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Reading the Local, Regional and International Dimensions of Developments in Shabwa



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Summary

The swift victory achieved by the Southern Giants Brigades in the Southern governorate of Shabwa raised many questions about the nature of the political and military developments that will follow, along with their future impact. It also examines the positions adopted by the parties of the Yemeni conflict and how they will affect the regional and international trajectories.

Shabwa, which enjoys a strategic location and position, faced crucial challenges due to its being at the crossroads of multiple political projects.

In August 2019, the Islah Party solidified its control over Shabwa, which made the governorate at the core of all the tensions. These factors helped the Iran-backed Houthis advance rapidly into large governorate areas.

Currently, after driving the Houthis out of Shabwa, it seems that most internal and external powers are inclined to support the efforts of the new Shabwa Governor, Awad Al Awlaki, to strengthen the pillars of security and stability and to keep it away from being a starting point for internal conflicts or a spearhead in political projects.

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However, for observers, the progress in Shabwa opened the door to assess and anticipate features about other developments during the next period. All local and regional parties were quick to directly outline their visions and agendas for the post-Shabwa phase after announcing the complete liberation of the areas previously seized by the Houthis.

For example, the STC talked about the broad lines and policies upon which it will decide on the participation in the Coalition's military and political efforts to penetrate the depth of Northern areas. The Coalition's spokesman also outlined the plans and the projects of the Saudi-led Coalition during the coming stage. On the other hand, the heavy defeats incurred by the Houthis in Shabwa pushed them to respond by relying on their missile capabilities in Shabwa itself, Marib, and outside Yemen.

This file provides an intensified and extensive reading about the developments' features and nature in the next stage.

This includes determining the possibility of Southern Forces' participation in the battles against the Houthis in the depth of Northern areas and understanding the circumstances. Furthermore, the file analyses the strategy adopted by the active local and regional parties, the conditions that control the paths of the military aspect there, and the ramifications by all of this on developing the needs of the Yemeni file with its regional and international ties and the UN-led peace efforts as well as their impact on regional and international files especially Iran's nuclear file negotiations.

Moreover, the file presents a reading of the military scene regarding different active local competing powers, notably the Houthis in North, the Coalition's available options during the next stage in light of the latest Houthi attacks and the intensified airstrikes launched by the Coalition against Houthi locations. It also looks at the choices which could be adopted by the US towards its Gulf allies.

Additionally, the file addresses approaches that need to be reconsidered, including the UN and international community's description of the situation in Yemen and dealing with its complex crises and involved parties in a way that practically leads to a cease-fire and prevailing peace in the country that has witnessed seven years of a devastating war which led to the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

Multiple Effects of Liberating and Securing Shabwa

Farida Ahmed

Multiple Effects of Liberating and Securing Shabwa

Over just ten days since the beginning of January 2022, the “Southern Giants Brigades” along with “Shabwa Defense Forces” resolved the battle for liberating the three districts of Shabwa, “Beihan, Usaylan and Ain” in South Yemen, backed by the Arab Coalition, especially the UAE.



Farida Ahmed

In September last year, the Houthis controlled the three districts when the local authority was led by the Islah party’s member, Mohamed Saleh Bin Adyo, who was replaced in late December with the prominent tribal leader “Awad Al-Wazir Al Awlaki” who became the new Shabwa Governor.

The former local authority, represented by the Islah Party, which is ideologically affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, had to expect that its role came to an end after the Houthis controlled some Shabwa’s districts, especially that senior military leaders in the army¹ previously accused the “National Army ” and the “Special Security Forces ” of handing over the Shabwa's districts to the Houthis without remarkable resistance.

This has been justified due to previous collaboration between the Iran-backed Houthis and the Islah Party. This was not limited to Shabwa but included Marib and Al Bayda districts, as confirmed by earlier facts on the ground and by a political source in Marib.²

It should be said that achieving a military victory in the Shabwa Battle in such record time is attributed to two central notions, the first of which is the Southern Forces’ genuine willingness and might to liberate the governorate’s districts from the Houthi control amid the poor management of the battles by the previous local authority. The second notion is the excellent quality of organization, implementation, and military efficiency enjoyed by the “Southern Giants” in comparison with the “National Army,” which faces a leakage problem among its

¹ [Confessions of Major General Ali Saleh AlKulaibi, Commander of the 19th Beihan Infantry Brigade that Beihan was handed over by a conspiracy from the Islah Party - YouTube](#)

² An interview conducted by the Writer in January 2022, with "Shaja' Husam Buhaibah", a political analyst from Marib during which he confirmed that the Houthis handed over areas in Marib to the Houthis without remarkable resistance, including the Ozlit Qanya on the border between Marib and AlBayda, as well as the withdrawal from the Mahlia District. In addition to handing over sites in Nehm and AlJawf earlier.

members, as well as the spread of financial and administrative corruption within its system according to previous reports submitted to the Arab Coalition.³

Correcting the path at both political and military sides in Shabwa could encourage other Northern governorates to follow suit, especially Marib, the last bastion of the internationally-recognized Hadi government in North Yemen, which faces similar Houthi threats against its districts.

However, this raises questions whether the Hadi Government and its army are willing to end the war militarily against the Houthis apart from keeping their remaining territories, and about the extent of their actual participation in the battle dubbed as “Liberation of Happy Yemen,”⁴ after several months of military floundering and lethargy since The Houthis began to move towards Marib.

Dynamic effect

The political and military dynamics in Shabwa could affect several aspects, including security, economic and social ones with the entry of the Southern "Giants" to Shabwa and its weighting of the military balance in favor of the Southern Forces as well as the subsequent extension of its operations outside the governorate's borders.

Both political and military cases have a direct connection with other aspects. Previously, the troubled general conditions impacted the solidity of social relations and community communication. A state of tension prevailed among the residents who have been divided between supporters and opponents of the local authority's policies, led by “Ben Adyo” for more than three years. He isolated Shabwa from Aden and Hadramout, which became connected to Marib and different fields after the August 2019 events.

Practically, the end of political and military chaos in Shabwa will gradually remove the state of societal tension. Those estimates, as a whole, could impact the freedom of organizational work related to each political party based on programs, not political conflict.

³ [A secret report submitted to the Arab Coalition by National Army officers reveals the largest corruption operation of "Al Magdashi" and why the decisiveness in Yemen has been delayed? | Yemen Press \(yemen-press.net\)](#)

⁴ [Yemen: The the Coalition's Spokesman announces from Shabwa a comprehensive military escalation against the Houthis - YouTube](#)

The STC's role in Shabwa is likely to witness a big boost as being the most active and organized political party capable of communicating with local communities in South Yemen, especially with the regression of the roles played by other political parties.

Therefore, the STC's popularity base in Shabwa could extend after a long period of hostility and harsh restrictions against its activities imposed by previous authorities which used to pursue its activists.

Furthermore, several violations were committed against the STC-affiliated "Shabwani Elite Forces" despite their significant role in maintaining the security and stability of the governorate and their good reputation among the Shabwani society.

It became clear that the new local authority is wiser in dealing with complexities in Shabwa as it is more inclined to distance itself far from polarization or use its leaders for political influence. Moreover, this gives the political powers the freedom to move on the ground as the new administration refuses to act as a repressive tool in the hands of a particular party and tries to avoid repeating the mistakes of the former authority, which relied upon exploiting the state of conflict as well as a political, military and social conflict to enhance its existence.

As for the security side, it is remarkable that the security stability in Shabwa returned after deposing the governor and the entry of the Giants Brigades and Shabwa Defense Forces. However, the "Special Security Forces," which are accused of affiliating with the Islah Party, could act as a hotbed of security and military tension, especially that they are not directly subjected to the authority of the new Governor and receive their operational instructions from outside the governorate.

This problem could be dealt with according to several possible scenarios⁵, including changing Special Security Forces' commanders and re-establishing them in a way that matches the objectives of the new local authority and its efforts to secure Shabwa, provided that they should operate under the control of Governor "Al-Awlaki" as he is also the Head of Security and Military Committee along with being Shabwa Governor.

⁵An exclusive statement from an official source in Shabwa Governorate to South24, January 2022

Moreover, those forces could be dismantled by drying up their resources and, the governorate's treasury has approved since the Bin Adyo era. Additionally, the troops could be restructured as part of Shabwa's police. Finally, the worst scenario is to dismantle and fragment them entirely by using military force to ensure that they won't confuse the military and political scenes in the governorate.

In return, those corrections would lead to the activation of the security structure, which has had no representation from a large number of Shabwa people, particularly those who oppose the former local authority and are affiliated with the Shabwani elite. This means that they will restore their security role on a larger scale due to their confirmed achievements and reliability related to efforts to secure the governorate, such as combating terrorism⁶ and limiting the spread of weapons, smuggling operations, and other activities.

As for the economic side in general, the new local authority has not presented a plan for its developmental and economic projects to determine how to work during the incoming period.⁷ However, it can be said that the economic state could improve if Governor "Al Awlaki" succeeded in making reforms and changes within the governorate's executive offices. This could happen by appointing general managers based upon their efficiency and experience to replace those who hold office through nepotism or during a political conflict.

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Making reforms in the administrative division and combating corruption could better employ Shabwa's available resources and reduce the "military expenses" taken from the governorate's resources during the "Bin Adyo" era to benefit military forces outside the Ministry of Defense.

Those expenses could be saved and directed towards economic activities and developmental projects that serve different sectors in Shabwa, especially those that benefited the military forces deployed in Abyan's Shuqrah, who kept up with the former local authority in its project to escalate towards Aden.

⁶ [Shabwani Elite.. Roles and Objectives | Sky News Arabia \(skynewsarabia.com\)](https://www.skynewsarabia.com/shabwani-elite-roles-objectives)

⁷ An interview conducted by the writer in January 2022, with Dr. Hussein Bin Laqour, a political activist from Shabwa.

Exploitation of opportunities

There should be a deeper understanding of the strategic importance of South Yemen and continuing to support its trusted leaders. Shabwa developments provide a recent practical lesson as it seems that the Saudi-led Arab Coalition has a more profound vision, though rather late, about this importance and the extent of its impact on war balances. Correcting the political path in Shabwa, based upon the Riyadh Agreement, led to creating a new approach for running the governorate politically and militarily and avoiding making new mistakes added to the previous ones. Thus, it is in the interest of the Arab Coalition and the local community in Shabwa to maintain those strategic gains.

These equations are related to the Houthi threat, which requires different strategic prospects by the Arab Coalition, especially after the military victories achieved by the “Southern Giants” in Shabwa and Harib in Marib.

The Arab Coalition and the “Southern Giants” could face tests on some fronts which the “National Army runs.” This could provide a scrutinizing and careful strategy by the Southern military Forces participating in liberating Marib’s districts and ensuring that other forces exploit the previously wasted opportunities. This will be in conjunction with the decline of the Houthi power due to pressurizing them militarily from the air and the ground in more than one place.

Ultimately, Although the Southern military forces, including the “Southern Giants,” don’t feel secure in fighting along with the “National Army Forces,” which attribute the Giants’ victories to themselves in the media coverage⁸, those battles seem the only practical choice for the Southern Forces to secure their borders. However, it is not clear how the military conditions on Marib fronts will develop after turning off the page of Shabwa.

⁸ The Yemeni army is achieving great victories over the Houthis on the Marib fronts (alhadath.net)

The STC: Legitimate Concerns and Serious Offers

Ayad Qassem

The STC: Legitimate Concerns and Serious Offers

The latest military developments in the Southern governorate of Shabwa brought the STC back to the forefront of Yemen's military and political scene.



Ayad Qassem

The STC was the first which sound the alarm about the expansion of the Iran-backed Houthis after they penetrated the border areas of South Yemen (in Al Bayda Governorate). It declared a state of emergency in the South starting from Sep 15th, 2021. Moreover, the STC seriously called the Saudi-led Coalition to [correct the path](#) of the "joint" battle against the Houthis "militarily, politically and at the media level."

The Yemeni War witnessed a tangible military and political transformation after the Houthi control of Al Bayda and Beihan's districts in Shabwa in September 2021.

This came after the Joint Forces, based in the western coast, withdrew from their sites in the vicinity of Hodeidah City. The Southern Giants Brigades have redeployed eastward towards Taiz Governorate in the center of Yemen and also in Shabwa to [match the Coalition's new military strategy](#). This was in conjunction with intensified diplomatic and political meetings held by the STC's leaders with the Coalition's relevant parties and the Ambassadors of [the Five States](#) in the UN Security Council.

This transformation was further clarified in late December by the visit of the Joint Forces' Commander in the KSA to the UAE and the talks about ["enhancing defense cooperation"](#) Between the two states one week before launching the military operations in Shabwa. Furthermore, the decision to depose former Shabwa Governor Mohammed Saleh Bin Adyo, who is affiliated with the Islah Party, constituted a remarkable political development that was praised by the STC, which accuses the Yemeni Party. Of "collusion in handing over Shabwa's districts to the Houthis."

After the defeat of Houthis and [liberating Beihan's districts](#) on Jan 10th, 2022, by the Southern Giants Brigades, which are close to the STC, and with the support of the Saudi-led Coalition and UAE, the STC expressed concerns about the Southern Forces' further involvement in the depth of the Northern governorates, especially in South of Marib and Al Bayda.

In this regard, the STC's reservations included three main motives: The first one is that those areas don't constitute an incubator for the STC due to political, geographical, and religious considerations. Thus, further incursion could pose a high risk for the military units. Secondly, most of the STC, founded in 2017 as a political entity, includes the Southern Movement "Hirak"s elements who call for restoring the former Southern Yemen State and always stress that their primary mission is to ["protect and secure Southern territories."](#) Thirdly, the STC believes that the "Northern Brigades," which are affiliated with the Yemeni Vice President, and based in Hadramout, are mainly responsible of, in light of the military morality and legal responsibility, engaging in the battles on their territories until liberating them from the Houthi control. Additionally, implementing this task was one of the main items of "the Riyadh Agreement".

Supporting brothers

As the latest developments in Shabwa created a new reality and enhanced the STC's presence in the governorate again to become currently the [leading player](#) after its loss in August 2019, The STC [didn't categorically refuse](#) to participate in the battles led by the Coalition South of Marib and Al Bayda in North Yemen.

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Its president repeatedly declared that the STC is ready to "support Northern brothers" confronting the Houthis. The Southern Giants Brigades are currently involved in clashes against the Houthis in Harib district, south of Marib and have achieved deceive victories. However, such participation in the Northern areas is likely limited to securing the Southern border areas.

The STC's statements are based upon its ["strategic partnership"](#) With the Arab Coalition until achieving the goals of the military operation in Yemen. The STC is aware that the challenges posed by the Houthis and their expansion would threaten its current influence in the South.

The STC considers the Houthi threats an extension to Iran's expansionist ambitions in the region. The Houthis previously launched missile attacks that targeted the Aden International Airport, Al-Anad Air Base in Lahij, Ataq port, and civil facilities in Shabwa, where the STC lost prominent leaders affiliated with it. The extremist religious group proved that it wouldn't hesitate to attack anyone when it could do

that. However, the Houthis claim that they fight to “restore Yemen’s sovereignty” and that their rivals are mere “mercenaries.”

Previously, the Houthis [refused](#) to engage with the STC, although the latter has not explicitly invited the Houthis to any direct dialogue. However, Aidarus Al Zoubaidi expressed his readiness to [negotiate](#) with whoever held control over North Yemen. Observers consider this a reference to the Houthis if they control Marib.

Recently, the STC adopted a stricter approach in its stance towards the Houthis. Al Zoubaidi called for adding the Houthis to the Terrorism List, stressing that the STC [won’t negotiate](#) with them if they are designated as “a terrorist group.”

The Southern Forces are a source of big upset for the Houthis. They incurred heavy defeats in the Shabwa and South Marib fronts amid [reports](#) that estimated more than 3300 Houthi fatalities during 18 days of confrontations.

However, the Houthi concerns are not limited to such casualties within their ranks as the Giants’ military progress thwarts strategic plans the Houthis have long sought to achieve as a way to improve their conditions in any incoming peace negotiations based upon fait accompli.

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The Houthi revenge against Abu Dhabi was probably the way to vent the group’s anger. They explicitly linked their latest attacks against the UAE to the latter’s support of the Southern Forces in Shabwa. Such a development is related to the field context in Yemen, as the recently escalating fight in Shabwa has shifted in favor of Abu Dhabi’s allies, according to [Marc Gotalier](#), the geostrategic consultant and the expert in Middle Water affairs.

Conflicting goals

In the midst of that, the STC emerged as a significant political and military power. Although the “Giants” are not directly affiliated with the STC, there was good coordination between the two parties during the latest battles, according to “South24”’s sources.

Some observers may see a conflict in some goals between the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and the STC, which seeks to establish an independent state in the South.

Consequently, this matter complicates finding a solid consensus to manage the Yemeni crisis and stands as an obstacle against the Southerners' reassurance about their political and national future. Such disputes previously led to battles in Shabwa and Abyan in the last three years.

In the Gulf arena, there is a remarkable wide disparity among the positions of the cultured elites there, between those who see that it is the STC's right to introduce its project after completing the Coalition's operations in Yemen and "restoring the state" and those who see that the practical solution is to support establishing a state in South Yemen, especially that there is no interest in North to confront the Houthis. Meanwhile, some Gulf people support maintaining the "Yemeni Unity."

The STC has long sent signals to the Northern Yemeni forces and regional and international parties, but they have not been exploited. During an interview with the Saudi channel, Al Hadath, the STC's President, presented his view for the Southern Yemen future. He clearly announced that he supports holding a referendum there, supervised by the United Nations. Al Zoubaidi looked balanced in presenting the STC's military and political vision features.

He previously confirmed the STC's position that supports the peace process led by Hans Grundberg. Provided that the STC "be part and parcel in all stages."

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Accordingly, the STC's military and political views and its repeated calls emanated from the core of the Riyadh Agreement acted as the savior to correct the path of the battles and avoid repeating the failure of the Saudi-led Coalition at both fields and political level.

Correcting the path also includes the presidency, file of terrorism and security in the Red Sea, and Yemen's entire political process.

Recommendations

-A genuine lining up in the face of the Houthis can't be achieved as long as the forces which enabled the Houthis to control Northern governorates run the political decision in the internationally-recognized government as those hopes stumble when the Coalition approaches them.

-The high-level diplomatic efforts to keep those parties, which have very [close relations](#) with the extremist groups, out of the correcting path's track won't achieve a practical result for "the freedom of Happy Yemen."

-The STC should bear in mind that the future, security, and best interest of South Yemen should be the partnership criterion in return for its moral commitment towards "its partners" in the KSA and the UAE, or even towards some local Yemeni forces.

-The STC has to present a comprehensive vision of the peace process for solving the Yemeni crisis, which is not limited to stressing the importance of its participation in this process.

The Internationally Recognized Government and the Nature of its Political and Military Role in North Yemen

Ezat Moustafa

The Internationally-Recognized Government and the Nature of its Political and Military Role in North Yemen



Ezat Moustafa

The government or the authority

The term "Internationally-Recognized Government" (IRG) has been used in Yemen to differentiate between the Houthis "coup" and the overturned authority. Although this label is more related to media use rather than political differentiation, the position of the Yemeni government and the distribution of its structural powers and responsibility are still vague. This is attributed to the absence of clear institutionalism due to most leaders in different countries.

Therefore, powers have been confined to specific figures away from the structure of the IRG. Any responsibility does not commit them as their performance is not monitored, so they have not been held accountable.

Despite the absence of the parliament as a legislative authority from the political scene, its presence could have constituted a more profound crisis as it became outdated. The last elected House of Representatives dates back to 19 years ago. The changes on the ground have led to the rise of new forces which have no parliamentary representation.

Moreover, there has been disparity among its members' positions between those who support the Houthis and those who back the "IRG," in addition to the dissimilarities inside the anti-coup wing itself.

This has been accompanied by a weak judicial system controlled by the executive authority that holds the right to make appointments even at the highest level of the judicial hierarchy.

However, the biggest crisis in the "IRG" is the lack of apparent constitutional reference. The existing constitution is inconsistent with the requirements of a state of war. Its items have been violated or overlooked many times under the pretexts of emergency and circumstances requirements without alternative text that could organize the affair of the authority (authorities).

This allowed some individuals to dominate power at the expense of the supposed institutional system as stipulated in the constitution. Thus, a gap has been created by the executive authority in the unliberated Northern governorates at the levels of the presidency, government, and local authorities.

The local authorities

While the local authorities in the liberated Southern governorates bridged some of the gap created by the weakness or the absence of the central authority, some of these governorates remained in a state of internal conflict with the main rules due to the constitutional system flaws, especially in light of the growing tendency by organized powers and influential figures to dominate jobs which provides powers that grant them a kind of proactive control.

Suppose there is a political impact of the “IRG” in the Northern governorates represented in holding control on the ground or running affairs within the scope of the administrative division. In that case, it has zero influence in the unliberated governorates despite the intensity of appointments of general managers and the vast excess workforce at the degree of deputy governors.

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Although the almost only impact that the local authorities in the unliberated governorates could make is to set regulations for domestic gas supplies that reach the Houthi authorities from the Safer fields in Marib, they don't exploit this advantage as they could at least oblige the Houthis to buy gas using the old currency instead of the new one whose purchasing value is uneven.

Therefore, the “government” allowed the Houthis to collect significant revenue by selling the gas to the consumers at prices that exceeded the purchasing price by multiple times. This is in addition to the substantial exchange rate differences between the two currencies. According to Oil Company, [Safer](#), gas sales to the Houthi areas during 2020 are estimated at more than 191 billion riyals. The payments have been carried out using the new version of the Yemeni riyal, which has low purchasing power compared with the old one.

As for the partially liberated three governorates, the Islah Party exclusively manages the liberated areas of Taiz and Marib. The local authority in Al Hodeidah played a marginal role in running the affairs of the liberated districts in the western

coast without impacting the areas controlled by the Houthis, including the city of Taiz, which is just tens of meters away.

Consequently, it is expected that the IRG's seven years of no impact over the Northern governorates will extend if there is no review of the previous failures and if the Parity Government does not declare its framework, publishes its annual budgets, or defines the roles of local authorities, whether in liberated or unliberated areas.

The military impacts

The National Army made a significant impact in the Northern governorates during 2016 as it constantly advanced towards the areas controlled by the Houthis towards the capital Sanaa.

However, such an effect began to decline after that time as the progress stopped at Nihm. The beginning of 2020 witnessed a significant setback by the sudden withdrawal from it and large areas in the governorate of Al Jawf in favor of the Houthis who penetrated to the outskirts of the city of Marib.

Apart from the areas the Houthis have not invaded, there are growing signs that what are considered liberated areas in Taiz are directly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, not to the Defense Ministry. The liberated areas in Al Hodeidah are controlled by forces not officially belonging to the Yemeni government.

Marib became the only Northern place with an official IRG's presence, even if it is symbolic. Marib's lack of military impact in the North is because the Houthis failed to invade it before the Arab Coalition's intervention due to the tribal resistance. Most liberated areas in Marib in 2015 and 2016 fell again during 2020 and 2021.

Although the internationally-recognized government can politically benefit from the victories achieved by the Southern Giants Brigades in south Marib districts, it is likely that the Arab Coalition will not push for restoring the field control by the National Army Forces over the Northern areas liberated by the Southern Giants Brigades, especially amid growing demands of correcting the conditions inside the National Army which over the last two years incurred serious military retreats that posed a threat against the future of Marib.

Their residents could form new forces to secure the Northern liberated areas like what happened after liberating the Southern governorates. However, the possibility of handing over the areas liberated by the “Giants” to the National Army is still on the table given that the Southern Giants Brigades have an attacking nature and used to leave securing the areas they liberated to other forces.

The south Marib battle map shows that the Arab Coalition has changed the way of combating the Houthis from depending on the National Army Forces in the North to relying on the Southern Brigades, which have more reliability.

The National Army could restore a gradual role in impacting the North if it can shift from defense to attack for making progress towards Sanaa from Medghal and Nihm districts. This would complete the “pincer tactic” around Sanaa from its northern east if we suppose that the Southern Giants Brigades could reach it in the future from its eastern south side in case their operations continue in the Northern governorates. This possibility assumes that the trajectory of the “Giants Brigades” will be Harib, Al Jouba, Sirwah and then to Sanaa.

Anyway, the National Army’s military impact in the North will remain connected with the extent of the Arab Coalition’s impact on Yemeni Vice President, Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, who remains the first man in the Army bypassing President Hadi, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces since. This dates back to February 2016 when Al Ahmar was appointed a Deputy of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces two months before being appointed Yemeni Vice President.

Although the position of the Deputy of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces is not a constitutional one, this apparently was necessary to enable Al Ahmar to replace the President on the top of the National Army’s hierarchy.

Al Ahmar’s appointment as the Deputy of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces came as a prelude for appointing him as Yemeni Vice President.

It is well known that the Yemeni Vice President has no constitutional powers over the Armed Forces, and this justifies the creation of the new military position that violates the constitution in order to bypass the constitutional obstacle.

The domination of General Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar over the Army emerges through his selection of military districts and brigades' commanders although it is an exclusive power for the Yemeni President. It is remarkable that most of those commanders assume their positions without presidential appointment decisions published in the Yemeni news agency Saba. This means that they took office based on assignment decisions not appointments. Such assignments are constitutionally entrusted to the Deputy Supreme Commander. This is evident, for example, in the absence of a decision to appoint the Commander of the Taiz Axis from November 2019 until now. Likewise, the Sixth Military District has been led by consecutive commanders since February 2020 without appointment decisions.

Recommendations

- The issuance of a temporary constitutional declaration in light of war circumstances, which determines the scope of executive authority powers (the presidency and the government) with the consensus of the Riyadh Agreement's two parties according to the necessities of the war against the Houthis.
- The establishment of a "Representative Council" consisting of 51 members through consensus among the forces on the ground, especially the new ones. The council will replace the House of Representatives in accordance with the (possible) constitutional declaration.
- Abolishing the position of Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and limiting the military hierarchy to the President of the Republic, followed by the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff.
- Appointing two Vice Presidents to enhance the unity in the war against the Houthis. Both of them, along with the President, will represent the presidency establishment until the end of the war and the expiry of the constitutional declaration.
- Re-establishment of the "Supreme Judicial Council" and the "Anti-Corruption Authority" in a way that guarantees the activation of the judicial authority role as one of the "Three Powers", as well as boosting the transparency and enhancing the governmental role as being an executive authority.

- Making a quick and accurate accountability system inside the National Army as well as implementing major changes into the Defense Ministry, Armed Forces Staff and military districts commanders.
- All Cabinet members should return to the capital Aden and hold periodical weekly meetings.

Reading the Military Developments in Light of Shabwa's Battles

Thabet Hussein Saleh

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Reading the Military Developments in Light of Shabwa's Battles

Initial throes



Thabet Hussein Saleh

For a wider understanding of the current military map and the transformations that happened in the past years and anticipating the future developments on the ground, there is a need to return to a pivotal point which is restructuring the Armed Forces in light of what has been adopted between 2012-2013.

This is based on the Restructure Committee ratified by President Hadi in the [Presidential Decision](#) No. 104 in 2013 which divided the Yemeni Republic into 7 military districts as follows:

1. The First Military District: Its headquarters is located in Seiyun, and its area of control is in the entire Wadi Hadramout (the valley and the desert).
2. The Second Military District: It is located on the coast of Hadramout and Al Mahra (the First and the Second Military Districts used to form one Military Region under the name of the “Eastern Military District” before the restructuring process.
3. The Third Military District: is based in Marib, Al Jawf and Shabwa.
4. The Fourth Military District: based in Aden, Lahij, Al Dhale, Abyan, Taiz and Ibb; Almost to the middle of Ibb Governorate.
5. The Fifth Military District: Al Hodeidah and Hajjah.
6. The Sixth Military District: The scope of its control is Sanaa - Saada.
7. The Seventh Military District: Its headquarters is located in Dhamar and extends to Al Bayda.

It is worth mentioning that the military zone of Sanaa, and specifically the north-western zone up to Hodeidah and Saada, led by Major General Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar was called the "Northwest Military District " before restructure.

The Special Forces and the Republican Guards were also restructured and attached to the military districts, and part of them were called the Reserve Forces. [The Presidential Decision No. 105](#) created new units including "Special Operations" "Missile Forces" and "Presidential Protection". The Air Force and the Navy, remained marginal forces that lack sufficient equipment and high technologies. This has been demonstrated during the past years of the war since 2015.

The military map after 2015

After the coup launched by the Houthis who seized North and reached Maashiq, the headquarters of President Hadi after he fled Sanaa to the city of Yemen, the military power balance on the ground has changed completely. While the Fourth District maintained the scope of its spread in Aden and other Southern areas, the two axes of Taiz and Ibb remained out of their operational control range. The 1st and the 2nd districts in Hadramout kept their geographical range (the valley and the coast).

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It is worth mentioning that the 1st Military District did make zero participation in the war amid accusations that it backed the Internationally-Recognized Government (IRG)'s forces against the STC in Shabwa during the August 2019 Events. The 3rd District maintained its locations in Marib and Shabwa. The domination of Marib over Shabwa increased after units affiliated with the Islah Party seized Shabwa. This situation didn't change until Shabwa was recently liberated from the Houthis.

As for the other military districts including the 5th, the 6th and the 7th districts, they practically became under the Houthi control, even though they nominally remained affiliated with the "IRG". They are mere structural nomenclatures like those governors of the governorates under the Houthi control.

In addition to the former official military forces, new formations have emerged in most areas. The Taiz Axis was formed, which is affiliated with the Islah party. Under its framework, new units were established, mostly consisting of graduates of

religious institutes (known as Scientific Institutes) and the University of Faith (the Iman University). All of those are centers supervised by the hardline religious leaders of the Islah Party, in which their followers are being prepared.

After the Houthis assassinated their ally, Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the latter's nephew, Tariq Saleh, the former Commander of the Special Forces and the President's Guards resorted to the liberated areas and formed new forces under the name of "the Republican Guards". Most members of the new unit are remnants of the "Republican Guards" established by the former President, in addition to the Tihami Resistance. Those forces participated in the confrontations against the Houthis in Al Hodeidah in which the Southern Giants Forces acted as striking power.

The current balance of power

Currently, South Yemen is militarily subjected to the Southern Forces represented by the 4th Military District and forces which were formed after the war including the Security Belts, the Shabwani and the Hadrami Elites, the Southern Giants Brigades, Commandos and Security Forces.

Apart from Wadi Hadramout and, to some extent, Al Mahra, Hadramout is still controlled by the 1st Military District whose affiliation is divided between the Islah Party and the Houthis with a tangible impact of the "terrorist" groups.

The same thing applies to the governorate of Al Mahra which still has not a clear status. The Islah Party attempts to be active there through a wing led by former Brigadier General Ali Salem Al Huraizi, as well as some brigades loyal to President Hadi, including those that are still militarized in Shuqrah, Abyan. However, they are weak, meaning that we can't say that the IRG'S Forces including the "National Army" in Marib, Taiz and Hajjah are much more affiliated with the Islah Party than President Hadi. After the latest developments in Shabwa, there have been some changes in the deployment of the military forces as Shabwa became again under the control of the Southern Forces as well as Harib District in Marib.

The military option in the next stage

The Houthis enjoy a comfortable position in North Yemen as they are in the defensive mode. Their strategy on the ground is based upon two directions:

Sticking to the areas they control, then fortifying them by tightening comprehensive control over them. The second one is making expansion by completing their control over the remaining Northern areas, such as the Marib city complex, the Western Coast and the Taiz Axis, if we exclude - from a military perspective in managing battles - the lack of secret coordination and cooperation between the Houthis and the Islah, which are explicit accusations previously made by [military leaders](#).

Furthermore, The Houthis try to benefit from their other options in order to achieve victories on the ground to make negotiation and media gains represented in launching ballistic missiles and drones towards Gulf states which lead the Coalition to pressurize them to stop providing cover for the forces on the ground. This may be accompanied with acts of sabotage, and targeting their opponents within the liberated areas, especially against South Yemen.

The IRG'S options are in fact the Coalition's options as the latter is the one which leads the war. The IRG actually has no options by itself, as the seven years' experience didn't qualify it to have its independent choices because it lacks an influential presence on the ground, as it didn't make victories nor maintained the areas controlled by its forces.

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The available options for the Coalition and the "IRG" include continuing military airstrikes against Houthi sites and bases, targeting their senior leaders, or by moving the fronts such as the Al Hodeidah front. The forces in the western coast, including the "Southern Giants, can be directed to reopen the front and take over Al Hodeidah. This is the first option.

One of the important options against the Houthi escalation is represented in moving fronts in Marib, Taiz, Al Jawf and Hajjah. However, all these options are depending on the position of the IRG-

affiliated forces (the National Army) and how they match the Coalition's strategy and the other forces which can support those operations (pro or against).

This means that the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement will be a top priority by compelling all military forces to return to their previous locations as in 2019. In other words, the forces based in Shuqrah, Wadi Hadramout and Shabwa will have to move to other fronts, at least to the nearby governorates of Marib and Al Bayda.

The possible scenarios of ending the war

After the latest developments in Shabwa and defeating the Houthis in their areas of control in a record time until liberating Harib District in Marib, some call the Southern Giants Brigades to liberate the remaining areas in Marib, at least its southern part including Al Abdiyah and Al Juba. However, this remains tied with the map of forces and positions there, especially that the National Army's stance towards the battles is still vague and revealing much evidence, complications and loss of confidence.

Based on previous war experience against the Houthis, the military confrontations are the only language they understand. The military scenario requires incurring the Houthis a heavy defeat or at least to initially make full control over Al Hodeidah, Marib, Taiz and Ibb.

Reaching this level of control could push the Houthis towards a reasonable political settlement. In other words, the anti-Houthi coalition and forces, especially in South Yemen won't make a political settlement without a position of strength not from a position of weakness. The military move will certainly remain connected with the political decision while war is another political tool and has to reach an end.

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The constant big questions are how long will the confrontations last? What are the subsequent options? What are the expected scenarios to end the war and wrap off the crisis?

The indicators and the experience during the last 7 years in the political and military fields concluded that if the Coalition remained relying upon the same previous policies, mechanisms and tools, the war would remain open. This means that it will be a prolonged war of attrition, a war of exhaustion, weakening, impoverishment and misery for all.

The international political scenarios still have an important role in impacting the military decisions. They are basically connected with the US stance and their ups and downs generally vary according to it.

The American position has passed through a lot of transformations and shifts during the past years.⁹ During the Trump era, the US aids to the Coalition focused on providing intelligence, media and diplomatic support as well as not making unjustified pressure against it. However, the situation changed completely after Biden took office as he made big pressure against the Coalition to end its operations. The Houthis exploited this by making military escalations, pushing some to believe that the US gave the Houthis the green light to continue the war. However, after a series of futile attempts to convince the Houthis by peace initiatives, it seems that the Coalition took the American green light to resume striking Houthi targets everywhere.

Accordingly, the Yemeni file again became a low priority for the United States after the enthusiasm of the new administration dimmed due to its big complexities and Washington's preoccupation by what it deems as more important issues such as the Iranian nuclear file, the Korean and the Ukrainian crises and other issues making the Yemeni file a secondary one for it. Ultimately, the matter is still dependent on a strict political position adopted by the US to pressurize Iran, and Implicitly the Houthis, to end the war and find a political solution in Yemen, especially if it comes within comprehensive political settlements for the region.

We believe that the political settlement opportunities remain existent in such a case, but it won't be drastic or comprehensive if it ignores the core of the conflict and the main issue which is the disputes between South and North over the Unity issue. The conflicts between Iran vs the KSA, The Houthis vs Saudi Arabia, the Houthis vs Islah, and the Houthis vs the IRG are still secondary issues which could be solved if compared with the main issue which is the chronic conflict between South and North amid endeavors for dodging around any initiatives or efforts to highlight it.

⁹ [Biden and the Yemeni War: the long Context of the Transformations in the US Position - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

The Regional Ramifications After the Developments in Shabwa

Ameen Shandhor

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The Regional Ramifications After the Developments in Shabwa



Ameen Shandhor

Due to the pivotal location of Shabwa on the map of the local and regional conflicts since 2015, it was natural that the drastic changes in its local authority would lead to broad and rapid variables in the power balance on the ground. This is also related to big and quick consequences culminating in the Houthis' repeated attempts to target the United Arab Emirates.

Since 2011 specifically, Yemen has become one of the most prominent arenas as the hub of more than one level of regional conflicts. From a regional perspective, the conflict in/over Yemen is emanated from two bets or dimensions: the first is finding a strong ally on the ground for using or not to use the country as a platform for targeting and exporting chaos. The second one is how to benefit from the Yemeni file at the negotiation tables as part of the difficult negotiations about other regional files, top of which is the Iranian nuclear file.

The developments in Shabwa and their regional consequences

This analysis tries to review the most prominent ramifications and possible consequences in light of the latest developments in Shabwa which would apparently move the path of the conflict in Yemen to new and different stages.

One day after the Southern Giants Brigades announced competing liberating Shabwa districts from the Houthi grip, the Arab Coalition's spokesman, Brigadier General Turki Al-Maliki declared, from the Shabwa's capital, the Coalition's strategy for the next period during a joint press conference with the new Governor, Awad Al Wazir Al Awlaki.

Those transformations in Shabwa looked as a new starting point for the Coalition's operations in Yemen. Al-Maliki dubbed this strategy as "Freedom for Happy Yemen" which kicked off from Shabwa by moving all fronts and axes to "purge Yemen's soil" until attaining its development and prosperity. By using such lofty language and big promises, it seems that the Saudi-led Coalition is determined to continue the battles against the Houthis. The Coalition accused the Houthis of rejecting the road of peace and building, and accused Iran of smuggling weapons to the Houthis through Al Hodeidah Airport.

This strategy seems closer to the Saudi firm opinion towards the Yemeni crisis. This is the strategy with which the Coalition engaged in Yemen under the so-called “Decisive Storm” and “Restoring Hope” operation to bring back the “legitimate elite” which is a mix of traditional forces affiliated with the KSA, to Sanaa, to avoid an Iranian foothold as Saudi Arabia hopes.

However, the Emirati strategy seems somewhat different. It shared with the KSA the goal of liberating Shabwa by moving the Giants Brigades which enjoy its support and supervision. This came in the wake of deposing the Islah-affiliated Shabwa Governor, Mohammed Saleh Bin Adyo who transformed Shabwa to a platform for attacking the UAE and its allies.

Thus, the UAE managed to restore its relationship with the KSA after a period of coolness and backstage disagreements about the way of managing the Yemeni file.¹⁰ The UAE also secured restoring the influence of its allies over the governorate. However, the UAE didn't show enthusiasm towards opening all fronts and going to the depth of the Northern areas. It seems that it revised its intervening strategy in Yemen in light of 7 years of bitter harvest¹¹ although its elites share the common belief that “[Defeating the Houthis is a victory against Iran](#)” As expressed by sources close to the ruling authorities.

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On the other hand, Iran bet on the Houthis's achievement of big victories in Yemen to enhance its obstinate stance in the Vienna negotiations about its nuclear file, especially after the ascendance of the hardliner “Ibrahim Raisi” to the top of the Iranian regime and his endeavors to strengthen the strategy of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. This has been in conjunction with the Houthis' intransigence towards all peace negotiations and their insistence to bring down Marib in spite of all international appeals that call them to stop their attacks against the city.¹²

The death of Hassan Erlo, Iran's Ambassador to the Houthis and the former member of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in late December 2021¹³ and the subsequent Houthi loss of large parts of Shabwa constituted a strategic blow against the ambitions of both Iran and the Houthis that seek to bring down Marib and control rich-resources areas, and then move to the other Southern governorates. The quick decisive operation has contributed to shaking the image

¹⁰ Noel Brehony (2020). The UAE's Role in the Yemen Crisis in Day, S.W. and Brehony, N. (Ed.), Global Regional and Local Dynamics in the Yemen

¹¹ @Abdulkhaleq_UAE | [Twitter](#)

¹² Jeremy M. Sharp (November 23, 2021). Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention, Congressional Research Service.

¹³ [Iran's Ambassador infected with Covid19- BBC News](#)

of the Houthis psychologically and morally after two years of quick victories they had achieved.

After it announced withdrawal from Yemen in 2019, the UAE attempted to reduce the ramifications and risks of the open regional conflicts, so it worked to find a platform to manage the balances among the influential and competing regional countries by focusing on cooperation in the economic fields. It sought to benefit from the economic exhaustion which hit all states due to the Covid-19 crisis.

This was an Emirati proactive move before US president, Joe Biden, officially took office as he announced an agenda which totally contradicts the policies of the Arab Coalition. However, the latest agreements between the UAE and the KSA after the latter's troubled position in Marib and Shabwa during the last months, and which led to moving the Southern Giants Brigades, supervised by the UAE, to reverse the consecutive defeats angered the Houthis and the Iranians.

Their reply began by kidnapping the Emirati Ship "[Rawabi](#)" In the Red Sea. On Jan 17th, [the Houthis targeted](#) a number of Emirati locations using ballistic missiles and drones which killed and injured a number of civilians. The same day witnessed a meeting between a Houthi delegation, the Iranian President and Secretary General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Admiral Ali Shamkhani in Tehran.¹⁴ Some pointed out that Iran itself, not Yemen, was the source of launching the attack.¹⁵ If this is true, it seems that the Houthi claim of responsibility for the attack is part of their services to Iran to seduce it to continue allying with them. The Coalition responded to these attacks with intensive aerial bombardment against Sanaa and other cities under the control of the Houthis, as a result of which a number of civilians were killed and wounded.

circular trajectories

The UAE is apparently in the center of the regional consequences after the latest developments in Shabwa. Iranians and the Houthis seek to neutralize the UAE in the Yemeni conflict as it plays an active and decisive role. They bet on launching flash strikes with low cost and wide impact. However, the UAE could absorb such reactions to develop a mechanism which could protect its airspace similar to what Israel did in the face of attacks by Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian factions.

¹⁴ [Al-Masirah - Urgent auf Twitter: "#Al-Masirah Urgent | Head of the national delegation, Muhammad Abd al-Salam, holds a meeting in Tehran with the Secretary-General of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran](#)

¹⁵ [Houthi Strikes on UAE Open Another Front in Yemen War | The Washington Institute](#)

Moreover, targeting the UAE gives it the opportunity to deepen its relationships with the wider international community as shown in the solidarity statements with Abu Dhabi. Thus, it can exploit that in moving forward towards achieving important deals, top of which is the American jet fighters “F35”.

Meanwhile, the UAE seeks to mobilize the international and regional opinion behind designating the Houthis as a terrorist group. Some may not see this step as important in the course of the overall conflict.

Nevertheless, THE removal of the Houthis from areas of wealth, as is currently happening in Marib, and the positioning of the UAE’s allies, such as the various factions affiliated with the STC and Tariq Saleh’s forces, on most of the fronts facing the Houthis who absolutely refuse all proposed peace initiatives, may put them under enormous pressures and challenges that eventually lead to weakening them and trimming their nails.

Accordingly, the Houthis will no longer have the same importance in Iran’s regional calculations, especially in comparison with its economic interests with the UAE. The latter sought, using a pragmatic policy, to help Tehran in finding a suitable deal regarding negotiations over its nuclear program.

On the other hand, the KSA will attempt to invest the latest victories to move forwards towards the depth of Northern areas to bring the Internationally-Recognized Government (IRG) back to Sanaa.

Nevertheless, the lack of an all-out and integrated strategy to address the Yemeni crisis to include the political aspect such as making drastic changes in the IRG’s structure, and solving the troubled economic conditions will necessarily lead to stir up discord within the anti-Houthi camp.

The Houthis can exploit this to rearrange their ranks and repeat the scenario of controlling new areas. Like what happened on the ground over the recent years, the whole result will be close to zero if the way of conducting affairs continues like the last seven years by relying on sketchy and corrupted figures in the IRG and the traditional forces.

This will prolong the war and lead to multiplying the Yemeni crisis into multiple crises: humanitarian, economic, social as well as deepening the tragic humanitarian crisis in an even more severe way. Such conditions make the UAE reluctant to engage intensively again in the Yemeni file, similar to the intervention in 2015, even as the Houthis continue to target it.

At the level of other regional states, Egypt is most likely to engage in the Yemeni crisis in the next stage, especially with its concerns about the growing risks in the Red Sea and after relieving the brunt of several files. The latest visit by Egyptian President, Abdulfatah Al Sissi to the UAE carried many indications. As for Turkey which was involved in the Yemeni file, it seems that it will now play no role at least until getting out of its stifling economic crisis.

The Qatari role will focus on the media aspects and the attempts to support the Islah wing inside the IRG, as well as coordinating with the Houthis and Iran to implement joint goals in the region.

Oman, which played a prominent role in peace negotiations but failed to convince the Houthis to accept the proposed offers, will only provide a platform to hold meetings among the local and regional parties of the conflict, and monitor the developments in Al Mahra Governorate which may push it to adopt different stances.

Recommendations

- A comprehensive process to prevail peace requires a more understanding of the driving regional dynamics, and the most active elements which can contribute in making a big and a sudden breakthrough on the path of efforts to resolve the Yemeni crisis.
- There is a need to understand that an endless conflict and the continuous humanitarian suffering across Yemen will have big regional ramifications at all political, economic and military levels.
- Commitment not to target civilians is needed as well as criminalizing such activities.

Prospects for Peace Efforts in Light of Military Developments in Marib and Shabwa

Fernando Carvajal

Prospects for Peace Efforts in Light of Military Developments in Marib and Shabwa

Current military and political realities on the ground pose greater challenges to efforts by UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg. The political equation has now shifted from Houthi demands for bilateral talks with Saudi Arabia and UN structure consisting of delegations from Sana'a and Hadi's government to inclusion of new actors like the Southern Transitional Council (STC) as its military role expands along new fronts.



Fernando Carvajal

Nearly seven years since the start of the current armed conflict in Yemen, momentum shifts once again raising hope in the prospects of renewed peace efforts. The process that stalled following [Stockholm](#) (December 2018), crushing the high hopes for progress, sees new opportunities as Western governments rally behind UN Special Envoy Grundberg and new actors carve their own roles expanding the table. While Houthi rivals in the south and west coast gain momentum on the battlefield, external interference once again could risk losing leverage as fears grow over impact on civilians.

The process to restart peace talks has failed as consequence of two major challenges: leverage has been on Sana'a-based Houthis' side, giving the rebels the upper hand demanding terms for start of talks; Competing interests within the Unity Government impede a united front against Houthis, which is then leveraged for more favorable terms. Recent developments aim at a new balance, not only shifting the momentum across front lines but also gaining leverage that facilitate a return to the UN framework for peace talks. The international community should recognize the shortcomings of shuttle diplomacy, especially as Houthis continue to reject meetings with Grundberg, and allow Yemeni actors to shape the balance that paves the way back to peace talks.

Goals of Peace

Defining the goals of peace is as complicated as expecting [US president Biden](#) to "[end](#) the conflict in Yemen." The UN-led process over the past few years has primarily failed due to a lack of understanding of how each actor defines peace, what each actor expects from an end to the conflict. As long as those trying to

facilitate mediation fail to understand the grievances and interests of each actor, their efforts will continue to face challenges that merely prolong the armed conflict.

Efforts to unite Houthi rivals, such as the [Riyadh Agreement](#) of 2019, had failed to realize expectations primarily due to hesitation by Saudi Arabia to pressure parties on implementation of the agreements. Now that Saudi Arabia facilitated the replacement of the governor of [Shabwa](#) and STC affiliated [troops](#) have deployed to Shabwa to engage Houthi forces, the tide has begun to turn. This momentum should lead to a wider political role for southern elements as part of the Unity Government, strengthening confidence among Western powers. The international community may not see escalation against Houthis across frontlines as a preferred option, but they must realize at this point that diplomacy alone will not accelerate a return to the negotiating table.

The new role of southern political and military elements delivers a convincing message to both the [Coalition](#) and Western powers; addressing southern grievances facilitates engagement of Houthi forces at their weakest points to begin disrupting their momentum. Prior to Operation [South Tornado](#), launched in late December 2021, military forces under the Legitimate Government had lost large segments of territory to Houthis, government troops abandoned their posts or [withdrew](#) to avoid confrontations with Houthis in southern al-Baydha and western Shabwa. By stabilizing southern provinces under implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, southern forces are now able to engage Houthis, who can no longer capitalize from conflict between government factions.

The UN goal of a comprehensive agreement may be far-reaching and following the collapse of the Stockholm plan it is clear that diplomacy alone cannot build confidence among Yemeni parties. Clearly Houthis believe military victories will yield leverage for negotiations, so it would be a huge mistake to dismiss military victories by Houthi rivals as counter-productive to efforts by the UN Special Envoy. There may not be a final military victory in sight, but undoubtedly Houthis will weight their options differently if momentum changes on the ground.

Current Options

Houthi rivals cannot ignore the opening of new opportunities. A problem obstructing a unified front today lies in the approach taken by individual parties,

some of which adopt agendas advanced by Western governments in order to gain their support, rather than moving the international community towards the party's own approach to the conflict, such as what the STC have done in recent months.

Also, the international community remains divided over the approach to the peace process. On the one hand, humanitarian agencies demand prioritizing their operations to address the deepening economic crisis. Over the past seven years, this approach has indirectly contributed to the war economy, prolonging the conflict and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis itself. On the other hand, shuttle diplomacy has merely allowed Houthis and al-Islah time to maneuver and wait for more favorable conditions to advance their individual interests. The collapse of the Stockholm plan, specifically in the cases of the handing over of Hodeida port and the siege on Taiz, have granted Houthis a perceived victory in the eyes of their supporters and maintained their profits through monopolies controlling delivery of humanitarian aid in areas under their control.

The capture of a [UAE-flagged](#) merchant ship off the coast of Hodeida and the drone strikes on [Abu Dhabi](#) by Houthis are [linked](#) to the ongoing battles in southern Marib and western Shabwa. Retaliation by Houthis following defeats at the hands of STC affiliated forces aims to shift public attention, as well as pressure members of the Coalition to withdraw military and political support for rival forces. It is unlikely Coalition members will again withdraw materiel support for southern forces, and surely both [Saudi Arabia](#) and the [UAE](#) will continue to engage Iran in order to diminish Houthi threats to their respective territories. It remains to be seen if Tehran is willing to sacrifice progress in talks with the US, the EU, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to sustain their relations with Houthis in Sana'a.

Just as the path to peace talks depends on a united front among Yemeni actors, so too does it depend on a unified front among regional and Western powers. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg must exploit current opportunities and coalesce support from the US and European governments if he wants to achieve significant progress early during his tenure. International organizations must also realize that the sooner peace talks begin, the sooner restrictions imposed under UN Security Council Resolution 2216 can be lifted to facilitate delivery of aid and commercial goods.

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Reading the Local, Regional and International Dimensions of Developments in Shabwa

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