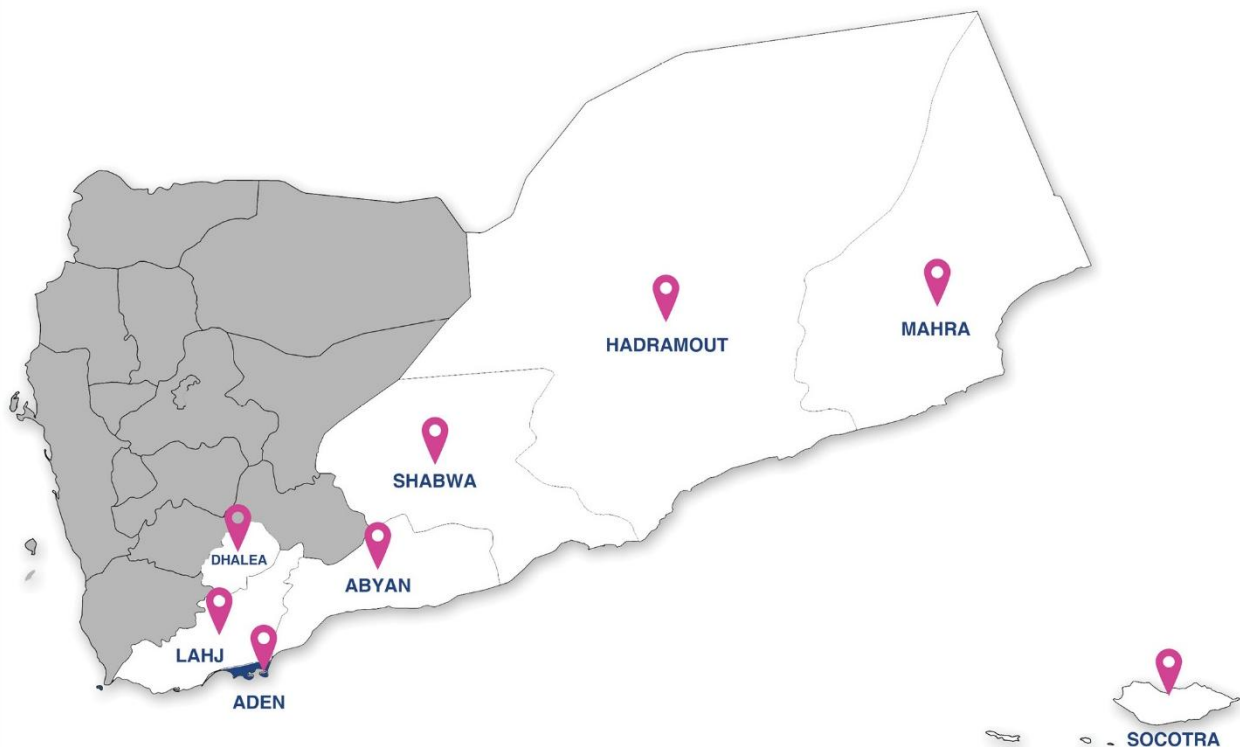# The Future of the „Security Turmoil" in South Yemen

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It seems that the chapters of security unrest are still going on in South Yemen, latest of which was the murder of a pregnant journalist by an explosive device in front of one of the Aden Airport's gates on 30th October 2021. It was the latest in a series of bombings in the Southern areas over the past weeks which raise several questions about the geopolitical importance of South Yemen, the factors behind extending the security turmoil as well as the future of the Yemeni political process and the extent of its impact on undermining the pillars of the security turbulence there.

First-The "geopolitical" importance of South Yemen:

South Yemen Constitutes a geostrategic depth for the region, and a pivot of a number of political and economic determinants that directly intersect with the priorities of stability, security and development related to some points which have its direct impact given the following map:
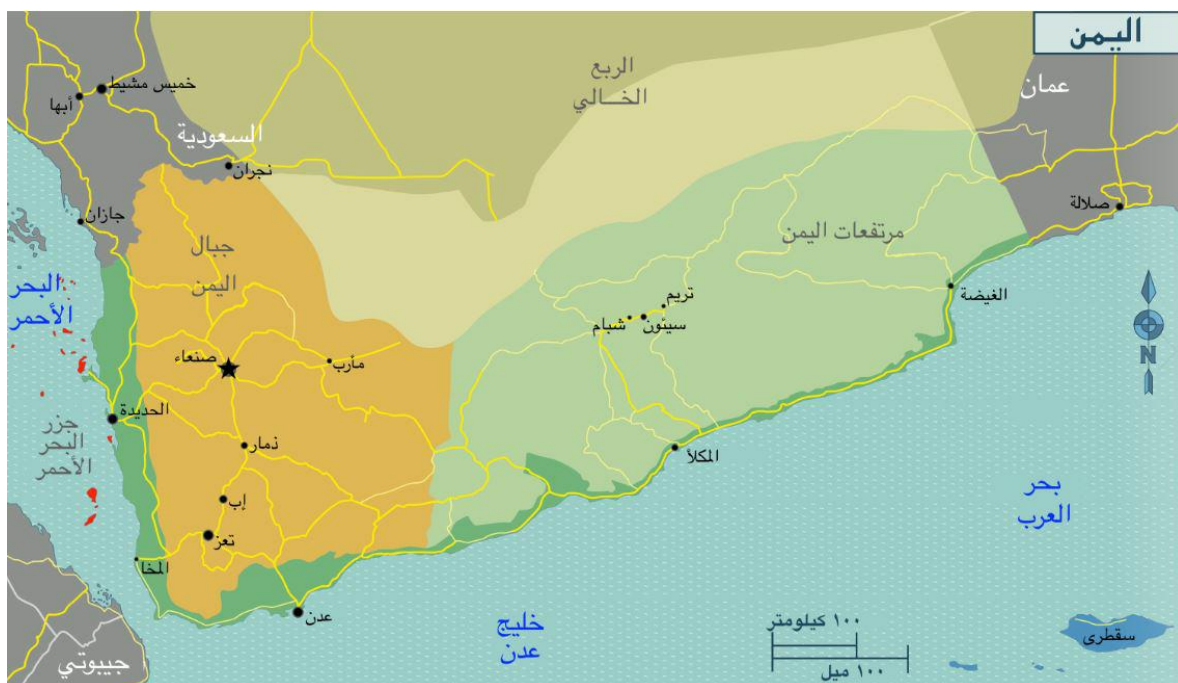
[File: Yemen regions map (Arabic).png - Wikimedia Incubator](#)

- "South Yemen" is a geopolitical hub for the Arab Coalition forces, "the UAE, The KSA, Egypt and other states in the alliance which cooperate with the STC to confront the Iranian influence in the region.

-Impact\control of the international navigation based upon "South's location in the middle of "the vital influence triangle". The latter includes the three most important maritime lanes, Hormuz, Bab Al-Mandab and the Suez Canal. For example, Socotra Island is important at the commercial, tourist and strategic levels, especially as it overlooks the international navigation lanes in the Ocean and the Gulf, as well as the geopolitical and trade positions of Aden Seaport, along with making advantage of the preferential features of the so called "the Southern Ports Economies" along the coast starting from the two ports of "Nashton" in Al-Mahrah, and Hulaf, in Socotra from the east to the port of Mayyun Island from the west.

-South Yemen owns what is known as "Energy economics" as it is full of significant stock of the hydrocarbons, especially oil, liquefied natural gas and minerals estimated by about 128 elements of different minerals and metals.

- "South Yemen" is one fulcrum of "the Belt and Road" project (also known as New Silk Road) due to its important location, as well having several ports and islands (about 130) between the road of Aden and Mokha ports, middle of which is Bab Al-Mandab and Perim Island which is located in the middle of this strait.

Accordingly, South Yemen enjoys several traits which make it qualified for applying "penetration to the west" or "turning to the east" policies. It also acts as a path upon which the regional strategic requirements towards the "Arab integration project" could be built.

Secondly-pillars of "Security turmoil":

There is a number of assumptions which agree that the security unrest" began years before the emergence of the Yemeni community movement in 2011. This is based upon three remarks, the <u>first</u> of which is that turbulence caused by the mismanagement of Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime and the state institutions involvement in the control and balance conflicts among sectarian, tribal and regional groups. The <u>second</u> remark is the Saleh regime's marginalization of

the active forces in South Yemen, especially after the first half of the 1990s. The <u>third</u> one is Saleh's inability to impose the rule of law and his failure to make the use of force limited to the national state. This encouraged the Houthis, many Northern tribes, the AQAP and local Southern parties to arm themselves and build alliances based on the weapon and money supplies with various regional parties. The <u>fourth</u> one is those societal reflections emanating from the revolution distribution problem and the absence of active development efforts and social justice policies.

Posteriorly, the qualitative frames of the "security unrest" triggers have diversified, top of which are the repercussions of Covid-19 pandemic, reproducing\the expansion of the AQAP in Yemen, confrontations against the Houthis, the failure to reach a peaceful settlement policy led by the UN that enjoys local and regional approvals. This is shown in the following detailed points:

1. **<u>The repercussions of Covid-19 pandemic</u>**

This pandemic added more complexities to the internal interactions and the settlement patterns. This directly triggered the escalation of the "security unrest". Moreover, the pandemic pushed in the direction of employing the regional actors (such as Israel, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, the KSA, the UAE and Qatar) as well local parties (such as the Houthis, the STC, the Madkhali Salafi fighters in Yemen...etc) to deepen the regional and the international polarities. This necessitates more time to reach consensual solutions and treat its negative effects. For example, the international and regional settlements reduced "the Yemeni issue" into "security\relief perspective regardless to the scale of internal complexities and their entanglement with the international and regional dimensions, as well as ignoring the "elitist division" and the state's failure to manage its internal institutions and external alliances.

2. **<u>Reproduce\expansion of the AQAP:</u>**

A number of factors contributed in the expansion and survival of the AQAP in Yemen in spite of all blows that hit it since the beginning of the current century given the following points:

- **The first Factor:** There are a number of incentive pillars that boost Yemen's strategic position in the AQAP's mentality, top of which is the demographic standard, represented in the high population density of Yemen which gives opportunities to attract extremists and recruit them. The second pillar is represented in the geographic factor related to the distinctive mountain nature of Yemen. The third is related to the spread of weapons in Yemen while the fourth one is the open borders that allow the organization to move freely and make military maneuvers.

- **The second factor**: is the political employment of the extremist groups and the AQ AP elements for serving the local parties' special interests. For example, The Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, which was established in Yemen in the 1990s was working with the support of the then military leader in the Saleh regime, Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar[1]. A report issued in 2012 by the expert team, authorized by the Security Council Yemen Sanctions Committee accused President Saleh of providing facilities to the Houthis and the AQAP to extend their control over North and South after the 2011 events. The same report referred to a meeting in 2011 between Saleh, in his Sana'a office, and Samy Dyan, the then local Emir of the AQAP in the presence of the then Defense Minister General Mohammed Nasser Ahmed. Moreover, the unwise treatment, sometimes, by the former Yemeni regime with the AQAP, at the security level, contributed in duplicating the organization's danger, such as releasing many of its members in 2007 after subjecting them to nominal reviews, as they quickly rejoined the organization.

- **The third factor**: is based on the pattern of the alliance relationships that connected the AQAP with other extremist organizations, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, represented by the Islah Party, which is widely considered, among the Southerners, on particular, as a sponsor and a catalyst for the AQAP's expansion in South Yemen.[2]

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[1] Elisabeth Kendall, "Contemporary Jihadi Militancy in Yemen: How is the Threat Evolving?", The Middle East Institute, Policy Paper, July 2018, p.3.

[2] Summer Ahmed, "AQAP in South Yemen: Past and Present ", the Washington Institute, August 30, 2019.

The fourth factor: is related to a state of tension along with political and security instability Yemen has witnessed since the 1990s (the Civil War in 1994, the repeated wars against the Houthis, the Southern Hirak since 2007, the chaos caused by the Arab Spring). All of these constituted a suitable environment for the AQAP'S expansion.

3. **Skirmishes/ the Houthi expansion in South Yemen**

By the geographical move towards South Yemen, the Houthis attempt to control the Yemeni demographic map and the sources of its Southern resources in order to use redrawing the conflict's field geography as one of the political negotiation cards in a peaceful settlement process in case of re-submitting it by the fourth UN Envoy. For example, the Houthis were able to control Al-Bayd'a governorate which became a kick-off center for the new Houthi operations in the East, in addition to the expansion towards 4 districts in Marib and Shabwa. The latter is seen as an attempt to control the oil fields as a huge economic source and using them as a logistic starting point in the direction of the Southern governorates. Shabwa is located in the center of the Southern governorates, and thus, the Houthis will take it as a bastion to pave and equip their forces with weapons and all physical and human capabilities to pave the way for controlling the governorates of Abyan and Aden in South, as well as Hadramout and Al-Mahrah in East.

4. **The failure to reach a peaceful political settlement with UN and regional efforts:**

There have been no talks so far about creating common areas among different parties involved in the Yemeni issue as a prelude for fulfilling the requirements of a "peaceful settlement" which always fails as result of not considering the internal complexities of the Yemeni community or the roots of the local issues as well as the scale of regional and international entanglements. This necessitates searching for a new approach different from the one adopted in managing the political settlement process in Yemen. The required approach should take into account four main dimensions: deterring the Houthis, reviewing the UN decisions in a way that matches the field developments of the Yemeni issue, working to restore the formal and services state institutions

and the involvement of the civil society organizations for launching a consensual approach about the form of the political settlements and the peace determinants for all civilians.

Thirdly-the future of "security turmoil":

Given the scale of political, military and strategic developments in South Yemen, there are a number of tracks which would determine the future of "the security turmoil" as follow:

1. **the success of efforts made by the fourth UN Envoy to Yemen, the Swedish diplomat Hans Grunberg:**

There are variable sources of pressure around Hans Grunberg's agenda amid the lack of clear and tangible indicators about an imminent advancement in the political settlement. This is what the UN Envoy announced in his first brief on September 10**th** 2021 which matched the expectations about his difficult mission and the nature of challenges that will face the UN mediation in Yemen, top of which are represented in the following point:

- **Overlapping\entanglement of files**
  The lengthy conflict added more complications to the solution mechanisms. The matter is no longer limited to studying the field conditions of the conflict and peace opportunities based upon the agendas of the local\internal parties, but went further towards creating "common areas" for regional and international tensions and bargains on the Yemeni lands to secure their support of 'the peaceful political settlement". For example, there are some observations which suggest a correlation between the progress in "the political settlement" of the Yemeni issue, and the advancement in the Iranian nuclear file negotiations, as well as monitoring the state of conflict and regional competition between Iran and the KSA, and the entailing impact on the opportunities to end the war in Yemen. This gradually moves the Yemeni file to act as a bargaining card in return of making various gains related to power, influence and the regional and international position.

- **Diversity\variety of the disputing parties' agendas**

  Most UN-sponsored deliberations to solve the Yemeni issue, apart from Geneva Talks, mainly focused on the "direct parties of the conflict" represented by the "the internationally-recognized government and the Houthis". However, with the failure of the solution opportunities, the dynamic and field changes politically and militarily in addition to the emergence of other forces which succeeded in finding a foothold in the Yemeni issue, there have been growing calls to expand the negotiation table and add other parties along with the main direct actors. The most prominent of those recently-joined heavy weight parties in the political settlement talks include:

  Firstly, the STC which managed to extract an official recognition to it through signing the "Riyadh Agreement" with the internationally recognized government in November 2019, sponsored by the KSA and the UAE, with the UN and international community's blessing and support. The agreement included the STC'S participation in the government's delegation during final political solution negotiations. Moreover, the fourth UN Envoy's keenness to visit the STC gave it more UN recognition, and emphasized the extent of the international community's interest in the ideas and trends of the Council, as being the most prominent actor and representative of the southern issue in any future discussions. **Second**, "the National Resistance-the Republican Guards "based on the Western Coast the establishment of the political bureau of the National Resistance was announced last March. In one form or another, this entity is affiliated with the General People's Congress party. It seeks to expand its authority in large parts of the governorates of Al Hodeidah and Taiz, in the west of the country to guarantee an influential position with any possible political settlement.

  Additionally, the presence/participation of other qualitative parties to take part in forming the political operation of the Yemeni issue has increased, top of which are the feminist groups as their presence is growing more and more with the UN focusing on this category and keenness to write down its vision and to involve it in the backstage conversations for a political solution in Yemen. Moreover, there are the

"youth component", and some other "community, political and tribal components" in North and South that seek special representation as well as preserving their interests and privacy in the post-political settlement phase. This comes as part of "new UN mechanisms'' based on expanding the horizons of political participation, absorbing the various local components, and taking their interests into consideration when talking about the prospects for a "peaceful settlement" for the Yemeni state and the future of its people.

- **the decline of local-internal interest of achieving the "political settlement":**
  One of the most important challenges that may undermine international efforts is the decline in the interest of the local conflict parties to reach a peace agreement that ends the war, and their continued bet on the option of a military solution.

The alienation approach and imposing the de facto policy are still existent among the parties involved in the political operation and its field attitudes on the ground. This could be attributed to a number of considerations: **First:** the ongoing hostility among the local\national parties inside Yemen. **Secondly**, the mutual mistrust. **Thirdly**, the lack of sufficient guarantees for different parties as part of the vision and the political settlement negotiations which assure all parties about their future, and ensure for them a permanent participation and presence in making the political decision in Yemen.

Therefore, there are indicators which suggest the growing of "No War, No Peace" theory" among the parties involved in the political process. All parties rely on the state of "political immobility" to guarantee a certain degree of independence and economic revenue in their exclusive areas of influence and control.

Subsequently, none of the disputing parties tend to present enough evidence about the desire to hold talks\dialogue and accept others as partners in the possible peace operation. Also, there is not enough

internal and external pressure that pushes these parties to quickly agree to an end of the war. Rather, the external agendas that drive these local parties are investing in this war in various forms, and benefit from the growing war economy. They could lose all of that in case the war reached an end. Thus, the UN role has to exert more efforts to break the stalemate and to push for a package of measures and policies which include a mix of incentives, guarantees and pressures that encourage everyone to respond to the political settlement in Yemen.

- **The decline of international\regional interest in the Yemeni file**
There are a number of indicators that push the hypothesis of "reducing international and regional interest" in the Yemeni issue as follows:

First: Is the political stalemate that followed the extraordinary visit of the delegation of the Omani Royal Office to the capital, Sana'a, last May, and the Sultanate's attempt to intensify its diplomatic moves as a mediator of peace between Riyadh, Sana'a and Muscat. However, there has been no significant development in the peace efforts, with the exception of the recent meetings held by the UN and US envoys with the concerned parties in Riyadh and Muscat, and the statements of the Omani Foreign Minister in mid-September, in which he expressed his optimism about the imminent resumption of political negotiations.

Second: the qualitative connotations behind the delay of appointing the new UN Envoy to Yemen. This was crystallized more by postponing Grunberg's official start of his new job unlike his predecessors.

Perhaps this indicator is mainly reflected on the overall dynamics of the Yemeni file, whose outputs have established the decline of the UN role based on a number of observations, top of which are: **First,** the failure of many mediations and initiatives that were proposed as part of the "political settlement". **Second,** the growing pace of the conflict in the Marib governorate and its expansion to reach neighboring governorates such as Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda, Al-Dhale', Abyan, Shabwa and other areas. **Third,** The failure of the experiences of the three previous envoys.

Fourth, The appointment of an American envoy for the Yemeni file. **Fifth**, the emergence of the role of Omani mediation, and perhaps other undisclosed meditations by other countries.

Consequently, the success of the efforts of the fourth UN Envoy as well as breaking/resolving the stalemate of the political process require a search for a new approach that is different from the one used in managing the political settlement process in Yemen, an international approach that takes into account four main dimensions: deterring the Houthi intransigence, reviewing UN resolutions in light of the developments on the ground in the Yemeni issue, working to restore the official and service institutions of the state, in addition to involving other actors such as the Southern forces and civil society organizations, in order to launch consensual formulations on the form of a political settlement and the determinants of a just peace for all civilians.

2. Moving towards the Saudi initiative

In a step to break the political deadlock and besiege the "security turbulences" in Yemen, and in light of an international consensus on the importance of accelerating the end of the Yemeni crisis, the KSA pushed for an initiative to achieve serious steps towards a "peaceful settlement", on March 24, 2021. Its four articles are based on: "a comprehensive cease-fire throughout the country under the UN supervision once the Houthis agree to the initiative, easing of restrictions on the port of Hodeidah, along with transferring customs revenues to a joint account in the Central Bank in Hodeidah, the opening of Sana'a Airport to a number of regional and international destinations, and the re-launching of political talks to end the crisis". All those items pave the way for a number of "political, economic and humanitarian" files, in addition to preparing the path of political settlement. This implicitly refers to two messages:

● **The first message-interim entitlement:** The settlement initiative proposed by the KSA includes executive steps that begin with an all-out cease-fire to pave the way for negotiation and a making a breakthrough in the path of political settlement. However, ending the conflict

thoroughly requires broader entitlements that begin by agreeing on the terms of the initiative and launching a new path to settlement. The preparation for the formation of a new political / national authority is probably closer to the "Peace and Partnership Agreement" that was previously presented in conjunction with the Houthi control of Sana'a, and was included in the Gulf Initiative Agreement.

- **The second message- juxtaposition with all parties**: The terms of the "Saudi Initiative" aim to create common spaces with the parties involved in the Yemeni file. For example, easing restrictions on the port of Hodeidah and Sana'a airport comes in light with what was previously demanded by the Houthis. However, it is accompanied with restrictions as opening Sana'a Airport does not mean resuming flights to Iran or Lebanon to avoid reopening the skies in front of Tehran or its proxies so as to prevent more military support to the Houthis. Additionally, the process of sharing customs revenues in the Port of Hodeidah has practical significance about abandoning the policy of "economic separation" after moving the Central Bank of the internationally recognized government to Aden.

Accordingly, there are two tracks that determine the future of the move towards achieving the items of the "Saudi Initiative" in Yemen as shown below:
The first path-the interim (gradual) building:

This path reinforces a number of hypotheses for the success of the moves aimed at achieving the outcomes of the "Saudi Initiative." **The first** is the extent to which the KSA has succeeded in adapting the American and international position in support of the "political settlement" in order to put more pressure on the Houthi group and the parties supporting them, especially Iran. **The second:** is that Tehran fears international and regional isolation as a result of its policy on the "Yemeni issue," especially amid the beginning of talking about a swift breakthrough towards the nuclear file and the economic sanctions imposed on it. Therefore, the Iranian position could carry a bargaining nature between achieving Tehran's national agenda (the nuclear deal + lifting economic sanctions'' and persuading the Houthi group to fulfill

the commitments of the "Saudi Initiative" as well as negotiating about "confidence-building" steps. **The third one**: is represented in the Houthis' reliance on the strategy of "diplomatic war," as after announcing the initial rejection of the Saudi Initiative, the Houthis may resort to accepting the idea of interim negotiation, while keeping their field progress, especially in South Yemen, to impose their own perceptions on the "political settlement file'' based upon the "gains on the ground" theory. It will likely be much less than what the internationally recognized government in Yemen aspires to, and even worse than the Stockholm Agreement 2018 compared to its military retreat on the ground and its critical economic conditions, as well as the continuation of its internal fissures and the division of elites.

The second track - the failure of the moves towards the achievement of the "Saudi Initiative":

This track ends with the failure to complete the "Riyadh Agreement" as a preliminary step towards re-advancing the path of a political settlement, based upon a number of determinants, **the first:** is the reality of the new Houthi field movement's map, especially in South Yemen. **The second**: is the failure to reach "consensus points" between most armed factions and local political forces, as the roots of the conflict are more internal than external or regional. **The third**: is the inability to find incentive formulas for the parties involved in the Yemeni issue, as the core of the "political settlement" process has become a "regional settlement", closer to being a "geopolitical bargaining" than an "actual settlement".

3-Reproducing the Riyadh Agreement:

The accelerating state of "security turmoil" in South Yemen is pushing us to rethink talking again about completing the outputs of the "Riyadh Agreement" in line with the current field and political developments on the Yemeni issue in general. It was signed between the internationally recognized government and the STC on November 5th 2019, sponsored by the KSA to make adjustments for the institutional relationships. Therefore, talking about completing the agreement would contribute to undermining the state of "security turmoil" and regulating the security, political and economic conditions that have

recently deteriorated. The framework of such talks has to include the following points:

-**Besieging the "economic turmoil**": through two frameworks. **The first**: completing the "Riyadh Agreement" may pave the way for "Southern institutions "to manage their various resources, including oil, customs, etc. **The second:** containing the deteriorating economic conditions which caused many problems related to paying salaries, the collapse of infrastructure, and the decline in services in general. The presence of the government is in Aden and giving most economic portfolios to the Southerners would contribute to restarting the idle production powers.

-Undermining the multi-crises dilemma:
One of the most important problems of the "Yemeni issue" is the multiplicity and diversity of crises. For example: the Southern crisis has duplicated the crises of Yemen, which were previously limited to the Houthi counter-moves in September 2014. Therefore, the talk about completing the "Riyadh Agreement" will push towards undermining Crises, especially with the case of the successful completion of the undertaking to structure a "joint government".

Determining the pattern:
The move towards the completion of the outcomes of the Riyadh Agreement can be employed in building what is known as a "generalizable national partnership", with the various parties involved in the Yemeni issue as a whole, not just the Southerners. For example: There are many participatory references, top of which is the Peace and Partnership Agreement (September 2014) attached to the Gulf Initiative (April 2011), which opened the door to the Houthi group's participation in power. Also, the bilateral negotiations between the KSA and the Houthi group during 2016, and the entailing unilateral truce announced in April 2020 aimed at motivating the Houthis to engage in the peace settlement process sponsored by the UN. Such moves can be built upon to besiege and contain the extended repercussions of the state of "security turmoil".

Finally, the triggers of "the security turmoil" in South Yemen are full of several pillars which are diversified between internal and external ones upon which the regional and international competitive policies are built. This is based on the geopolitical importance of South Yemen, and requires a number of moves on the internal, regional and the UN levels to fulfill the requirements of the "political settlement" whose outcomes have direct impact on containing and besieging the security threats in Yemen.

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