

A panel discussion

A Presidential Council in Yemen: A Solution or a New Dilemma?



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South24 Center for News and Studies



On Sept. 25th 2021, South 24 Center for News and Studies held a Zoom- panel discussion entitled “A Presidential Council in Yemen: A Solution or a New Dilemma?”¹

The panel witnessed a number of opinions and discussions that enriched the topic by a group of speakers including:

- Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen: A Journalist and a Political Researcher.
- Ezat Moustafa: a Journalist, Analyst and a Political Researcher.
- Hussam Radman: a Journalist, Analyst and a Political Researcher.
- Amin Al Yafaei; a Writer and Political Researcher.

The Panel was moderated by Ayad Qassem, Chairman of South24 Center for News Studies.

After welcoming guests, Ayad Qassem set up the following key points as the main entrance of the conversation:

- As yet, there are no clear signs for a specific agreement about the form of a final solution in Yemen amid the continuous war and the rejection by some disputing parties of the peace international efforts. However, some opinions raise the notion of a “ Presidential Council” as an alternative to "a consensus president" and believe that this is the proper solution to make peace for an interim transitional period, and for settling disputes that rattled the anti-Houthi forces in Yemen, in light of the failure by the internationally recognized Hadi government, especially that the legislative authority (the parliament) is still frozen.
- It's a fact that the history of the presidential councils in Yemen was not successful on both North and South before and after the unity, as the conflicts flares within them militarily and politically, and it has gotten worse now by adding the ideological and doctrinal tussles.
- Some believe that forming a presidential council would prevent monopoly of power, as there will be participation in the process as well as making the political decision represented by different main social and political entities in Yemen, through large number of seats to guarantee the society's representation. Others deem that the first presidential council's barrier will be how to merge the military and security forces, this dilemma faced by the anti-Houthi parties during completing the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, related to the military and security sides. This threatens a possible rebound of fighting among more than one party amidst this division.
- Some suggest leaving the implementation duties to a technocratic government, based on the efficiency standard and not for political and social consideration, and to limit the power of the presidential council to appointments and foreign policies, so as its role will be a supervisory and oversight one.

¹ [YouTube - ندوة نقاش: المجلس الرئاسي في اليمن: حل للأزمة أم معضلة جديدة؟](#)

- Some believe that the presidency constitutes a main source for managing authority and assuming powers in a way that strengthens the government's performance in running the public institutions, and achieving the political transitional period requirements. However, they can't be done by putting the presidency within the framework of a presidential council as any possible dispute inside it will inevitably lead to the loss of power for both the presidential council and the government.
- Others concluded that the idea of a presidential council is consistent with the new reality on the ground represented in power division and the growing independence of governorates, entities and local groups. This represents an alternative suitable plan to spare the country a new conflict crisis.
- Some believe that establishing a presidential council without a permanent solution for the complicated drastic crises such as the Southern issue, due to the failure of the Yemeni unity project between South and North would consequently mean the survival of the conflict's causes and motives

Therefore, we will attempt today to discuss those opinions through the following questions:

- Will the establishment of a presidential council, even an interim one, would save Yemen (North and South) from the current crisis? or further complicate the situation?
- Does a presidential council Provide a guarantee for the solution? And what are the guarantees for not turning against it by one of the disputing parties in Yemen?
- What are the possible challenges that in the face of the presumed presidential council?
- Will all parties accept this solution?
- Are there other alternatives or solutions which are able to gather the disputing parties, and constitute a real political partnership?
- what is the more suitable time to form a presidential council? is it now among the anti-Houthi powers? Or later in the context of the political settlement after the presumed cease-fire agreement?

We asked our honorable guests to answer these questions

Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen:

In a previous paper, I suggested the Idea of a presidential council with an aim to arrange the power positions from the top level due to the big failure of the Hadi government. President Hadi has many problems from personal and political perspectives which led us to the current situation. Moreover, The Islah Party dominates the political decision making, so there is a need to make a wider order in the top authority which is related basically to the anti-Houthi camp. This should happen prior to discussing a cease-fire or ending the war, while an all-out

settlement is another story. The biggest was settling the conditions in the anti-Houthi camp. We know that they are contentious partners but, the Houthis are a common danger which constitutes a threat for them, On the other hand, there is a need to arrange the conditions of the areas outside the Houthi control, especially the services which are in a state of complete paralysis, particularly the city of Aden due to the ongoing power struggle and the endless suffering of its people.

Therefore, instead of waiting for an end to such a power struggle, the main key of the solution is how is to sort out the position of power from the top based upon the following suggestions on many levels:

The first level: it won't be a mere presidential council, but a one that replaces the role of the House of Representatives to represent all the political and social powers. It will include many numbers to serve this goal as well as monitoring the government's performance and drawing the general policies no more, no less without having any financial or other power. Its main goal will be limited to representation like any parliament, especially in light of the difficulty of holding elections in our country. This is related to the top level.

The second, the government level: instead of being a representative government as it is now, the new one will be a technocratic government depending on Efficiency to implement the executive policies, top of which is improving the people's living conditions. Currently, it is a consensus one in which each political and social party selects it a representative according to political and social identities.

The third level: is to extend the powers of the local government by a very large degree, to widen the powers of the existing local councils and increase their representation and other things related to the local rule. The wider it is, the better it is. The goal of the paper was to make three -levels modification to reform the conditions in the areas outside the Houthi control, instead of waiting for an end to the war, or until this conflict between the STC and the government will be determined through armed clashes or something like that. It aims at improving the living conditions.

Thus, there are several challenges of course. I don't deny that the level of political elite in Yemen is weak, which is a general matter related to the mentality. It may be attributed to a cultural problem that occurred within the Yemeni political elite in general. Therefore, our expectations ceiling should not be too high. Additionally, the previous experiences of the presidential councils usually ended in conflicts. This is true, so this paper tries and seeks to widen the powers of the local governments, or reduce the pressure on the top power struggle, as well as the powers of the presidential council to be very limited, and accordingly to avoid a conflict which may lead to a paralysis, in addition to separating between the executive and legislative authorities, or to keep the technocratic government which does not represent any political or social party away from any possible conflict at the level of the council. This was the paper's point of view.

I can't call it an ideal idea but a temporary one which is neither permanent nor long term. This idea also has a lot of side effects, but I think this is the possible solution under the current situation.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

In light of your view about the hierarchical power arrangement (from top to down), the blemish is basically existent in the top layer, as if without top to down treatment, it will be useless. Some different points of view may say that the current authority does not represent all parties but is dominated by one party. You indicated that the Islah Party seized power. The question now is to what extent this move can be implemented, who will push for it? and who is able to achieve it if the decision making is basically in the hands of Islah (Muslim Brotherhood)?

Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen:

Islah could be pressured. The idea is that the party has a big influence on President Hadi, as it controls him through the Director of the President's Office and others who determine the people he can meet and largely impact his decisions. Therefore, Islah is able to affect a person not an entire group. I mean that the presidential council will provide some transparency in the decision making allowing for more participation. We certainly can't negate the intense presence of Islah which is a big party at the levels of size, members and organization. Hence, it is difficult to talk about excluding it completely, but the idea is how to restrain Islah to be a mere participant at an equal foot with other parties and not to be the dominator, this is the basic idea. We do not call for excluding one party but for allowing all actors to participate without complete marginalization. Consequently, the idea here, or the most important and difficult question is who will push for this? There are political parties who can benefit from that such as those which lack representation like The General People's Congress, the remnants of Ali Abdullah Saleh with all their factions, the STC. I believe that all parties will have certain interests in applying this except for Islah and President Hadi who has absolute power. Additionally, the regional and international parties will benefit from rearranging those areas. The current form allows the Houthis to seize territories, and they threaten the South itself as they seek economic sources. So, if they seize control of Marib, they won't hesitate to threaten Shabwa. Even if they fail to capture it, they at least will seek to get use of the oil-rich districts, besieging them and bargaining for fortune. The ceiling of the Houthi aspirations is endless. They speak about the liberation of Makkah and Palestine. Their ceiling is beyond the Yemeni limits, and it would be wrong to assume that. Consequently, in such a way, The Houthis defeat us. the conditions further deteriorate at the living and humanitarian levels. To preserve what is left, and in order to improve the living conditions, I believe that it is in the interest of the regional and international parties to improve conditions within these area to create a kind of citizenship, if they want a settlement and ending the war in any way, as there is no way to stop war if we fail to establish a bit of balance.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Thank you, let us turn to Ezat Moustafa. Maysaa said that a presidential Council provides a partnership pattern for all parties which will create some balance and stability, as all actors

will be present and share the decision making. Do you agree with that? How do you look into the idea of a presidential council now in light of the current division?

Ezat Moustafa:

I would like to thank Maysaa for her paper. Of course, it is an ambitious and somewhat creative idea, but I won't engage in discussing it as I want to present my point of view about a presidential council. The paper provides a new and different idea. I thought it was similar to previous ideas about presidential councils but obviously it is different. Certainly, it is a superb issue which deserves discussion. Briefly, I understood that the paper suggests a parliament, not a presidential council having broad powers. In spite of being called "a presidential council", it will exercise parliamentary powers. The paper wants to abolish the presidential establishment, and replace it with a presidential council which, regardless of the names, will exercise the powers of the parliament. And thus, we shift from a presidential system to a parliamentary one as in the case in Iraq. To my understanding, it wants to make a gradual implementation of the idea. I would like to ask the supporters of a presidential council to what extent the Houthis will accept dividing seats, especially that the idea suggested forming a presidential council after a political settlement. Consequently, if we gather all those actors including the STC, the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood, the other parties like The General People's Congress, the so-called Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) and the Joint Forces in the western coast in a presidential council, what will be the Houthi quota while they almost control the entire North? Will they accept 15% or 20%? The answer is no. However, why will the Houthis support the idea of a presidential council although their quota will be largely affected in such a way? Of course, there are many answers to this question, but Maysaa's idea suggests that she wants a presidential council prior to a settlement related to the legitimacy which does not enjoy the public support, but people cling to it as being the only legal card before the international community in the war against the Houthi militia. Therefore, a presidential council will first topple the Houthi favorite card, in other words, forming a presidential council prior to a settlement will give the Houthis a 50% quota, instead of 15% or 20% if the presidential council is formed later as a result of the political settlement, this means that the so-called Supreme Political Council in Sanaa will engage in a dialogue with the Presidential Council to form another one. Accordingly, the Houthis will take 50%, the Houthis are ready to accept even 15% to enter a presidential council against which they will launch a coup later.

This multilevel pattern will constitute an immense danger on the future of the country and empower the Houthis. As for a technocratic government which is isolated from all political parties, it is not an applicable idea and unlikely to happen. And anyway, the technocratic government proved to be worse as it will be selected by the political parties which will nominate persons who have nothing to do with politics and are being controlled by the political parties, this means that they are not part of the political scene, but they were selected by political parties. By the way, Ma'een Abdulmalik Government "the parity government" is similar to the one we talk about. They called it "a technocratic and parity government" but we found that its ministers disobey the Prime Minister. When the STC asked

the members of the government to stay in Aden and not to leave it, they did so, but they left the governorate after receiving orders from the parties they represent. The attitude of the PM is not known and whether he wants to return to Aden or stay outside it, as he is unable to control his ministers.

In general, there is a question whether the call for a presidential council is addressed inside Yemen or abroad? The problem is “Do we want ending the war or establishing peace? It is important to decide whether we want a presidential council or a new consensus president? How will we engineer the form of the coming solution in Yemen? As for citizenship, do we want to care for the interests of the local communities or the political parties? It is clear that a lot of political parties don’t represent the local communities. For example, when we talk about the National Resistance in the Western Coast, they don’t represent the 100% of the local community, this is a very important issue as the political parties in Marib don’t represent 100% of the local community there, like Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, who neither represent the Ma’ribi community nor Mabkhot Al Sharif who represents the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood. Can we gather all of them in a presidential council instead of leaving each warlord to dominate a territory? The problem of making such a gathering will be related to seats if the presidential council has broad powers and a large number of seats (a parliament). But it won’t exceed 7 seats in case of a narrow council. There is a previous paper in this regard, published by “South24” which talked about a 7 seats-presidential council. All forms of a presidential council that came to mind tackled the Southern issue. Whether the Southern percentage constitutes 50% +1 or 50%-1, it aims at representing the Southerners and South. This is of course the main and pivotal issue in the whole conflict, meaning that we practically talk about establishing an all-out peace except for the Southern issue making 2014 as the starting point, since the Houthi coup in Sanaa. Some prefer March 26th 2015, as a starting point, since the beginning of Operation “Asifat Al Hazm (Decisive Storm), considering it the day when the war erupted. However, others who are anti-Houthi or at least neutral could take the September 21st War, Dammaj and others into consideration. So, the problem is not only limited to the coup, but the Yemeni trouble is how to establish a comprehensive peace. If we talk about an equal wealth distribution and peaceful exchange of power under the unity, we can’t ignore previous conflicts even prior to 1990. Let us start from the Southern Issue, especially that all forms of presidential councils talk about the return to Sanaa.

For example, I would like to refer to an item in the Document of Accord and Agreement in January 1994, sponsored by the then Jordanian King Hussein in Amman. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hussein Alahmar put a condition, next to his signature, requiring the return of Ali Salem Al-Bidh to Sanaa. At the time, there were talks about a presidential council which led to a political crisis, and then to the 1994 War. However, even in the wake of the 1993- parliamentary elections, prior to the presidential election to end the transitional period, they required the return of Ali Salem Al-Bidh to Sanaa after assassinating about 158 of the Social Party’s leaders since 1990. So, the core theme here is the return to Sanaa when we talk about any form of settlement, whether technocratic government, parties, or parity government. Regardless of the form of the government, the point of interest is whether it will return to Sanaa or Aden, to Marib or Seiyon as this will make a difference.

Even in the conflict between the STC and the influential parties in the Maeen Abdulmalik government, there is a problem regarding the return to Aden. This happens although we just talk about Aden and actors whose personal security is not at risk, so how about returning to Sanaa? Mahmoud Al Sobeihi is an example that clarifies the problem of returning to Sanaa after the political settlement, whether related to a presidential council or others. When Al Sobeihi was the Commander of the 4th Military District, and pledged to defend Taiz against the Houthis, he was appointed(promoted)as the defense minister in spite of the threat. The reason behind this is to make him go to Sana'a to be under house arrest or to threaten his own life. Therefore, promoting him from a military district commander to the Ministry of Defense is not actually a promotion but a personal revenge by returning to Sanaa. Now a lot of people can't return to Sanaa, whether a minister or a mere activist, so how about a party leader or one of top front politicians?

Generally, there is much talk about a presidential council. Even the Hadi government itself is similar to a presidential council as it has a number of advisors who represent the other parties and make consultations about the presidential decisions, but Islah has been able to control it. Therefore, it is not justified when we support a presidential council because of the weak Hadi authority. Hadi is one of more than thirty million persons. They can bring any one instead of him. Talking about a presidential council will make them seek for figures they can control as in the case of Hadi who gained the consensus because all parties thought that he is a weak man who can be controlled. He did not help himself or try to be stronger by using all pressure cards and points of strength which were in his hands. They did not help him to be stronger but sought to weaken him more to remain under their control.

I believe that the presidential council will constitute a very big problem which could move the conflict to a complicated phase like what we witness in Iraq after toppling down its presidential system and turning it to a neither parliamentary nor presidential one. It will be a dilemma to bring down the presidential system and to drop the card by which the Yemenis fight against the Houthi "militia" before any all-out political settlement that guarantees establishing a comprehensive peace, Thank you.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Hussam, Kindly, it is your turn to talk after you heard two different points of view, In terms of the idea, content or the possibility of its application. What do you think? How do you look into the idea of a presidential council? To what extent is it able to solve the Yemeni problem?

Hussam Radman:

First, back to the historical record of the previous presidential council experiences, and the Maysaa's distinctive paper, we find that the presidential councils always accompanied each critical political turning point in the Yemen's recent history, South and North, the formula of such councils attempted to solve address basic issues: the first is the legitimacy crisis of the fledgling country during its transition from the revolution to the state. The second one is the

weakness of the central state, the multiple centers of power inside the country itself and the multiple social and political actors. Historically, this formula suffered a basic point of weakness, mentioned by Maysaa, which is the lack of sustainability and its violent ends. Even during the Yemeni unity, when the formula of the presidential council was paired with the slogan of democracy and pluralism, we found that it eventually ended by civil war. Consequently, the real question should be why the Yemenis still suggest the idea of a presidential council. Of course, the only political turning point which didn't witness presidential council formula was 2011, when the political elites replaced it with a new arrangement based upon two elements:

- A popularly elected president and accordingly solving the legitimacy crisis.
- the existence of a consensus legitimacy which attempts to gather the political elites as shown in the Gulf Initiative and the Dialogue Conference. These two elements as well as the international support are the reasons behind President Hadi's retaining power until now. However, there is a question about why do we again stir the idea of a presidential council in such a critical moment? I think the reason is related to the shift in the legitimacy structure which is based on exclusion and alienating all political partners, and ignoring the principles in partnership and Compatibility. Additionally, we have a legitimacy which no longer believes in institutions but relies upon personal symbolism. Moreover, we found that this legitimacy suffers from the lack of efficiency. As a result, its consensus legitimacy has eroded as well as losing the legitimacy of achievement on the ground, at the political and military levels, as well as the increase of the existential threats against the remnants of the liberated areas. Those existential threats take two shapes:
 - The Houthi expansion which lately became imminent even in South.
 - the economic collapse which is no longer bearable for people.

Consequently, we find that the Yemenis, in South and North, in light of the current formula of the legitimacy authority began to lose the possibilities of achieving peace. Moreover, we even started to lose the possibilities of continuing war. Hence, we became close to the Afghani scenario. So, raising this question is justified as suggesting a presidential council throws a big stone in a stagnant pool. We could differ about the typical formula to implement the presidential council but suggesting it in this political moment is justified and deserves to be discussed and being built upon.

There are two programs to face this historical dilemma:

- A radical drastic program which has two formulas, the first requires surpassing the three references and to build new ones based on power in the ground. In spite of the logical pleas of this thesis, it is a step towards the unknown. The second formula, and the more logical one, seeks to make structural drastic changes inside the presidency, top of which is a presidential council as shown in Maysaa's paper. However, this formula may face several barriers related to how to find the new legitimacy, the technical problems for the presidential council. There are also dynamical problems including the pace of the Houthi progress. Currently, any big

changes at such a scale will have negative repercussions on the coherence of the governmental forces and may lead to more collapse and another problem accordingly.

- a gradual reformatory program that has two formulas:

The first formula: at the theoretical level: the three references may be still valid. Probably, they are not literally valid, but they constitute the only reference that protects us from going to the unknown, however. We should feed them by two things.

- The Riyadh Agreement, and this is what already happened.
- the return to the mechanism of consensus decisions at the structural level.

It seems there is a reformatory formula through activating the existent institutional frames within the Yemeni state which were intentionally destroyed. Such a reformatory process looks easier than a presidential council. For example, at the economic level, some steps should be adopted in two directions:

- The Central Bank governance and guaranteeing its independence.
- Activating the Supreme Economic Council and securing feeding it with a widespread figure.

At the military level, the Supreme National Defense Council should be activated and integrate all active military actors. This council should include Aidarous, Shalal. Tariq and all figures who can jointly coordinate to engage in a joint battle against the Houthis. Moreover, at the legislative level, the parliament can be activated and to find a harmonic formula. For example, the leadership body of the Yemeni parliament currently has 4 members, so we can add a fifth one to merge the likes of Dr Nasser Alkhabji as the STC's representative, provided that the decision making mechanism inside the parliament is a harmonic one and not based on the majority. Therefore, by this formula we could relinquish the urgent necessity for a presidential council. The judiciary authority has been activated including the Attorney General, The Supreme Council. The decisions in all those institutions should be taken on a harmonic basis. Whether the gradual reformatory program or the radical drastic one is to be implemented, there are three conditions that have to be fulfilled to make any changes in the legitimacy structure which we agree that it is no longer valid:

- Breaking the close obsessive alliance between President Hadi and Islah is the first step in this direction, and to appoint a consensus Vice President. This step could be more important and easier than appointing a presidential council.
- Crystallization of historical block in the anti-Houthi camp, based on the two rules of change and liberation. I believe that the STC is the most qualified party to lead this large alliance formula for making the reforms which Maysaa spoke about, provided that it adopts both a wider reformatory program and a more extended alliance formula.
- The existence of an international pressure tendency to make such reforms especially from the "Quartet".

This is a summary of what to talk about a presidential council and the imperative need to reform the legitimacy in its current form. Thank you.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Thank you for your ambitious initiative which seems very optimistic. You spoke about a better or more urgent reformatory process than a presidential council. You talked about a harmonic formula without determining its identity, and who will persuade the divided parties in North and South? As we know, the Houthis now control most parts of the North, and accordingly, the only remaining areas in the hands of legitimacy include parts of Marib and Taiz as well as the Western Coast. The STC control most of South, at least the vital areas, along with other southern forces. Even if they are affiliated with the legitimacy, Will these parties be convinced to apply this combinatorial formula on South Yemen only, and accordingly to legitimize the North. This question could be asked in South in this way: How can you overcome this problem if we look at the background of the Southern issue and Southerners' demand for independence?

Hussam Radman:

Do you mean that applying any reformatory pattern in light of the legitimacy erosion in North is unacceptable even for Southerners?

Ayad Qassem-South24:

I mean that will the Southerners accept recreating a new legitimacy in North which is fully under the control of the Houthis?

Hussam Radman:

I think the answer is yes pending on two basic conditions: the first that any formula to reform legitimacy should include reconsidering the liberation of North. Therefore, the Southerners would have strategic interest to deter the Houthis. The second is that any harmonic formula must take into account the representation of the Southern issue as shown in the Riyadh agreement. Thirdly, there should be a guarantee of a balanced Southern partnership on any incoming negotiation or dialogue tour, to reach a common ground.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Thank you Hussam. And now let us move to Amin Al Yafae with all those details by our three honorable guests. What is your point of view about that?

Amin Al Yafae:

Theoretically, I suppose that this is an important proposal in light of this stagnant water to get out of such a huge deadlock in the Yemeni file. I will present a theoretical introduction through which we can overlook a wider picture of the power pattern in Yemen.

First: we can enlarge the name presidential council to be “the collective authority”. It is dated back in history starting from the simple groups, followed by councils and clans, the totalitarian regimes based upon the patterns of collective authorities and to the European Union which is the most sophisticated collective authority till so far.

Of course, there are two patterns of the collective authority, the first which came from below. Some kind of challenges or crises against some groups which in turn join alliances to repel these challenges and alliances. Then they return to their original status after the disappearance of those risks. In other words, those collective authorities are temporary. The second one is the elite collective authority which are usually imposed from the top levels, and it has two forms:

The first: is the typical institutional form as represented in the European Union.

The second: is the pattern of the totalitarian parties. Unfortunately, the totalitarian view of the national idea within these countries led not to explicitly recognize the plurality in the country, so it finds itself obliged to dodge around by Aggregating an authority which is distributed on the surface, but it is also an interim one due to the lack of the right channels to manage this authority.

Back to Yemen, as Maysaa mentioned in her paper, Yemen witnessed the emergence of 5 presidential councils including 3 in the North prior to the unity. (In the eras of Al Salal, Al Eryani, and Al Hamdi respectively), one council in South in the era of Salmin, and one council after the Yemeni unity (1990-1994). The four presidential councils prior to the unity were characterized by the intellectual harmony of elites in the top of power. However, as all of them were totalitarian, except in the Eryani era, they didn't exercise authority(formally) as they were not able to do that on the ground due to the existence of stronger local powers which simply put an end to the pattern when they abandoned them.

But, as we have already mentioned, those councils were characterized by intellectual harmony, so moving from one pattern to another was easier. The 1994 Presidential Council was characterized by multiple projects, ideas and ideologies, and this somewhat resembles the current circumstances with a focus on multiplicity of projects. A researcher, called Eris Glosemeyer, wrote about the development of the state institutions in that period. He concluded that this Presidential Council caused a state of emptiness regarding institutional development. It stripped it of everything and was a main cause behind the instability. However, we can look into the other face by talking about informal collective authority. I agree that Yemen, since the beginning of history, is run in a collective way due to this immense variety in power sources. We can't say that Yemen has been ruled by one authority, or central or individual power, or that this has been witnessed in North from 1978-1990, and to 2011. It was a collective authority, but a formal one. Probably. It was stronger than all formally

declared authorities in South. However, this customary collective authority caused catastrophic repercussions. We can't now turn a blind eye to that. One main reason behind the current situation in Yemen is the "collective authorities" which were established in North (Ali Abdullah Saleh, Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar and Abdullah Bin Hussein Al Ahmar). When Saleh wanted to break up the partnership and to further centralize power in his hand, it led to a catastrophe. The same thing applies to South with the experience of Ali Bin Nasser Mohammed.

As for the political transition in Yemen, if we want to search for solutions that can bring peace and stability to avoid the magical solution method that has prevailed in Yemen so much, we have to think well about the Yemeni issue and in a much deeper way.

There are several crises such as Syria, Iraq and Libya. What have been produced about those crises at the information and scientific studies level are very large and huge. Therefore, after ending the war, such production could help establish perception or build a pattern that can treat the reality.

As for the election of Hadi in 2012, the tragedy is that the reason behind his election was not that he was the Vice President but because he belongs to South. There are many issues like that, the belief that separation is one of the biggest problems in Yemen, and ignoring Hadi's lack of efficiency as he had no experience in running the state, but no one criticized that. The Southern streets had a point of view different from the elites in North, so how did they believe that a man with these poor capabilities can run all these complexities while he is bereft of will? Consequently, the results have been very logical that this weak character does not have the power leading to all this vacuum caused by the militias in the political scene, especially that power does not love emptiness.

The presidential transitional council is an important idea that can be considered, but there are many inputs or barriers in its way, like how can we establish this transitional council? How can we unify those powers that differ at the ideological, regional and project levels? What can prevent the recurrence of the 1990 or the 1994 experiences when Islah allied with the General People's Congress and disavowed the Unity constitution? National powers conspiring against their country's constitutions are odd cases in political history. Moreover, can the state institutions bear such a project? Does the political decision pass through institutional channels? Are the state institutions now in a sound state that they can accommodate the plurality of powers? This is an important question.

Will pluralism lead to what we can call "choke path" instead of the integrity track. The first means that the wealthy areas, like Marib, do not give other areas if even simple problems erupted among those different parties creating tragic situations. How can we solve this dilemma? What are the agreements that could guarantee the disappearance of such problems and dilemmas? How can we manage the balance between the local and central? How can we allow for example the trans-regional organizations to practice its activities in other areas controlled by an opposing party? Especially when we saw each party burn the headquarters of the other.

My proposal for a solution is to express my hope for conducting a thorough study based upon the data on the ground, the nature of political forces, and the structure of state institutions. These are essential things that should be studied in depth. Even the suggestion for a solution could be transient. The Yemeni problem recalls the famous proverb “Necessity is the mother of invention”. The dilemma has to produce ideas and innovative solutions to help the Yemenis to get out of this predicament. It is the mission of the elites. For example, some could suggest other patterns away from efficiency, such as a multi-government model for locally located territories. For example, in Germany, there is a government for each state and a government that runs the affairs of this country, so that there is no overlapping of powers, and no collective punishment occurs when one party disagrees with another. We have to be broad-minded as politics are not always sacred. The central form may not be the proper one, and the federal model also. I hope there will be openness for other solutions to treat the difficult problem before Yemen degenerates into its end, and becomes a mere history. Thank you.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

You mentioned that there are other possible solutions, do you mean a confederal state for example? Or independence? Are those solutions currently logical to get out of the legitimacy crisis? Or do you believe that they can be suggested as strategic solutions in light of any incoming political settlement?

Amin Al Yafae:

Yes, but provided that there will be no pressures which restrain minds. As I said before, preconceptions are our problem. It is wrong to ignore the transition process that happened in 2012 as people think outside the scope of the main topic. They were thinking illusions outside the political reality and that led to what we ended up with. Therefore, stripping from these tendencies can lead to an exit and treat this reality even in a simple way.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Back to Ezat. Of course, you mentioned the Iraqi experience, and there is a recent experience like the latest Libyan pattern when the United Nations sponsored the election of a presidential council consisting of three members and two deputies. It seems so far that the Presidential Council is going on. There is a regional division in this council as well. The suggested figures are from South, West and East of Libya which has entered a phase of war. Of course, we do not deny that the disputing parties are linked to regional influence, which in the end determines such final options. I think Maysaa pointed out that the KSA has the ability to persuade President Hadi to take such a move. So, is it possible to try the Libyan model in this way, or do you see a different reality between Yemen and Libya?

Ezat Moustafa:

OF course, there are a lot of differences between them as the complexities in the Yemeni scene are more dangerous for several reasons. Also, the Southern issue in Yemen dates back to before 2011 as there were two UN member states that entered partnership and so on. In contrast, much of the Libyan problems began in 2011. I don't think that the suggestions for solutions in Libya can last long if there are no drastic ones. accordingly, they are just temporary solutions to pave the way. However, when I spoke about Iraq, I said that there are risks in applying the parliamentary system in a country that lacks coherence, stability or institutions. In a country like Yemen, this will be more devastating, and may prolong the crisis for the next 100 years and make us enter a dilemma that is difficult to get out of.

Generally, I'd like to stress the importance of suggesting a presidential council. It is clear that all people including politicians and elites are not in favor of such a council for some considerations including the previous models. Of course, Maysaa pointed to the failure examples. However, re-stirring the topic serves as incentives for more solutions. so, either we discuss this idea in a thorough way in order to actually produce a new product that was not considered, or raise it in this way, which excludes it completely, this is important in both cases,

If we say that there are parties in Yemen who can accept a presidential council, I think that the Muslim Brotherhood won't do that while president Hadi himself does not care as he will be outside the political settlement. He is neither a political power nor he has a popular base, and he won't represent any political party. I expect that the presidential council won't be proper for the STC. Only the Houthis who may like the idea. Tariq announced he backs a presidential council as he has very weak chances and he can gain a more political role in case of establishing the council.

Additionally, if we form a presidential council, who will represent Marib? He will be a Maribi figure even if he is close to Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar (Sanhan). Tihamah will be represented by a figure close to former President Saleh even if he is from Tihamah. Finally, we will note that the Northern share of the Presidential Council will be limited in Saadah and Sanhan only. It is a big dilemma as we have to engineer a special solution in Yemen that ensures a sustainable peace.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

This is the goal of this panel. Back to Maysaa, there is a question from one participant (Wahbi Hassan): Is power in Yemen a political one with its scientific definition, and can we depend on the Yemeni politicians in building a national project able to produce a real broad-powers rule?

Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen:

I can't change the political elites in Yemen. I make a suggestion based upon the existing reality. I have many comments, especially in response to Ezat. First, regarding the Iraqi scenario, I

mean transitional interim arrangements not permanent. Just interim and transitional measures to save what can be saved, to get out the state of Houthi open military appetite especially after the Afghani pattern. Moreover, to save the economy and the deteriorating living conditions in the areas outside the Houthi control. The second point is that the Houthis were supporting the idea of a presidential council, but they stopped short of doing this, as their ambition ceiling became much higher. Currently, they see themselves in a political and military position that makes them unwilling to enter a settlement with others. Additionally, I agree that this council will have the problem of weak legitimacy. Therefore, it can gain legitimacy from a local, regional and international agreement about the council. It can find a certain solution.

There is another point related to the current frame of the Yemeni state. The STC and the Southern political forces have the right to keep demanding separation. But the matter now is temporary, not permanent, and connected to saving the current situation. The separation could occur after 5 years, or 10 years. It is a big project which can't happen overnight. This of course requires regional and international approval, as well as making arrangements in the internal and southern position, and this will take some time. Until this happens, we can't leave people in South Yemen and other areas under the legitimacy's control in such deteriorating living conditions because we have not yet settled the major issues. The matter is basically related to arranging the legitimacy position.

I praise Hussam's attempt to extend the economic and military issue. I believe it is an important point. However, there are no guarantees ensuring that the presidential council's members won't clash with each other. There are separated and divided military forces, and there are no guarantees except for their awareness of the importance of continuing the situation, which is better than conflict and fighting, especially in light of the current worsening conditions in South. They know well that all parties lost the Southern streets, the STC and the government. Therefore, it won't be in their favor to stay inside these zero equations. They must have minimum awareness that this formula can help them all, and that they can politically work to serve their various projects and agendas Through a political framework that has a minimum level of harmony.

The last point I would like to discuss is a comment to Amin. I repeatedly pointed out in my paper that the powers of the local governments are necessary in Yemen because this is one of the most important guarantees, the rule of the council will be more able to represent local communities and their interests, whether they are poor or rich. It is the most capable because it usually consists of individuals who engage in daily contact with the members of this community, and this is different from the elite nature containing ministers and others.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

My last question to Hussam from another participant: will the presidential council be affiliated with the legitimacy of the Houthis?

Hussam Radman:

Maysaa's paper was distinctive as she determined the temporary nature of the presidential council, describing it as interim, not permanent. It is a reformatory formula within the current system of legitimacy, and not a formula for a comprehensive political solution. Ezat asked about the Houthis' share, but they have so far been excluded from this formula which is basically for the STC and legitimacy.

Ayad Qassem-South24:

Isn't the Riyadh Agreement similar to that?

Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen:

Let me reply, Hussam, the Riyadh Agreement is addressing the problem of the government, not Hadi, the top of the authority which is the major dilemma.

The second point is very important. Since 2011, the ministers have been selected by the political parties. So, the Prime Minister doesn't choose the members of his government leading to a lack of harmony between the PM and the ministers. Prior to 2011, in spite of all troubles and problems of that period, the P.M was selecting his ministers and used to have a certain idea, program and agenda so he himself was the one who selected them as he is responsible for its success or failure. But since 2011, the political forces have played that rule.

Hussam Radman:

Additionally, the Riyadh Agreement has two faces, the first is sharing power(quotas). The second face is the institutional reformation of the state. So far, the first one only was implemented, as there is a power monopoly by the President and his Vice President. Accordingly, we want to cross to the stage of institutional reform, is it in the form of a presidential council? or in a more realistic formula? No problem, the core objective, on which we all agree, is the importance of making urgent institutional reforms in the current structural legitimacy.

After Mr. Qassem thanked the speakers and participants, the seminar was concluded.

About:

- Ayad Qassem: Founder and Chairman of South24 Center for News Studies, journalist and an independent researcher living in Switzerland specialized on Yemeni and Arab political affairs.
- Maysaa Shujaa Al Deen: A Non-Resident Researcher at Sanaa Center for Studies. She did several researches about Yemen. For Carnegie, she wrote a paper about “the religious schools in Yemen, and about the “Yemeni Immigration” and the war's impact on the Yemeni communities. She published many opinions in The New Arab (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed).
- Ezat Moustafa: A Researcher and Expert specialized in political Yemeni affairs. He worked at a number of TV Channels and the research centers. He is the host of the “Red line” program on “AL ghad Al Moshreq” he worked as a correspondent for a number of Arabic and foreign media outlets including Radio Monte Carlo, Elaph, Bahrain TV and Kuwait TV.
- Husam Radman: Journalist and Political Researcher, specialized in Yemeni affairs and issues of conflict and peace. His writings focus on armed religious groups, and political and social developments in South Yemen. Hussam is a reporter for Dubai TV in Aden, a visiting researcher at the South24 Center, and a research fellow at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies.
- Amin Shandhor Al Yafae: a Writer and a Political Researcher. He is the Deputy Director of Muhammad Ali Luqman Forum for Studies. He holds a master's degree in Technology and Innovation Management from Brandenburg University of Technology, Germany. He wrote a number of articles and studies on political and cultural topics in many Arab and local newspapers and websites.

A Presidential Council in Yemen: A Solution or a New Dilemma?

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