



Political Paper

# Political Assassinations in South Yemen: **Rivals' Final Weapon**

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| Farida Ahmed

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## Summary

With the recent increase in political assassination operations in South Yemen, it was a must to highlight this large file which has been long neglected. The perpetrators of those operations found a suitable space to extend their activities as a result of the consecutive political crises that hit the country and ultimately led to resorting to wide scale acts of violence, including the organized assassinations using various ways and methods.

The paper reveals the scale of the intensified wave of assassinations, most of which targeted influential Southern leaders and figures at several levels, including political and military ones, over several historical periods that preceded the Yemeni Unity and followed it after the 1994 War. It also focused on assassinations in South Yemen on a wider scale through presenting the reasons and the motives behind them, along with shifting to some operations in North Yemen, some of which changed several historical and political paths.

The paper concluded that most of the executive bodies are related to radical religious groups, which played a major role in such operations, in addition to the Yemeni intelligence agencies. The paper is based upon the views of political and military experts who enriched it through their participation.

Moreover, the paper pointed out the importance of activating a strong Southern intelligence agency to reduce such operations. It stressed the importance of an active response by decision making political and security forces against assassination through investigating the issue, forming a suitable vision to address it and putting pressure to speed up freeing the communication and internet sector from the Houthi grip in Sanaa.

## Background

In Yemen, political assassination is not a strange phenomenon, as modern political history includes many cases of it. These operations often take the lead amid unstable political and security circumstances. Some parties rely on assassination as the last tool to silence rivals and undermine their strength. Throughout Yemen's history, many details about assassination operations are still unknown or being tied up to anonymous culprits, which ends any investigations by investigation committees. Subsequently, they turn out to be mere memorial events in which people list the virtues of the victims.

The most prominent public assassination incidents included the operation that assassinated the Assistant Secretary-General of the Yemeni Socialist Party, "Jar Allah Omar" on December 28th, 2002, while he was delivering a live speech during the 3rd Conference held by the Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood) in the center of the Yemeni capital city, Sanaa. This was attended by more than 4000 officials and members of the organization led by its founder, Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar<sup>1</sup>. This assassination caused much panic within political circles as it was a direct and overt operation witnessed by several politicians. The main goal behind it was to silence the voice of "Jar Allah," who was an influential thinker affiliated with the Yemeni Social Party, and to send intimidating messages to many politicians.

Moving a back little to the past, the most controversial assassination operations which made a decisive impact in North and South were between 1960s to 1980s. The most prominent operation in North was assassinating the military commander, "Abdulraqueeb Abdulwahhab " who played a heroic role in lifting the Sanaa siege. He was killed due to a territorial dispute among soldiers that led to eliminating him and being dragged through the Sanaa streets in a horrible way on Jan 24th, 1969.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1970s, the most ambiguous assassination operation was the killing of President "Ibrahim Al-Hamdi" and his brother "Abdullah Al-Hamdi" on October 11th, 1977, during a lunch in the house of the then Vice President and Chief of Staff Ahmed Al-Ghashmi in the presence of a large crowd. The operation occurred two days before his visit to Aden which was supposed to be the first of its kind by a Northern president. His assassination is attributed to the conflict with tribal forces that he deposed from power and who opposed, along with their regional allies, his quick steps towards making unity with South.<sup>3</sup> It has not been known yet the party who implemented the assassination operation. However, along with his conflict with tribal forces, one of the reasons for his assassination was probably his affinity with Southerners, particularly his counterpart at that time President Salem Rabie Ali.

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<sup>1</sup> The moment of the assassination of the Secretary-General of the Yemeni Socialist Party, Jar Allah Omar, in Sana'a, December 28, 2002 ([YouTube](#))

<sup>2</sup> Abdulraqueeb Abdulwahhab, the hero of the seventy-day siege | [Yemen \(republicanyemen.net\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> The killing of Al-Hamdi: Who killed Ibrahim Al-Hamdi "The Assassination of Ibrahim Al-Hamdi" • Al-Yaman Al-Ghad ([alyemenalghad.com](#))

His Predecessor, Al-Ghashmi, didn't last much time in power as he also was killed eight months after taking office. He was assassinated by a bomb that was planted into his Army General Command office on June 24th, 1978.<sup>4</sup> Then, Ali Abdullah Saleh, a member of the Presidential Council, became the President of the Yemeni Republic (North Yemen) in August 1978 and remained in power for more than 3 decades before being assassinated by the Houthis in December 2017.

In South Yemen before the Unity, the situation was not better. In 1970, several assassination operations occurred which carried a political stamp, including the execution of Faisal Abdul Latif Al Shaabi, who was one of the Southern liberation icons. This was followed by the famous plane accident in 1973 that killed a number of Southern national leaders. Later, President Salem Rabie Ali was assassinated. The famous Jan. 1986 events led to the deaths of thousands of victims, foremost of whom. were President Abdulfattah Ismail" along with Ali Antar and tens of political and military commanders.<sup>5</sup>

After signing the Yemeni Unity in 1990 between North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) and South Yemen (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), The transitional period between 1991-1993 witnessed a wide scale assassination operations which targeted many of Southern political and military leaders, most of whom belong to the Yemeni Social Party or other independent and partisan leaders. The most prominent among those figures was Omar Al-jawi, Secretary-General of the "Yemeni Unionist Gathering" party, who was subjected to an assassination attempt in 1991. He was seriously wounded in the armed operation that killed his colleague, engineer "Hassan Al-Haribi", a commander of the "Yemeni Unionist Gathering" party who was dubbed then as the "first martyr for democracy".

In 1992, Southern Defense Minister Adviser, Majid Murshid was a target of an assassination operation in one of Sanaa's streets by the Central Security Forces

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<sup>4</sup> The Assassination... the end of 3 successive presidents in the history of Yemen ([alarabiya.net](http://alarabiya.net))

<sup>5</sup> The book "Bab al-Rada (Door to Death): The Story of the War in Yemen", Saleh al-Baydani, p. 62, Anaween Publishing House, 2021.

and the Republican Guards.<sup>6</sup> The number of the following assassination operations reached more than 160. However, they were painted with a radical ideological nature along with a political one. This has been a dangerous development in the assassination trajectory in Yemen because of their connection with extremist religious discourse. Most of those operations were implemented in conjunction with the return of Yemeni extremists and other Arabs (so-called Afghan Arabs) who participated in the Afghanistan War, as they were directly related to Al-Qaeda and some Islamic groups such as the Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood) in Yemen.

During this period, the Yemeni regime embraced some jihadist figures as part of its structure in the government and the army. They helped him in the war against South in 1994 with the recognition of the Yemeni Prime Minister at the time, "Abdulkarim Al-Eryani".<sup>7</sup> This war was a result of religious mobilization and incitement under the jihadi pretext of eliminating apostate communist thought. The Northern army and the religious assassination teams relied on fatwas which allowed killing the Southerners as a way of getting closer to God. This was a proper and helpful tool to consolidate the hegemony of the regime of "Ali Abdullah Saleh" in power.

After the 1994 war, the pace of political assassinations didn't calm down. Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf was assassinated in 1999 after being run over by a car in Haddah Street in Sanaa. Prior to that, Mohammed Thabet Al-Zubaidi, a founder of "Hatm" which opposed the Saleh regime, was assassinated in an ambush at the Zabid area in Al Dhale. Thabet was close to the current STC President, "Aidrous Al-Zubaidi" who led the movement at that time and was a target of more than one assassination attempt at that time. Moreover, the peaceful resistance elements in Hadramout were targeted as they were part of the popular uprising that began in 1998 against Saleh regime. The most prominent of those who were assassinated at the time include "Ahmed Bargash" and "Faraj Bin Hammam".<sup>8</sup>

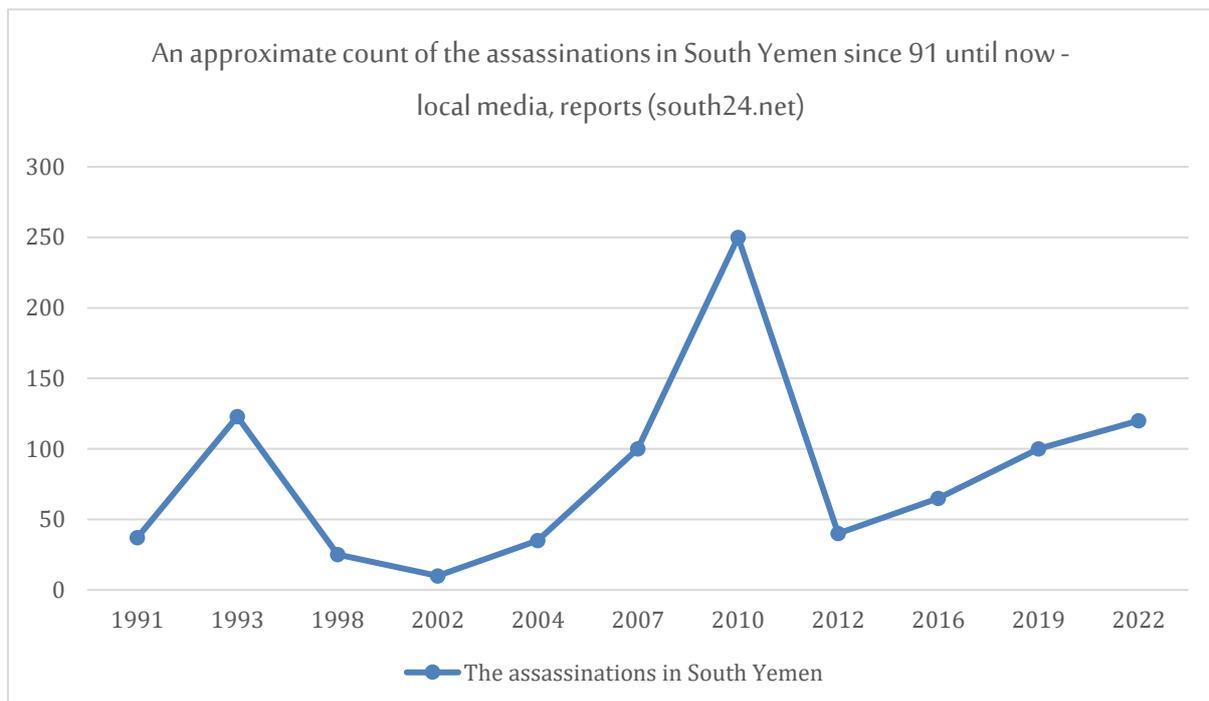
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<sup>6</sup> From the Southern Memor. The martyr Majed Murshid: one of the Most Important Southern Cadres of and his Brave Men - Al-Umana Net | Honesty of the word .. respect for the truth ([al-omana.net](http://al-omana.net))

<sup>7</sup> [Yemen Links to bin Laden Gnow at F.B.I. in Cole Inquiry - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/middleeast/05yemen.html)

<sup>8</sup> [Why will we Celebrate the Memory of the Martyrs Bargash and Bin Hammam with more Dignity???](http://shabwa-press.info/why-will-we-celebrate-the-memory-of-the-martyrs-bargash-and-bin-hammam-with-more-dignity-why/) ([shabwa-press.info](http://shabwa-press.info))

After the outbreak of the peaceful Southern Movement (Hirak) in South Yemen in 2007, the assassinations took a new and intensified curve as most operations were carried out in broad daylight. Some of them succeeded, while others failed. Reports point out that the number of assassination operations implemented by the former Yemeni regime and its intelligence agencies between 1995 to 2007 is twice the number of people assassinated before the 1994 war. From 2009 to 2013, over 126 assassination operations were carried out against military and security officials.<sup>9</sup> One of the most horrific assassinations captured by cameras was the dragging of martyr Ali Saleh Al-Haddi in his house yard in Abyan's Zinjibar in 2010.<sup>10</sup> Al-Haddi was a prominent leader in the Southern Hirak.



## Motives behind assassinations

Although the multiple motives and reasons behind assassination operations which range between political, religious, retaliatory, and others, the biggest challenge of this phenomenon lies in tracing their perpetrators. Most

<sup>9</sup> News and Reports - Assassinations under the Mantle of Terrorism... the Most Prominent Violations of the Yemeni Occupation Regime against South ([aden-tm.net](http://aden-tm.net))

<sup>10</sup> [Martyr Ali Saleh Al-Hadi was dragged away by the Yemeni occupation soldiers - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

assassination operations are carried out in a very easy way while their planners and perpetrators evade accountability without investigation or even following their roots. This gradually leads to burying the truth. Brigadier General and Southern military analyst "Mohammed Jawas" said: "The assassination policy in South has been continuous and renewable since 1994 and prior. They have largely focused on military and security leaders who didn't succumb to remain under the Sanaa state authorities. In this case, they are dragged into battles without any consideration of the risks that those Southern leaders may face. This includes the six Saada wars against the Houthis, where the majority of their front-line fighters were Southern military commanders."<sup>11</sup>

In June 2012, Southerners received a severe blow with the killing of the Southern District Commander, Major General "Salem Ali Qatan" who successfully led the war against the AQAP. He was killed in a suicide bombing in Aden by a Somali who was a member of the organization. This was in conjunction with the withdrawal of extremists from their last bastion in South. Apparently, there were retaliatory motives behind the assassination as Qatan made an anti-terrorist qualitative shift in just three months and inflicted damages in the AQAP and cleansed the governorates of Abyan and Shabwa from it. This was followed by failed assassination attempts against Major General Mahmoud Al-Subaihi including an armed ambush in one of the areas of Abyan's Al-Mahfad District.<sup>12</sup> Al-Subaihi held the position of Defense Minister before the outbreak of the latest war. He has been detained by the Houthis for more than 7 years. The AQAP tried to eliminate him more than once.

One of the clear examples related to the vengeance assassination motives was the killing of the prominent Southern military commander, Thabet Jawas, who was targeted in a bomb car attack in north of the capital, Aden, along with a number of his companions on March 23rd.<sup>13</sup> It was one of other intentional and organized operations that targeted figures who have a high amount of political and military impact in South Yemen. Jawas was commander of the Al-Anad Axis and the 131st Infantry Brigade. He was one of the prominent military leaders who engaged in big battles in Saada between 2004 -2009 and led the first military operation against the Houthi insurgency movement, which led to

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<sup>11</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with the Southern Brigadier General and Military Expert "Mohammed Thabet Jawas", on April 1st, 2022

<sup>12</sup> Dozens of dead and wounded in the confrontations between the Yemeni army and Al-Qaeda ([al-jazirah.com](http://al-jazirah.com))

<sup>13</sup> [Jawas dies in the second assassination attempt in months \(south24.net\)](http://south24.net)

the killing of its founder, Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi, the brother of its current leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi.

For the Houthis, a figure like “Jawas” who was linked to the killing of the movement's founder will undoubtedly be at the top of the Houthi target list. The Houthi leader Abdulqadir Al-Murtada, Head of the Prisoners' Affairs Committee, wrote on his Twitter official account that he supports the vengeance operation, in an indication of the Houthi involvement in it <sup>14</sup> although there is no official Houthi declaration about that.

As for the current climate of the Yemen conflict, it is remarkable that the calculations of the perpetrators are the same even with different methods and faces. Mohammed Jawas confirmed this, saying that when Northern forces feel threatened by the Southern political and military leaders, they resort to getting rid of them, and try to negate the capabilities of those Southern figures. The motives behind the assassinations are usually to prevent Southerners from reaching a reference or an inclusive independent political entity that would unite them away from the North at all levels. Most assassinations come in light of this context as an attempt to make them lose the components of Southern power or inclusive reference. <sup>15</sup>

## Post 2014 assassinations

Over the course of the war that broke out since 2014, more than Southern figures were assassinated. This indicates that there are organized and growing ongoing operations against South due to the impact of those figures in the political and military scenes. For example, in December 2015, a suicide explosive attack targeted the convoy of the Aden Governor, Major General Jaafar Mohammed Saad, as he left his house in Tawahi, which led to his death along with a number of his companions. The assassination was claimed by "ISIS". Major General "Jaafar" is one of the Southern leaders who had an influential role in liberating Aden from the Houthis and extremist jihadist organizations that tried to take advantage of the post-war chaos to extend their influence over some cities, as happened in Mukalla.

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<sup>14</sup> [Twitter \ Abdulqadir Al-Murtada on Twitter: "We take revenge on the sinners" Great truth of God. https://t.co/iELN8TOdj" \(twitter.com\)](https://t.co/iELN8TOdj)

<sup>15</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with the Southern Brigadier General and Military Expert "Mohammed Thabet Jawas"(previous source)

The "terrorist" organizations took advantage of the fragile security situation in South at the beginning of the 2015 War to consolidate their influence. One of the prominent assassination attempts adopted by "ISIS" at the time was targeting the headquarters of the government of Prime Minister "Khaled Bahah" with car bombs, which resulted in the killing of 15 soldiers, including 4 Emiratis, a Saudi and a Yemeni.<sup>16</sup> This raises many questions about why there have been growing AQAP activities. In South Yemen, compared to the Northern governorates, which have been mostly free of their attacks.

Political researcher Saleh Al-Dawil said that terrorism exists in South as much as any country in the world, but its spread in South a country which has a population of 8 million people, and its rare existence in North, which has a population of 30 million, raises questions that confirm that terrorism in South is a project sponsored by North Yemeni parties, whether partisan or intelligence, to achieve their agenda in South. This is confirmed by the increase in "terrorist" operations in South and its paucity in the Northern governorates. This in itself is an indication that "terrorism" is a Yemeni intelligence project linked to international intelligence bodies that benefits from recycling it according to their interests.<sup>17</sup>

Gradually, developments in the course of the war have led to an exacerbation of political assassinations. Other operations of assassinating Northern figures in the Houthi-controlled areas floated to the surface, but they were deemed as an internal conflict between Zaidi wings, similar to what happened to Hassan Zaid, Mohammed Al-Mutawakil, Sharaf Al-Din, Al-Khaiwani, Ibrahim Al-Houthi and others. Those operations drastically differed in terms of their complex and organized motives towards the Southerners. This includes the assassination of Major General Ahmed Seif Al-Yafei, Deputy Chief of the General Staff in the city of Mocha in 2017, which raised a lot of controversy and doubts about its implementation. It appeared to be deliberate assassination by directing the missile directly<sup>18</sup> towards his tent precisely and not others. Sources later indicated to him that an electronic chip had been planted in the vicinity of his tent and provided accurate coordinates to the perpetrators so as to direct the missile towards his location. This in turn reveals the presence of a party in the same area who had a direct involvement in the process of getting rid of "Al-

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<sup>16</sup> [Bahah survived an assassination attempt with car bombs and the martyrdom of 15 soldiers, including 4 Emiratis and a Saudi - Al-Rai \(alraimedia.com\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with political researcher "Saleh Al-Dawil" on April 6th, 2022

<sup>18</sup> [A military source reveals serious information about the martyrdom of Major General Al-Yafei in Mocha \(adengad.net\)](#)

Yafi'i for his great military role in the areas of the West Coast after its liberation from the Houthis. This was known as the Battle of the Golden Spear (Al-Sahm Al-Zahabi).

Two months before the killing of "Al-Yafi'i", Brigadier General Omar Saeed Al-Subaihi, commander of the Third Brigade in Bab al-Mandab and one of the Southern Hirak Commanders, was assassinated by a Houthi sniper in the battle to liberate the West Coast. This enhances the argument that the intentional dragging of the effective and influential Southern commanders into the front lines of serious battles in the Northern areas still exists and was not limited to the former Yemeni regime.

In July 2016, the STC President and the current Vice-President of the Presidential Council and the then Governor of Aden<sup>19</sup>, "Aidrous Al-Zubaidi", survived an assassination attempt with a car bomb that targeted his convoy while he was passing through a district in Aden. This was the fourth assassination attempt during his tenure as Governor of Aden at the time. Without a doubt, Al-Zubaidi will remain a permanent name on the target list as one of the most influential political and military leaders in the South since the 1994 War until now. Likewise, the security circle surrounding him, which plays an influential role in trying to establish the security of the capital, Aden, won't be excluded from the same list. Major General "Shalal Ali Shaye", Aden Security Director, also survived more than one assassination attempt<sup>20</sup>. This reflects the reality of violence in different areas of Yemen. The assassinations are especially concentrated in South Yemen, especially after the latest war.

In parallel, the assassination of the military commander "Munir al-Yafi'i", nicknamed "Abu Al-Yamamah," along with more than 49 soldiers from the Security Belt forces affiliated with the STC, caused a wave of outrage in Aden. Southerners considered it a treacherous operation carried out with a missile launched by a drone on Al-Jalaa camp. Although the Houthis later<sup>21</sup> claimed their responsibility for the operation, the report issued by the Security Council's Committee of Experts on Yemen stated that the allegations that the Houthis were involved in bombing the parade ground led by Abu Al-Yamamah were incorrect. The report indicated that the committee inspected the site of

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<sup>19</sup> [The governor of Aden survived an assassination attempt - BBC News Arabic](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Major General Shallal Shaye survived an assassination attempt in Aden \(yemenisport.com\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [The Houthis claim the attack on a police station and al-Jala camp in Aden with a ballistic missile and a drone - Al-Shorouk Gate \(shorouknews.com\)](#)

the explosion, where it found that the attack was not carried out by a guided missile or by a drone.<sup>22</sup> The Committee of Experts did not identify the party involved in the operation, but the Vice-President of the STC, "Hani Bin Brik", accused earlier, through a televised speech<sup>23</sup> that the Yemeni Islah party and the internationally recognized government were behind the targeting of Abu Al-Yamamah and his companions, and his accusation came based on accurate information and investigations that identified the type of missile and launching location.

The first explicit accusation by the Southern Transitional leadership of the involvement of someone such as the Islah party, which has managed the decision of the internationally recognized Hadi government for years since the outbreak of the 2014 civil war, may appear in such an attack. A charge that many observers believe is close to reality. Because the bloody violence has historically been linked to extremist religious groups and the Islamic Reform Party is one of these groups that fought in South the experience of the 1994 war alongside the forces of former President Saleh, and committed massacres and assassinations against civilians and influential southern leaders on several levels, under religious fatwas and claims.

In fact, the assassinations did not stop there, but rather extended beyond that, and the planners and executors began to choose the appropriate times to carry out their operations, as operations emerged aimed at occupying local and international public opinion and drawing attention in order to distract from another event. For example: The assassination<sup>24</sup> attempt on the governor of Aden, "Ahmed Lamlas" and the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, "Salem Al-Saqtri" came in October 2021, after Only five days after the visit<sup>25</sup> of the new UN Envoy to Aden "Hans Grundberg" on his first official visit since his appointment, on a tour during which he met with the leaders of the Transitional Council. It appeared to be an attempt to prove that Aden, controlled by the Southern Transitional Council, is unsafe and unstable, especially since a similarly high-ranking European delegation was scheduled to visit the capital, Aden, days after the attempted assassination of the Governor and his companions. Months earlier, this operation was preceded by an

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<sup>22</sup> [The team of experts reveals new information about the assassination of the martyr Abu Al-Yamamah | Yemen Voice News \(ye-voice.com\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Yemen..Ben Brik announces the results of the investigations into the assassination of Brigadier General Al-Yafei - YouTube](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Wide Arab and international condemnation of the attempt to assassinate southern officials in Aden \(south24.net\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> [UN envoy Grundberg makes his first visit to Aden | OSESGY \(unmissions.org\)](#)

attempt to target members of the new Parity Government that stemmed from the "Riyadh Agreement". This attack on Aden Airport killed 22 people and wounded dozens.<sup>26</sup> The Houthis were accused of being involved in the operation that was carried out with ballistic missiles similar to those owned by the Houthis, and this was later confirmed by the International Panel of Experts.<sup>27</sup>

Such an understanding of events leads us to the importance of highlighting the day when sources revealed the GCC's intention to examine the possibility of inviting the Houthis and other parties to consultations in Riyadh<sup>28</sup>. In a matter of hours, the Security Belt Forces commander in Abyan, "Abdullatif Al-Sayed", was subjected to an assassination attempt with a car bomb, which led to his injury and the killing of a number of soldiers and attackers.<sup>29</sup> Days after announcing officially the date for holding the Yemeni-Yemeni Consultations, Major General "Thabet Jawas" was assassinated in Aden. Just one week later and one day before the Riyadh Consultations kicked off, "Akram al-Mashreqi", Commander of the Security Belt in the Sheikh Othman District of Aden was assassinated in an armed ambush.<sup>30</sup>

The recent succession of assassination incidents recently raised doubts about the reason behind the intensification of operations in conjunction with hundreds of Yemenis holding consultations in Riyadh which would lead to fateful outcomes towards a comprehensive peace solution in Yemen. This apparently acts as a proper approach for a broader participation of the Yemeni components in the sovereign decision, especially the "Southerners." This comes in light of the control of one political party over the presidential decisions for years. This is what happened next when President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi announced on April 7th the formation of a Presidential Council. He transferred all his powers to it in accordance with the constitution, the Gulf Initiative, and its executive mechanism. He also deposed his deputy, Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Horrible scenes reveal the moments of Houthi targeting of the Yemeni government plane - YouTube](#)

<sup>27</sup> [War in Yemen: UN report reveals the Houthi involvement in bombing Aden airport bombing - BBC News Arabic](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Reuters: Gulf officials are considering inviting the Houthis to the Riyadh Consultations - Al-Shorouk Gate \(shorouknews.com\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Al-Ayyam newspaper - Arrest of 2 perpetrators of the assassination attempt on the commander of the security belt in Abyan \(alayam.info\)](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Details of the assassination of Security Belt Forces Commander Akram Al-Mashreqi of in Sheikh Othman, Aden | CRATER NET | critter net](#)

<sup>31</sup> [The Yemeni president announces the transfer of his full powers to the Presidential Council \(alarabiya.net\)](#)

The outcomes, which included changes in the structure of the Yemeni presidency with the consensus of various political forces, including deposing Al-Ahmar<sup>32</sup>, aim at, besides entering into a future negotiating process towards peace, undermining the Islah party's control over the joints of the presidency and the national army. This was to be expected, and it may have agitated the parties in charge of making sovereign decisions in the internationally recognized government over the years. The proposal to change the presidency institution had been clearly circulated since January 2022. The main Yemeni parties were aware of this information, according to high-ranking political sources who spoke to "South24". It is likely that such moves multiplied the assassinations in an attempt to distract attention from the Riyadh Consultations. This could lead to suggestions that more than one party may be behind these operations, including the Houthis.

The assassinations of Southern political and military leaders cannot be fully detailed in one piece of paper. Those operations are numerous and continuous. They also hit Southern security leaders at military points on an almost daily and renewed basis. Therefore, the security threats and challenges still exist. This is confirmed once again by Brigadier General "Mohammed Jawas", about the assassination of Southern political and interior security men, as well as some retired military officers who are still targeted due to their great influence in the Southern Hirak or on the political and community level within their geographical areas.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the Southern forces' military impact on the ground at the beginning of this year, researcher and political analyst "Khaled Baklan" said that operation "South Tornado" (Isaar Al-Janoub) launched by the Southern Giants Brigades, achieved its goal quickly and in record time, which confused the Houthi calculations. The process of liberating the three districts of Shabwa played a role in thwarting the Houthi schemes to occupy Marib and Shabwa. This may be one of the most important reasons behind the recent assassinations of Southern leader. The Houthi and other forces are good at carrying out such plots after they failed militarily. They intentionally tried to

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<sup>32</sup> Yemeni-Yemeni Consultations with GCC Sponsorship: Is Peace Looming? ("[South24](#)")

<sup>33</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with the Southern Brigadier General and Military Expert "Mohammed Thabet Jawas", on April 1st, 2022(previous source)

thwart the anti-Houthi project despite the strong support they received from the Arab Coalition.<sup>34</sup>

## Another type of assassination

It is clear that the assassination operations in South Yemen have expanded to a dangerous point as they have targeted opponents of extremist religious ideas. The two young men, "Omar Batawil" and "Amjad Abdulrahman", who were physically eliminated, were among the victims of this type of assassination. The perpetrators of those crimes aspire to control the psychological and community climate by attempting to bury the ideas of many enlightened youth and intellectuals, as well as sending death messages to others. On the other hand, a number of preachers and imams, most of whom belong to Salafism, were subjected to systematic assassinations during sporadic periods in Aden and Hadramout. The perpetrators used direct shooting at the victim during their operations. A development that emerged significantly between the years 2016-2019, before forces affiliated with the STC took control of Aden. On August 23rd, 2017, thinker and engineer Abdullah Al-Dhalei was also assassinated in Al-Dhalea. He was a prominent leader in the Southern Hirak and, at the time, served as a member of the STC's technical committee.<sup>35</sup>

The perpetrators of the assassinations have insisted on including influential Southern journalists in their elimination list. The military affairs journalist, "Nabil Al-Quaiti" was assassinated next to his home in Aden,<sup>36</sup> shortly after covering military confrontations between forces loyal to the National Army and forces affiliated with the STC in the Southern governorate of Abyan, the killing of "Al-Quaiti" sparked international public opinion, as he was a correspondent and photojournalist for AFP. While international organizations indicated the involvement of the Islah party in the operation, research sources told "South24" that those accused of the assassination are closely related to the prominent leader in the Yemeni government, Amjad Khaled<sup>37</sup>, who has had close ties with the Yemeni Vice President and parties within the Coalition. It was not the only assassination of journalists in South as the Houthi group was

<sup>34</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with researcher and political analyst "Khaled Baklan" on March 31th, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> [Shatara: "The assassination of the engineer Al-Dhalea is a clear message targeting the STC and its leaders" \(shabwaah-press.info\)](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Our correspondent: The assassination of AFP correspondent Nabil Al-Quaiti in the Yemeni city of Aden - RT Arabic](#)

<sup>37</sup> [A year after the Assassination of Al-Quaiti, Justice is Still Absent \(south24.net\)](#)

accused of targeting Yemeni journalist "Mahmoud Al-Atami" while he was accompanying his wife, journalist, "Rasha Al-Harazi", on her way to the hospital to give birth. The attack led to the killing of his wife and their fetus, while Al-Atami sustained various injuries.<sup>38</sup>

Away from the usual methods of assassination, such as using silenced weapons or explosive devices, and others, the case of investigative journalist "Mohammed al-Absi", who died in Sanaa in 2017, was a remarkable one and raised doubts that he was poisoned. This was later<sup>39</sup> confirmed by medical reports. He was investigating the financial activities of senior Houthi officials linked to corruption in the oil and other sectors. This method of poisoning was not the first of its kind, as it was preceded by the mysterious death of Yemeni journalist and parliamentarian "Abdulhabib Salem" hours after a presidential lunch<sup>40</sup> during the President Ali Saleh Era. Speculations and Yemeni narratives did not rule out assassination by poisoning, especially for those who opposed or criticized the policies of the former regime.

Moreover, there were assassinations cases related to torturing inside prisons, mysterious car accidents, or pushing from mountain peaks. Recently, biological action has not been ruled out as a recent policy of assassination through spreading epidemics, diseases, and others, particularly as many figures die after contracting a disease or abruptly.

It can be said that the causes of most of these operations, even they differ in their methods, are attributed to goals that fall within the political struggle that uses assassinations in the last stage.

### Who are the perpetrators?

Although most political assassinations in Yemen are usually tied against anonymous people, contemporary historical evidence indicate the involvement of extremist religious groups at the top of the list of perpetrators of most assassinations in Yemen. AQAP, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Houthis are repeatedly accused. Their actions are either based on narrow ideological

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<sup>38</sup> [Journalist "Al-Atami" reveals the identity of the killers of his wife, journalist Rasha Al-Harazi... and what happened to him before the crime \(almahjar.net\)](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Medical report: Yemeni journalist Muhammad al-Absi died after being "poisoned" \(aman-palestine.org\)](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Thrilling and accurate details .. the deposed Saleh kills his opponents with the last lunch | nass times \(nass-times.com\)](#)

perspectives that allow them to practice violence, incitement, and mobilization against those who differ from them, or they are based on those who determine their moves in light of their policies. Then comes the role of the Yemeni intelligence agencies, which partially depend on these organizations to carry out some operations, or they implement them independently through its security services.

This is confirmed by "Saleh al-Dawil" who said that perpetrators are either terrorist organizations that are logistically rotated by intelligence agencies and the deep state power centers in Sanaa, or through certain parties in the security services in North, whether affiliated with political security, national security or the Houthi Preventive Security. He added that it is easy to put the terrorist banner in such operations as all the aforementioned agencies are the ones who direct the killing operations and working to stereotype the presence of terrorism with South to intimidate the world that without the control of Sanaa and its centers of power, southern Yemen will be a haven for terrorism.<sup>41</sup> "Khaled Baklan" agrees with this possibility by saying that South has become a de-facto reality that imposes itself, and it is natural to find a plot which targets Southern military forces in order to dismantle its entity. This could only be done through assassinating of certain leaders and influential figures, and these operations are implemented through parties that have intelligence agencies that own the crime tools and finance them simultaneously.<sup>42</sup>

It should be said that the recent war period in Yemen provided favorable conditions for the massive escalation of political assassinations, and the perpetrators found space to precisely plan and hit the target, because they know very well the extent of the weakness of the intelligence and security bodies, most of which emerged after the war. Furthermore, it has been remarkable that media outlets turn a blind eye towards repeated assassinations in South, compared to perhaps less important operations in other places towards which they allocate large areas of news coverage and follow the smallest details. This raises questions about the intended reasons for neglecting such important issues. It is apparently a more appropriate situation for the culprits.

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<sup>41</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with political researcher "Saleh Al-Dawil"(Previous source)

<sup>42</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with researcher and political analyst "Khaled Baklan"(Previous source)

## How can assassinations be confronted?

Although there are no absolute or relative criteria to understand the reasons for the increasing assassinations, especially in South Yemen, recent historical evidence along with the opinions of all researchers interviewed in the paper, indicated that getting rid of southern leaders and figures who have political and military influence is one of the reasons for such operations. It can be said that ignoring to address the security vulnerabilities will allow the assassination squads to find space to take advantage of the instability to carry out operations on wider geographic scales.

Addressing security challenges currently will undoubtedly be a hard mission, and it is unlikely to produce quick results. However, it seems that adopting a more careful approach by Southern military and security forces to address the status quo is not impossible. It is also important to emphasize the commitments of the "Arab Coalition" to protect the liberated areas within the framework of partnership with local actors, and to provide them with the necessary expertise and high-level security training, especially the Southern military forces, which played a major role in protecting the security of the Arabian Peninsula and liberating the region. Most of the areas in Yemen are from the Houthis and AQAP.

According, "Mohammed Jawas," stressed the need for a strategy that provides greater attention to the influential political and Southern military commanders in a way that ensures their protection. He added that paying attention to influential elements and figures will help the Southerners to reach required political and military status which faces constant obstacles by anti-Southern forces<sup>43</sup>. As for confronting this phenomenon, Khaled Baklan said that it is important and a priority to build an intelligence security apparatus in South capable of monitoring and follow-up. It is no less important than the urgent need to qualify security personnel and giving them intensified courses for them as well as establishing special security units to combat crime and terrorism. He added that the Houthis put Aden and its security and military leaders, especially those loyal to the STC in the targeting circle. This makes it very important to monitor those who come from the Houthi-controlled areas only

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<sup>43</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with the Southern Brigadier General and Military Expert "Mohammed Thabet Jawas" (previous source)

without the need to detain them as close monitoring could reveal schemes before they occur.<sup>44</sup>

It would not be wrong to say that handing over the "terrorism" file to Southern leaders and institutions is the most appropriate move. "Saleh al-Dawil" pointed out to that because these institutions are keener on fighting terrorism compared to their Northern counterparts, which circulated terrorism. He added that "terrorism" during the rule of President Saleh remained in Hadramout until he seized Mukalla, and it was not fought by brigades, anti-terror forces or army. Only the Hadrami Elite Forces were capable of eliminating him from his current location in record time. However, it remained within the scope of the First Military District in Wadi Hadramout, which is operated under Northern commanders and where the assassinations are constantly increasing. The same applies in Shabwa, where the authority, he says, handed over the city of "Azan" to "Ansar al-Sharia" and is close to Balhaf to threaten international oil and gas companies.<sup>45</sup> He stressed that, despite this, they didn't harm any of those interests. This proves that such "terrorism" is affiliated with the Yemeni intelligence. When the "Shabwa Elite" attacked its hideouts in Shabwa, its members fled to Northern areas like Al-Bayda and Rada. When the Islah party took control of Shabwa in August 2019, it revived again and was used to make daily tours in the roads to kill members of the Elite members without any reaction from the forces. However, the situation has changed recently after the liberation of the Shabwa districts and the control of the Shabwa Defense Forces, and it has begun implementing its first operations by combating its dens.<sup>46</sup>

Based upon that, will be futile to counter terrorism or trying to eliminate assassinations without finding long-term measures or solutions to reduce them, especially with the Houthis ongoing control of Central and servers of mobile operators in Sanaa. This enables them to spy on the calls of the targeted figures, track their whereabouts, and hack their text messages. The issue of espionage using mobile phone companies has raised much controversy since before the popular uprising 2011. Opponents of the regime of former President "Saleh" said that the National Security Agency obliged operating companies, in order to license them, to supply and install spying devices that

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<sup>44</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with researcher and political analyst "Khaled Baklan" (Previous source)

<sup>45</sup> [NewsYemen - Al-Qaeda controls Azzan Shabwa \(news.yemen.life\)](https://newsyemen.life)

<sup>46</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with political researcher "Saleh Al-Dawil"(Previous source)

enable it to record the calls of thousands of users identified by the device identifies, to keep records of their calls, and the ability of the intelligence service to determine their whereabouts using the companies' antennas and their database. These accusations have been raised in successive periods because calls of political figures were leaked to the media at various stages.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, after the Houthis seized Sanaa, indications of their exploitation of the capabilities of the National Security Agency on mobile phone companies and their users in assassinations increased. The group has exploited the vital communications sector since the beginning of the war in its military operations by monitoring calls, spying and monitoring coordinates to target civilians with ballistic missiles and drones.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, and in order to overcome the assassinations, which have increased dramatically in recent years, the Southern political and military forces will have to address these events according to the following set of recommendations:

- There is an urgent need for an effective southern security and intelligence frame to limit the widespread assassinations which are mainly concentrated in South Yemen targeting influential political and military Southern figures. Therefore, the development of a strong intelligence agency that is completely independent from the previous security services will be important to limit these operations.
- The Southern political and security forces must admit that they are also responsible for the exacerbation of the assassinations after the recent war in Yemen, because they are currently in the positions of political decision-making as well as at the military and security levels. However, their efforts in monitoring and tracking in these operations are still little. This requires them to adopt serious action steps, not just nominal ones.
- The potential threats and security challenges in South Yemen could serve as a motive to develop the Southern security agencies. However, failure to respond to the importance of the assassination event or not interact with it properly through investigation, following its roots and establishing a vision to address with it will necessarily lead to the penetration and disintegration of these bodies over time.

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<sup>47</sup> [A leaked phone call between President Hadi and Ahmed Bin Mubarak in 2015 \(Youtube\)](#)

<sup>48</sup> [Accusations against the Houthis of using "telecoms" to spy on opponents and manipulate the sector | Middle East \(aawsat.com\)](#)

- Southern political forces should pressurize for the speedy liberation of the telecommunications and Internet sector from the grip of the Houthis who are exploiting it in their war against South by targeting influential political and military figures through surveillance, monitoring and espionage.
- Southern media and human rights activists should take the responsibility of following up the growing assassination files, most of which are classified as "terrorist" operations in South Yemen. They have to convey them to international forums and mobilize to highlight them in a way that helps local actors to receive support for curbing such operations.
- Strengthening economic, social and other policies while neglecting security would aggravate of the phenomenon of assassinations. An integrative action must be adopted to enhance all policies and achieve the conditions for general stability, especially after the Southern military and security forces took control of most of the Southern areas.

**Author's note:**

*The assassination operations mentioned in this paper are not complete; they are just a fraction of hundreds of operations that targeted hundreds of Southerners at various levels, methods and motives. The process of monitoring them is a hard task due to the lack of past cover aging of this file. Moreover, the sources of research on it are still scarce. Moreover, some of the names of the victims were not documented in addition to the continuation of the assassinations until the moment of writing the paper.*

*Finally, "South24" would like to express gratitude and appreciation to all political and military researchers who enriched this paper with their opinions and information.*

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Political Assassinations in South Yemen:

# Rivals' Final Weapon



Farida Ahmed

Executive Director of South24 Center

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