in the South and later extended to the North. In 2008, strikes by port workers, teachers, labourers, and professors took place in cities throughout Yemen. In 2011, demands for employment, increased wages, and better work conditions reinvigorated this labour movement.

¹⁴ *Time*, 2 February 2012. This is an allusion to the accusation made by many Yemenis that Saleh wanted his son Ahmad to assume power after him.

¹⁵ The JMP, founded in 2002, is a coalition of six opposition parties dominated by the Islah party, seconded by the Socialist Party that used to be the ruling party of the PDRY.

¹⁶ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/11/yemen-pro-government-forces-attack-demonstrators>.

Square was born.¹⁷ With time, the ‘tent city’ covered more than four kilometres strung across the road. Its inhabitants came from different social and regional backgrounds, including Islamists, socialists, liberals, artists, judges, academics, women, children, the elderly, the unemployed . . . all sharing food and qat.¹⁸ From one entrance, a sign read ‘Welcome to the land of liberty’. However, in Change Square and other squares around the country, Yemenis were not newly discovering the power of acting as a public (see Tripp, Chapter 6 in this volume). By virtue of its tradition of civic activism (Carapico 1998), party politics and its daily qat sessions often involving large numbers of people and intense political deliberation, Yemen’s public sphere has never been depoliticized, nor could it be entirely controlled by security agents (Wedeen 2008). On the one hand, collective political activism at the square constituted continuity with other forms of citizen participation (yet in more potent form). On the other hand, it promoted novel forms of national solidarities that might change the terms of Yemeni citizens’ political subjectivities and interaction in the future.

At the square, social boundaries related to gender, class, and region were transcended to some degree. Existing gender moralities and local legal codes were challenged. San‘ani women, who traditionally must neither be out at night nor talk to unrelated men (except in places such as universities and offices), slept in (women-only) tents and chewed qat with men.¹⁹ Self-identified tribesmen shared tents with opposing tribesmen with whom for years they had been locked into cycles of revenge killings, agreeing on peaceful relations and instructing their tribes not to revenge their deaths in case they were killed by security forces during the uprising.²⁰ Networking, awareness-raising activities, debates, seminars, and art exhibitions constituted democratic practice more inclusive than, say, at qat chews. Literacy classes were held and more than twenty newspapers were produced and distributed by both professional and ‘citizen journalists’. Prior to the uprising, these activities targeted above all urban elite or civil society groups, building the foundation of an

¹⁷ Many ‘squares’ were created in various cities throughout Yemen. By virtue of the location of our field research, and the fact that many of the protesters and activists from other cities congregated in San‘a, we focus on events there.

¹⁸ Qat is a mild stimulant chewed by adults.

¹⁹ Qat chews are usually gendered.

²⁰ ‘Un tribalisme civilisé’, *La Voix du Yémen*, 27 April 2011. <http://www.lavoixduyemen.com/2011/04/27/un-tribalisme-civilise/239>.

inclusive nationwide grass-roots movement that was partially blocked owing to events following 18 March.

18 March – A Turning Point in the Movement?

On 18 March, after Friday prayers, snipers fired on pro-democracy protesters at Change Square, causing many deaths. Several government officials resigned in protest. ‘Friday of Dignity’, as it was referred to later, was the bloodiest and most violent day witnessed by peaceful protesters in San‘a, and a turning point in the uprising, changing the scene on the ground, the players, the decision-makers, and the movement’s direction. Activists held the government responsible, but Saleh denied his forces were behind the shooting and court proceedings have been suspended. Saleh declared a state of emergency, imposed a curfew on ‘armed men in all cities’²¹ and fired his entire cabinet. The most important consequence of the shooting was the announcement by General ‘Ali Muhsin and several senior army commanders of their support for the ‘revolution’ and the deployment of army units to ‘protect’ the protestors.²² FAD soldiers surrounded the square and replaced the civilian security. However, the general did not officially resign, nor was he dismissed from the army. Nor did he remove Saleh’s portrait from his office – in fact, he added another one later on. At the square, his joining of the protests was controversial. Some protesters, who felt vulnerable after the killings, hailed him and his soldiers as heroes who had vowed to make the square a sanctuary for peaceful demonstrators. Others took a pragmatic view arguing that the FAD’s defection created a balance between army factions and offered protesters more bargaining power. However, others suspected that the general besieged the square as a form of protection for his units from possible attacks by the Republican Guards. Some also thought ‘Ali Muhsin, who has always been a shadowy figure in Yemeni politics (Phillips 2008: 52), was playing a double game, implying that he wanted to settle scores with Saleh and pursue his own interests rather than support the youth’s demands.²³ Some of those who contested the general’s presence at the square, considering him to be part of the regime

²¹ “Yemen unrest: ‘Dozens killed’ as gunmen target rally”, *BBC News*, 18 March 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12783585>.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Interview with Hamza al-Kamali, ‘Independent Media Centre’, Change Square, 20 March 2011.

and a political player seeking to maintain the status quo, left the square. They were also concerned about a possible military coup by the general. According to Hamza Al-Kamali, a young protestor, ‘how can a man who has a bloody past and is responsible for the death of thousands of people, be moved by the death of only fifty-two? This is surely his way of getting on the winning team and to save himself’. Indeed, sympathizers of the Southern Movement²⁴ and the Zaydi-Shi‘i revivalist movement (Huthis) disapproved of the general’s announcement on the grounds that he had participated in the war of 1994 that led to the defeat of southern forces and was in charge of the military campaign in Sa‘da.

Similar discussions took place in the southern provinces, which by the time the nationwide uprising began had already witnessed four years of mass opposition to the Saleh regime. When the protests spread to several cities, many amongst the Southern Movement believed that there was a real opportunity for change and put aside their calls for secession, hoping that a new regime would mean justice for the South. However, after ‘Ali Muhsin embraced the protest movement, they became disillusioned; subsequently, calls for ‘an end to northern occupation’ and separation intensified.

Another implication of his joining was the gradual militarisation of the square. Despite the commitment to peaceful resistance, since the arrival of the FAD, the line between soldiers and protesters became more blurred. Soldiers were seen entering tents with their Kalashnikovs, something that was forbidden at the outset of the ‘revolution’. Occasionally, they changed their uniforms for civilian clothes. At the square, ‘Ali Muhsin recruited unemployed young men – often under eighteen – for the FAD and Islah-affiliated militias.

In a newspaper interview, Yahya al-Dhib, the first soldier who defected from Saleh’s army prior to ‘Ali Muhsin and the FAD, spoke of the negative effect of the general’s control over the square, especially because he had been recruiting civilians to fight in his army. He also explained how he was threatened after refusing orders from ‘Ali Muhsin to use violence against attackers. ‘They told me that if you want your salary, you have to hold the weapon and kill whoever assaults the protesters’, adding ‘they will make us kill each other and they will not care how many of us die’.²⁵

²⁴ The Southern Movement emerged as a result of discontent in the southern provinces after 1994. Earlier demands for equal citizenship rights and jobs have culminated in calls for the reinstatement of the PDRY (see Day 2010).

²⁵ ‘Faces from Yemen’s revolution: Yahia al-Dheeb’, *Yemen Times*, 10 October 2011.

In fact, in September and October 2011, attacks by security forces on protesters soon evolved into clashes between them and the FAD.

Post-18 March: 'Establishment' Actors Consolidate their Power in Change Square

Echoing Filiu (2011: 57), Tripp (Chapter 6 in this volume) highlights the 'leaderless' nature of the uprisings of 2011. However, in Yemen's Change Square there were powerful actors who aspired to control the protest movement and did not shy away from the use of force. In spite of declaring their opposition to Saleh, those men – all members of the regime – began to exercise authority over the space that had been previously reclaimed by protesters as part of 'a counter-hegemonic project of resistance' (ibid.). As a self-styled leader of the opposition against Saleh, 'Ali Muhsin became a paradoxical figure who maintained his government salary after his defection. His joining also consolidated the power of his close affiliate, the Islah party that after the 'Friday of Dignity' came to play a crucial role in determining the protest movement's direction. At the square, this raised questions as to whether the uprising was an independent movement led by 'youth' – as it has often been portrayed – or whether it was dominated by the most powerful opposition party, al-Islah. Thanks to its access to mosques and party-affiliated NGOs, al-Islah has a large following. The large presence of unemployed youth at the square has also helped al-Islah and 'Ali Muhsin to 'buy' loyalties through money and food distribution.

Al-Islah's attempt at controlling the square and Hamid Al-Ahmar's intention to use his constituency to gain power caused resentment, especially amongst the younger generation who does not hold memberships of officially recognised political parties, nor close ties or affiliations ('independents').²⁶ Those who had spearheaded the protest movement and felt empowered were disillusioned. As one of the student protesters who had been amongst those who began the sit-in in front of San'a University in February 2011 noted, 'our tents were not as nice as they are now, we did not have enough food, and we were not as organized, but we were in control'. Although lacking experience and funding, they were successful in forming coalitions with other groups. For example, the Coordination Council for the Yemeni Revolution for Change (CCYRC), an umbrella coalition intended to bring together independent groups in squares across

²⁶ Some have been active in politics on an independent basis or in NGOs.

Yemen, was made up of about seventy groups nationwide. Grass-roots groups emerged whose numbers steadily increased, taking on different tasks: medical, security, financial, provision of services, and the establishment of media task forces. However, once well-organized and well-funded members of the JMP (mainly Islahis) joined the movement, they began infiltrating the organizing committee that was in control of security and planning activities. At first, ‘independent’ youth welcomed them because organizing and coordinating the movement was a priority. Yet, eventually, Islahi hardliners who had assumed the leadership of many of the major groups consolidated their power and monopolised decisions. In an arena where emphasis was placed on freedom and change, the organizing committee began censoring information and confiscating private property.

Thus, after 18 March, with the support of the FAD, al-Islah grew stronger and slowly began monopolising the square’s platform – the centre of media broadcasting and live coverage – and decision-making processes.²⁷ Consequently, independent groups became marginalized, unable to express their own opinions – their choices were to stay quiet, to suffer abuse, or to leave the square. The Islah party and the independent youth were caught in a tug of war, with leading activists chanting, ‘No partisan politics, no political parties. Our revolution is a Youth Revolution’.

Independent groups repudiated accusations that they were controlled by either al-Islah or more generally the JMP. They often used these two terms interchangeably, highlighting the hegemony of al-Islah over other parties (of the JMP) as exemplified by their control over political decision-making. Many argued, since the other JMP parties remained in the coalition even after many abuses were committed against activists, that they were complicit in the crimes. As one protester asked, ‘while it is al-Islah hardliners who commit the crimes, why are the other parties still partners in the coalition even though they are also targets?’

Islah’s control over the square often led independent activists to defy its decisions in order to demonstrate that it does not control ‘the street’. Feeling excluded and resentful, on various occasions they and others organized their own marches without the approval of the organizing committee – only to experience violence from Islahi hardliners and ‘Ali Muhsin’s soldiers. Following protesters’ complaints about the organizing committee’s policies, its members were replaced, but maltreatment of protesters did not stop.

²⁷ Controlling the square, of course, means controlling the outgoing messages.

After Saleh's speech about inappropriate mixing of men and women protesters, a cross-gender march was planned in protest at his remarks. The organizing committee was concerned to 'prove' that women did not fraternize with men at the square. Some of those who marched jointly that day were beaten by committee members and FAD soldiers – those who had vowed to protect the protesters. Defying the committee's orders, on another occasion independent protesters marched to (the then Vice President) 'Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi's house and were met with batons and gun shots in the air, and some were detained once again. Al-Islah's and 'Ali Muhsin's authority manifested itself not least in the prisons run by them – the clichéd hallmark of Foucault's disciplined subject – where recalcitrant youth were taken. The rationale given for operating private jails at the square (and new ones established by 'Ali Muhsin, found in various public institutions) was to 'detain thugs who attacked peaceful protesters'. The organizing committee often detained independent protesters on the false premise that they were 'thugs', and soon these prisons became populated with people who had been too vocal against the decisions of either al-Islah or 'Ali Muhsin. Protesters were to defy state power, but not theirs. Human rights organizations were not allowed to visit the prisoners who claimed to have been repeatedly beaten. 'There are many methods they use to impose their decisions, such as [offering] food in return for loyalty, making accusations that someone is a government spy, or detaining people as happened to me' said Nasir al-'Ujaybi, an independent protester and member of the CCYRC. Independent protesters and groups opposed to al-Islah's or 'Ali Muhsin's practices in the square were also faced with smear campaigns via Facebook and the Suhayl television channel owned by Hamid al-Ahmar.

Although the JMP – especially al-Islah – was criticised by 'independents' over these violations, it was able to deny responsibility because of the clever distance it created between them and other groups in the square. For example, the organizing committee did not officially carry al-Islah's name, and many of its members were not affiliated to the party. However, a closer look into the group's composition reveals that the decision-makers were members of al-Islah and often received direct orders from top party leaders. Similarly, many other groups who claimed to be independent were in fact affiliated to the party. This has allowed them to control the square and simultaneously evade responsibility when the organizing committee is accused of violations, giving it the opportunity to play both sides.

Moreover, some leading Islah civil society members remained quiet even while abuse occurred, often questioning the truth behind such

accusations. Amongst them was Tawakkul Karman, chairwoman of the NGO ‘Women Journalists without Chains’ who had already organized protests several years before the uprising began. Jointly with other members of civil society groups, she demonstrated weekly in favour of the right to freedom of expression and an end to corruption. Karman, who prefers to be known as a youth activist rather than a member of al-Islah’s advisory council, exemplifies the double game played by her party; members of the party – including ‘Ali Muhsin, who has ties to it – secured leading roles in both camps. In the early days of the ‘revolution’, Karman’s decisions often varied from the politics of her party. Occasionally, she was at odds with its leadership, most notably on 11 May 2011, when she decided to march without the approval of the organizing committee. Thereafter, however, Karman’s political decisions were in line with Islah’s. For example, in a BBC interview after Saleh’s signing of the transition agreement, she declared her opposition to the initiative and the forthcoming election. ‘If there is only one consensus candidate where is the people’s choice then?’ she asked. ‘This is a conspiracy against the Yemeni people, and against the revolution. It means nothing to us, and has nothing to do with us. We reject it wholeheartedly’.²⁸ Her party, however, asked its members and followers to take part in the election. A month before the election, Karman publicly declared her loyalty to the political process and encouraged people to vote, stating on the day of the election, ‘this [election] is the successful product of the people’s struggle’.²⁹ In response to a post on Facebook where a man wondered about her change of mind regarding the election, suggesting that her and her party’s main goal was to gain seats in the new government, Karman responded ‘if we look at the statistics of the martyrs and the wounded, we see that the largest share goes to the Islah party. You cannot find a single martyr from the Huthis [adherents of the Zaydi revivalist movement] and very few from the armed Southern Movement. They cry about the wounded and the martyrs but left them [protesters associated with al-Islah] alone to fight ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh’s regime’.³⁰

By highlighting Islah’s sacrifices and dismissing those made by others who had fought Saleh’s regime, Karman made claims in the name of her party to the ownership of the ‘revolution’, and underscored rivalries and fault lines within the opposition, which has become more sharply

²⁸ http://youtu.be/VVD_OiDiJaY. Karman had herself planned to contest the elections.

²⁹ <http://youtu.be/omQeVZ7TBB8>.

³⁰ Her statement was met with indignation amongst members of the Southern Movement and the Huthis whose uprising claimed as many victims as Syria’s between March 2011 and June 2012, most of them non-combatants.

polarised. In Change Square, members of the Islah party tried to burn tents set up by the Southern Movement (Hirak). After 18 March peaceful coexistence amongst Islahis and Huthis gradually gave way to collision, reflecting tensions and armed conflict between them in the northern provinces. These different sides are clearly demarcated by the slogans and posters that decorate their tents, dividing the square into a northern and southern part, with independent groups in the central area often mockingly calling the square ‘north and south Beirut’. In June 2012, Islah hardliners for the first time chanted ‘No to Huthis, our revolution is the revolution of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers)’. Thus, Islah indicated its unwillingness to eschew partisan politics, but none the less subscribed to political dialogue. Its general secretary, ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Anisi, was a member of an ‘outreach committee’ that discussed the Huthis’ participation in the national dialogue with their leadership in Sa‘da in February 2012.

Islah’s double game continued even after the signing of the power-sharing agreement. As part of the JMP, Islah signed it and joined the transitional government (as will be discussed), but by May 2012, its members were still at the square shouting revolutionary slogans against the agreement. This led many younger members of al-Islah and other parties to leave them, sometimes joining new groups such as al-Watan (‘Homeland’), made up of emerging youth leaders and businessmen; the Justice and Development party, headed by Muhammad Abu Luhum, a former GPC member; and the Yemeni Labour Party, the first party created by and for a stigmatised group who is attributed to East African descent and often referred to by the derogatory term ‘al-Akhdam’. The first Salafi-affiliated al-Rashad party was also established. Moreover, because it joined the new government, al-Islah sought ascendancy within the JMP, which is unlikely to remain a united opposition against the new president. As for the GPC, at the time of this writing, several of its members wish to reform the party and envisage a coalition with the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and the Huthis against al-Islah.

A Negotiated Transition

The Yemeni uprising alarmed both the Saudi and American governments because of its potential for stirring up revolts in neighbouring Gulf countries, for backtracking on and jeopardising U.S. counterterrorism policy and, after ‘Ali Muhsin’s defection, for descending into violence. During the early phase of the uprising, U.S. and EU officials were already

discouraging Yemeni activists from continuing their protests.³¹ In April, efforts were made to contain ‘the revolution’ by ousting the man at the regime’s apex without altering its fundamental structure. To this end, an agreement was drafted in consultation with Saleh’s advisor ‘Abd al-Karim al-Iryani and others. It was Saleh’s idea to involve the GCC, and subsequently the draft agreement was adopted by the secretary general of the GCC, ‘Abd al-Latif al-Zayani. Like other GCC countries, at that time Saudi Arabia was opposed to Saleh’s departure and played no role in the drafting of the agreement. (Qatar made a few minor amendments but later withdrew from the mediation process.) According to one political observer, ‘there was a fatwa from Riyadh [that is, an endorsement of the initiative], but it was a GCC initiative without the GCC’. The agreement, which during its initial phase was not based on negotiations between the GPC and JMP, was presented to Saudi Arabia only a few hours before the signing ceremony. Calculating that it might not win fresh elections, Islah was hesitant at first but decided to support the agreement because it wanted to see Saleh squeezed out of office. What came to be known as the ‘GCC initiative’ centred on the formation of a government under the leadership of an opposition candidate and on demands that demonstrations end and public spaces be evacuated.³² Following his resignation, the president was to be granted immunity from prosecution, a measure rejected by human rights groups and ‘revolutionary youth’ who insisted that he be held accountable for the killing of protesters.³³ The draft agreement is pursuant to several basic principles such as the preservation of Yemen’s unity, security, and stability; the fulfilment of the Yemeni people’s aspiration for change and reform; and a transfer of power based on national consensus. It stipulates that a national unity government will be formed with equal representation from the GPC and the opposition parties, and that the vice president will become the legitimate president thirty days after the agreement. Terms such as ‘democracy’, ‘national dialogue’, ‘women’, and ‘youth’ do not appear in the initial GCC document of April.

After Ansar al-Shari‘a (Partisans of Shari‘a), an affiliate of AQAP, had gained control of two cities in southern Yemen and had come close to Aden and the Arabian Sea in July 2011, the United States insisted on an

³¹ *New Yorker*, 11 April 2011.

³² <http://www.yobserver.com>, 23 April 2011.

³³ ‘Yemen: Deadly attacks follow Saleh immunity pact’, Human Rights Watch, 28 April 2011.

immediate transition of power. Political analysts suspect that Saleh, keen to raise fears that the militants would expand their operations were he to step down, allowed the militants some leverage. However, the United States, which still supported Saleh's regime even when it had become the main threat to national stability, seem to have interpreted their territorial gains as demonstrating the regime's inability to protect their interests in a country of geostrategic importance.³⁴

Although Saleh had agreed to the GCC proposal, he declined to sign the agreement for several months – presumably, he resented the prospect that his rivals would celebrate his resignation as their victory and feared that power might fall into their hands. Consequently, he pledged to step down on behalf of the youth movement rather than the JMP (Filiu 2011: 68). In November 2011, Saleh was persuaded by UN envoy Jamal Benomar to sign the second agreement. Saleh wanted neither to suffer Qaddafi's fate nor have his assets frozen. The November agreement, which unlike the first one, was based on UN-led negotiations between Saleh and the opposition, reflects the UN's concern that the political process be participatory and inclusive. It calls for early presidential elections within ninety days and the formation of a government of national unity, stipulating that the first phase of the transition period shall end with the inauguration of the new president (this has been completed). The second phase is to last for two years – which includes the time of this writing – and is to end with the holding of general elections in accordance with a new constitution. The agreement – essentially a compromise between elites – places emphasis on human rights and good governance. It calls for the establishment of a committee on military affairs for achieving security and stability and a conference for national dialogue focussing on changes to the constitution and national reconciliation. It is to include all political actors, amongst them 'revolutionary youth', the Southern Movement, the Huthis, civil society, and women representatives. After the signing of the agreement, different members of the Security Council 'volunteered' to take on complementary advisory roles: Russia dealing with the national dialogue committee, France with constitutional reform, the United States with restructuring the army, and Britain – in liaison with EU partners – with the security and justice sector.

³⁴ For some time, Saleh's strategy had worked: in 2010, the United States spent \$176 million on training and other military assistance (*Washington Post*, 16 May 2012), and King 'Abdullah granted him \$700 million (*New York Times*, 17 March 2012).

A presidential election was held on February 21, 2012. ‘Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi, a consensus figure, was the only candidate.³⁵ Ordinary Yemenis hoped that the election – in reality a referendum and a symbolic act sealing Saleh’s exit from power – would end the ‘paralysis’ (a term they often used) of previous months. The new Prime Minister Muhammad Basindwa, tasked to form a government of national unity, was nominated by the opposition. Half of the coalition government is composed of members of the GPC that is still headed by the former president. He has become the *éminence grise* who has not ceased interfering in government affairs. Key portfolios such as foreign affairs and defence are still in the hands of his party. Like Hadi, the minister of defence General Muhammad Nasir Ahmad ‘Ali hails from Abyan province (southern Yemen) and moved to the YAR in 1986. One of the shortcomings of the GCC agreement is that key members of the political elite, some of whom have attempted to stifle the political process, have not been asked to leave the country temporarily, in spite of agreeing with this proposal (the GCC objected). The power struggle within the elite – beginning before and during the uprising – has been carried into the new, post-Saleh era. Even though its members belong to various political parties, their conflict is driven by interest rather than ideology.

In addition to constitutional legality, Hadi enjoys the backing of the ‘international community’ and of ‘Ali Muhsin, and has started to dismantle some of the old regime’s pillars and to assert his authority. (This has been one of the ‘revolutionary youth’s’ demands.) However, he has yet to demonstrate his ability to build a broad base of support within Yemeni society. In an effort to reduce southerners’ alienation from the central government and indeed from himself (since he helped to defeat southern forces in 1994), he replaced Aden’s governor and police chief as well as the commander of the southern region, Mahdi Maqwala, who stands accused of having collaborated with AQAP-affiliated elements in order to make the region ungovernable and of having illegally appropriated land in the south for personal gains. Hadi also replaced the governors of five provinces and nearly twenty military commanders who were loyal to

³⁵ Hadi, trained at Sandhurst and in Egypt and Russia, rose in the military ranks of the PDRY. Following clashes within the ruling party in 1986, Hadi – along with his battalions – fled to the North joining ‘Ali Nasir Muhammad (former PDRY prime minister) and became one of Saleh’s advisors. Having dealt the southern separatist forces a decisive blow in the war of 1994, Hadi was given the defence portfolio and vice presidency. His appointment also allowed Saleh to rebut accusations that his government was dominated by the (northern) victors.

Saleh. He began to establish his own power base and – during the early months of his rule – to redress the balance between North and South in the military and security institutions. However, more recently, sustained recruitment of army and security personnel from Abyan and Shabwa has raised suspicion that he will build another, different patronage system rather than a supra-regional professional army. Former PDRY governor of Abyan Muhammad ‘Ali Ahmad has returned from his exile in Britain and now supports Hadi against another PDRY veteran politician, ‘Ali Salim al-Bidh, who advocates Yemen’s renewed partition. Some of the governors Hadi appointed hail from the provinces they govern, amongst them those in charge of Abyan, Aden, and Ta‘izz. This policy, which might help to heal divisions, constitutes a delicate balancing act because regional affiliation in the distribution of power has been a contentious issue for centuries. However, his more recent appointment of several Islahi governors in the northern provinces (in September 2012), which reflects the strong influence of the Islah party on his government, has exacerbated the violence there.

Some of Saleh’s relatives and loyalists who were dismissed from their posts were defiant and even mutinous. Saleh’s half-brother Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar laid siege to San‘a airport, forcing its closure after threatening to shoot down planes.³⁶ The transfer of the Third Brigade – an advanced military unit of the Republican Guard stationed on a mountain overlooking the presidential palace – from Saleh’s nephew Tariq to ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Halili, a friend of ‘Ali Muhsin, carried more than symbolic weight; the brigade included about 200 tanks and was in charge of protecting the capital from all directions.³⁷ Several months after his inauguration, Hadi had not removed any high profile allies of ‘Ali Muhsin. The officer corps was still Sanhani³⁸ and a number of Saleh’s loyalists remained in their posts. Rather than calling off the military parade for the twenty-second anniversary of Yemen’s unification after the murder of ninety-six cadets who had been rehearsing for the event the previous day, Hadi had it moved from Sab‘in Square (where parades took place during Saleh’s era) to the Aviation Academy located in a part of the city

³⁶ *Agence France-Presse*, 3 May 2012. Subsequently in June, the UN Security Council approved a resolution threatening non-military sanctions against anyone who obstructs the implementation of the GCC initiative and its mechanism (*Washington Post*, 12 June 2012).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Members of Hashid’s sub-section Sanhan from which most of the regime’s inner circle was recruited (see note 9).

controlled by ‘Ali Muhsin,³⁹ thus preventing this provocative act from undermining his authority.

The dismissal of Saleh’s nephews left his son Ahmad more vulnerable. Given the bold steps Hadi has taken, since 2013 his political survival has no longer depended on maintaining a balance of power between Saleh’s relatives on the one hand and ‘Ali Muhsin (who maintained his independent power base until December 2012) on the other hand. By June 2012, Hadi had gained considerable popular support even amongst some ‘revolutionary youth’ who had argued that the GCC agreement had ‘hijacked the revolution’. The reshuffle pursued by Hadi may yet provoke a coup by remnants of Saleh’s inner circle who resent losing power and suspect that the dismissal of their peers will strengthen their rivals’ position; or by opposition figures who seek power and are concerned that men linked to the South’s old political elite encroach on their status. Some key political brokers might be inclined to hinder substantial changes to the status quo unless their interests are well served. They may be disinclined to acquiesce in the dialogue’s Technical Committee’s recommendation to Hadi to return all properties and funds appropriated, as a kind of booty, after the war of 1994. ‘Ali Muhsin, who has protected Hadi since 1986 and has declared his loyalty to him, might well abstain from obstructing the unification of the army and be content with taking up the position he held in the old regime prior to the discord between him and Saleh. Tribal leaders have been mediating between them trying to minimise the rift. Several leaders of the Hashid and Bakil confederations, amongst others, feel alienated by Hadi’s personal style and by the number of southerners who have been appointed to key positions in the government and the army. They complain that Saleh was more readily available for personal consultation. Political rumours and speculation abound; this has led some government officials to recall President Ibrahim al-Hamdi’s fate whose rule came to a sudden end after he ousted several important tribal leaders from their posts.⁴⁰ A number of attempts on politicians’ lives, amongst them Yasin Nu‘man, leader of the Socialist party, and Minister of Defence Muhammad Nasir Ahmad ‘Ali (third attempt on 11 September 2012) invoked fearful memories amongst Yemenis.⁴¹

³⁹ Al-Quds al-‘Arabi, 23 May 2012.

⁴⁰ Al-Hamdi ruled from 1974–1977.

⁴¹ Between mid-2011 and November 2012, at least fifty-five military and security officials had been killed (Associated Press, 7 November 2012).

Hadi's Challenges

Three months after Hadi's inauguration, Jamal Benomar noted that the transition was taking place 'against a backdrop of serious security concerns, an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and many unresolved conflicts'.⁴² Hadi's credibility will depend in part on his ability to rescue the collapsing economy, to create jobs, and to restore political stability so that the national dialogue can be brought to fruition.⁴³ Unlike his predecessors, he cannot rely on the 1962 revolution as a source of legitimacy, and his record does not help – during the period he served as vice president, living conditions were only fractionally better than those experienced under the ousted Hamid al-Din dynasty.

One of Saleh's burdensome legacies is the re-energised AQAP. Outfits such as Ansar al-Shari'a have failed to benefit from the turmoil in Arab countries – except in Yemen. Hadi is concerned to prove that he is capable of establishing a government that will have sovereignty over its territory and of fighting AQAP. His first statement following his election emphasized his willingness to do so. In March 2012, Ansar al-Shari'a took control of a district in Shabwa (on Yemen's south-eastern coast-line) where the country's largest liquid natural gas plant operates, and of al-Briga, where Yemen's major oil refinery is located.⁴⁴ By June, Ansar al-Shari'a was driven out of southern cities such as Jaar and Zinjibar.⁴⁵ The recapture of cities in Abyan – Hadi's home province – is, of course, symbolically significant.

In 2011, divisions within the army brought the country to the brink of civil war. They have continued to stifle the political process. Therefore, one of Hadi's greatest challenges is to reorganize and unite the army under a single command. As a first step, Hadi established a new military unit composed of elements from the military police, the Central Security Forces, the Republican Guard, and the First Armoured Division. This move has helped eliminate the capital's division of several zones of rival control.⁴⁶ By helping to revamp the army, the United States is likely to gain more leverage over the Yemeni leadership and to orient it

⁴² <http://www.un.org/apps/news/printnews.asp?nid=42109>.

⁴³ There is up to 70 per cent unemployment amongst Yemen's youth (*Financial Times*, 27 March 2012). A month after his election, Hadi announced the creation of 60,000 new jobs, raising the salaries of civil servants and medical treatment for those wounded in the uprising (*Yemen Times*, 25 March 2012).

⁴⁴ Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 13 March 2012.

⁴⁵ Reuters, 9 June 2012.

⁴⁶ Ginny Hill, 'Yemen's presidential gambit', *Foreign Policy*, 16 May 2012.

more strongly towards counterterrorism operations. The United States envisages ‘developing interoperable and integrated approaches’ in liaison with GCC countries.⁴⁷ Given Saudi Arabia’s incompetent army and its disgruntlement at losing an ally, Hosni Mubarak, whose forces might have contributed to fighting its enemies in future conflicts, such a vision is of great significance, indicating that the United States is already re-thinking the Middle East’s military structure within the framework of the US-GCC strategic alliance. The Saudi-owned Al-Sharq al-Awsat (15 May 2012) noted that ‘Yemen is considered the geo-strategic extension of the GCC countries’ security’. Al-Hayat (3 August 2012) went as far as to suggest that Yemen was likely to join the regional and international alliance against Iran.

The United States has taken advantage of the turmoil to increase its influence and the scope of its military operations in Yemen. It has increased the number of CIA operatives and Special Forces, has taken over the former Soviet air force base in al-Anad, and begun to send military aircraft to Yemen. Fourteen out of thirty-one drone attacks carried out in Yemen since 2002 have occurred in 2012, and Yemeni troops fighting in the south receive direct help from U.S. forces.⁴⁸ However, the United States’s counterterrorism policy might undermine the caretaker government that in order to gain legitimacy needs to be perceived as independent by Yemeni citizens. As for Yemen’s powerful northern neighbour, the obstruction of democracy and independence in Yemen will remain part of its foreign policy agenda. Unwilling to tolerate the emergence of an alternative leadership from the youth ‘revolutionary movement’, it has acquiesced in Hadi’s presidency. Against the backdrop of Yemen’s fragile economy and volatile political situation, Saudi Arabia is likely to maintain and even enlarge its patronage network there. Hadi, who will depend on Saudi Arabian largesse, will not be able to prevent it from meddling in Yemen’s affairs. A GCC-sponsored conference held in Riyadh in January 2013 by Hadrami-born politicians and merchants calling for a GCC-affiliated independent Hadramaut has renewed fears amongst Yemenis that Saudi Arabia might still seek to annex it in order to gain access to the Indian Ocean.

Hadi is aware that failure of the national dialogue might lead to renewed violence and to Yemen’s fragmentation. The political stalemate

⁴⁷ Gerald Feierstein cited in <http://yemen24news.blogspot.com/2012/02>.

⁴⁸ *Economist*, 12 May 2012; *Washington Times*, 17 May 2012; *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 2012. *The Long War Journal* (13 June 2012) reports forty air strikes since 2002.

during Saleh's rule was linked partly to the fact that the 'responsible national dialogue... among the full political spectrum' (Phillips 2011: 41) he had called for never took place. As noted by the UN envoy to Yemen, 'the success or failure of the national dialogue is likely to make or break Yemen's transition'.⁴⁹ In March 2012, a preliminary meeting took place in Potsdam to explore the possibility of an inclusive dialogue. In May, Hadi formed a committee charged with contacting different political representatives; above all, those not yet represented in the political process, such as the Huthis and followers of 'Ali al-Bidh.⁵⁰ In June, talks were held in Cairo with southern leaders, amongst them 'Ali Nasir Muhammad and Haydar al-'Attas. Attempting to discourage the southern provinces from seeking secession, one of the dialogue's central goals is regional détente. Questions about sovereignty – centralised union or decentralised federation – will have to be tackled, and Yemenis will have to decide whether to choose a presidential or parliamentary system of governance. A federal constitutional system would allow those provinces that are no longer under the government's control to be incorporated. The outcome of the dialogue will feed into the constitution-making process that is to conclude in 2013.

Conclusion

Compared to the other uprisings dealt with in this volume, that in Yemen is unprecedented. A prominent member of the governing elite, but with no dynastic ties to the former leader and who came to power via a deal rather than a coup, has begun to unseat members of the old regime.⁵¹ Saleh has been the only ousted leader granted immunity from prosecution and remains in charge of the former ruling party. Until well into the twenty-first century, Saleh used to label his adversaries 'enemies of the revolution', thus linking his rule to the 1962 revolution and claiming that it had come to fruition in him. Cognisant of the dramatic events of 2011–12, many of his fellow citizens might feel that revolution in their country is indeed a long-term project. Did Hadi, by ordering that parts of

⁴⁹ See note 42.

⁵⁰ Because of the GCC agreement's provision to include only members of established political parties in the new government, significant groups such as the Huthis were given neither cabinet posts nor governorships. Thus, an opportunity was missed to integrate them into the political process and to weaken their role as a militia.

⁵¹ Note in this context that Hadi became a member by default – he was an opportunist rather than a regime loyalist.

Change Square be cleared, declare it complete? Several months thereafter, there were still many tents left in the square; for some time, Karman even moved her family and secretary to hers.⁵²

The negotiation of the power-sharing agreement as well as the forthcoming national dialogue constitute democratic practice even while institutionalized; procedural democracy – a key demand of the protesters – is unlikely to be established any time soon. The impetus towards political change came from the protesters, but it was the joint effort of Yemeni politicians, foreign powers, and the UN who brought about Saleh's resignation. According to one Yemeni analyst, 'the protesters were the spark but not the fire'. In accordance with the transition agreement, power has passed between elites to the exclusion of the 'revolutionary youth'. The agreement constitutes a fragile equilibrium of sorts. It is hoped that it will not come under strain like that between the GPC and YSP in the early 1990s that ended in armed confrontation. The regime has been reframed but not undone, thanks partly to the split within Hashid. 'Ali Muhsin's desertion made Saleh vulnerable but also safeguarded the stake of the Sanhanis – not least because he also prevented Hamid al-Ahmar from monopolising the revolutionary stage.

Irrespective of what the 'revolution' may or may not have achieved,⁵³ the effects of public-sphere joint activism are likely to be lasting and productive of new political subjectivities. As political analyst 'Abd al-Ghani al-Iryani declared enthusiastically, 'the election provided a political opening – a shift of power from the tribal north to a democratic centre. Yemeni subjects have become Yemeni citizens'.⁵⁴ However, at Change Square, people's sense of empowerment alternated with disappointment. As it was put by a businessman whose young nephew was still going to the square in May 2012, 'in the future he will insist on his right to demonstrate. He has learnt to distinguish between people who want real change and those who want power, and that "the street" can change things. He first felt empowered and then disillusioned, but that doesn't matter'.

Protesters' demands for democratic reform have been overshadowed by a power struggle within the elite that climaxed in 2011 and might yet haunt the new government. The militarisation of Change Square

⁵² The Organizing Committee of the Youth Revolution decided to dismantle the tents in April 2013, a month after the start of the National Dialogue.

⁵³ Space does not permit us to examine whether indeed another "revolution" has occurred.

⁵⁴ Interview, 2 May 2012.

undermined the experience of solidarity, which was starting to transcend familiar divide-and-rule strategies. Self-styled 'revolutionary' leaders purporting to protect the lives of the protesters and to provide guidance also exercised censorship, intimidating and even imprisoning those who disagreed with their policies. Moreover, the initially peaceful protest movement was marred by tensions and clashes amongst the regime's opponents. *Whether* or not the national dialogue, with its emphasis on reconciliation, will be able to deflect such tensions is for the future to tell.

Postscript

After several months of political stalemate, on 19 December 2012, President Hadi issued a decree dealing with the restructuring of the army, thus starting to implement one of the principal points of the transition agreement. With the restructuring of the security forces still outstanding, the elite Republican Guard and the First Armoured Division have been amalgamated with the Strategic Reserve Force, one of the five newly established military branches. The Republican Guard is now under President Hadi's control and its former commander, Saleh's son Ahmad, will take up an ambassadorship in the UAE. General 'Ali Muhsin has been appointed presidential advisor on security affairs.

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) began on 18 March 2013, the anniversary of the 'Friday of Dignity'. It includes 565 delegates from across Yemen's political and social spectrum, among them members of new political movements and historically marginalised groups. Women constitute 30 per cent of the representative body. The dialogue is wider in scope than those conducted in Bahrain in 2011 and 2013, and promotes discussion of issues of substance rather than their agendas. By mid-2013 it was expected that an agreement regarding the introduction of a federal system would soon be reached (few, among them Islah, have not endorsed it). Nine separate committees, some led by women, have been discussing specific issues. By June 2013, they had visited 18 governorates in an attempt to reach out to non-delegates, and made more than 100 recommendations to the Plenary. A newly created ND Consensus Committee is to reconcile those recommendations and to aid reaching consensus.

The issue of the South remains the most contentious one. In his speech to the UN Security Council on 11 June 2013, Jamal Benomar noted that without a consensual settlement of the 'Southern question' the foundations of a new constitution could not be developed. Several representatives of southern political groups are taking part in the NDC, among

them Lutfi Shatarah and Muhammad ‘Ali Ahmad, but many remain outside. A significant number of recommendations (“twenty points”) made to President Hadi by the ND’s Technical Committee address grievances and human rights violations in the South. According to a new presidential decree, issued in January 2013, two committees composed of lawyers and military personnel are to solve outstanding issues such as land appropriation in the South since the war of 1994. Proposals on the status of the South are likely to be debated within the context of discussion of a new system of governance. The UN envoy also noted that the Yemeni government has yet to establish a Commission of Inquiry into the events of 2011 or to adopt a law on transitional justice.

Critics (among them independent youth) dispute that a new inclusive politics is emerging, and object to what they consider interference in local decisions by foreign bodies. They argue that participants’ daily stipends of around \$100 alienate them from the rest of the population (40 per cent live on less than \$2 a day). Against the background of the threat of UN sanctions, key players or their representatives at the NDC may hesitate risking their fortunes by seeking to undermine the transition process. Despite some Yemenis’ reservations, for the time being the NDC would seem the only workable mechanism for resolving differences peacefully.