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An Overview in the Reality of Independence:  
**Does South Yemen Have  
the State Prerequisites?**

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## Summary

15 years after the emergence of the "Southern Movement" (Hirak), Southerners still propose the same ideas and visions related to finding a solution to the crisis of the Yemeni unity signed in 1990. Most notably is the independence from North, especially in light of the current political and military facts and the entitlements obtained by Southerners after 2015. A big percentage of them adopt a project to establish an independent federal state who has initial prerequisites in a way that makes it qualified for that. However, some international, regional and local actors still avoid addressing this option in an attempt to create approaches for alternative solutions which don't suit the current reality. This comes a time when it is possible to deal with the events and their real consequences in a way that prevents wasting more time, maintain political and military credit to achieve the region's security and stability and to re-understand wider perceptions for Southern solutions and mechanisms in order to spare the country more circles of conflicts and violence.

All parts of this research paper stress on a wider explanation of the Yemeni case in general and the Southern one, especially in regard to the current prerequisites owned by South Yemen. There are possible challenges that obstruct them and should not be underestimated.

The paper concludes by calling the international decision makers not to draw a link between Yemen's stability and unity. They should not depend on the old narratives whose circumstances and contexts have changed after the Yemeni civil war since 2014.

It pointed out that supporting Southerners to build an independent state would create stability and security in the region and will basically help to stabilize the internal situation in North and South.

The paper noted that it is a mistake to keep the Southern issue in the bottom of international or regional interests. They have to listen to the Southerners and understand their cause with its political, historical, geographical, economic and social dimensions in a deeper way. It also believes that directing attention towards the complete picture of the causes and the root of the troubled scene along with providing the financial, strategic and political support to the Southern

forces directly and not through mediate Yemeni channels would contribute in providing proper conditions for a sustainable peace in Yemen.

The paper said that the Southern forces have played a big role in the governorate for South Yemen's stability, especially in the counterterrorism file.

Moreover, the paper recommended the local parties to continue the intra-Southern dialogues, called by STC, before the beginning of the upcoming comprehensive peace negotiations with other Yemeni forces. This will lead to the establishment of a Southern national front that paves the way for a political life in South Yemen.

It added that supporting Southern research centers can be helpful in changing the views of the international decision makers towards the unity crisis and be open towards more realistic solutions.

Furthermore, the paper recommended establishing a "general union for Southern communities" in order to facilitate the coordination and the organization among the expatriate communities. This aims at unifying the speech and the message of the Southern issue as well as introducing Southern efficient figures and lobbies through peaceful diplomatic ways.

The paper said that the Northern parties have to realize that "liberating" North from the Houthis is tied to Southern independence and that being dragged behind some Northern voices to enhance unity in light of the changes experienced by South Yemen only strengthens the continuous Houthi control on North.

## Introduction

South Arabia has not witnessed stability since the North-South unity in 1990. It has suffered ongoing conflicts beginning with the 1994 War to the six Wars of Saada to the latest civil war in 2014. Yemeni political and military forces played a negative role throughout different stages and contributed to drawing the map of the Yemeni scene in a complicated and divergent way.

This paper particularly addresses South Yemen's reality after 2015 and raises an important essential question about the possibility of the establishment of a Southern state considering the current data and its dynamic shifts on the ground. Many Southerners see it is the right time to present such visions to the international, regional and local communities after constant neglect and postponement to reach a solution for the unity crisis which has been extended for 32 years. This crisis would not have reached this bad level without these false notions and bases adopted by the Yemeni parties. The international and the regional actors have ignored its painful facts.

The first part of the paper provides a comprehensive concise background about the political scene for a wider understanding about the Yemeni case since the unity declaration in 1990 and the subsequent dramatic developments of events, especially in South till the current situation. The second part discusses general concepts about the state, its identity, its prerequisites, and its basic elements for a wider understanding of its establishment. The third part will tackle the prerequisites owned by the Southerners currently and whether they are sufficient for the establishment of a state. Additionally, the third part presents a number of essential points including the Southern armed forces, the political lever, the Southern staff, the diplomatic corps, Southern unions and bodies and finally the Southern communities. Some of its paragraphs are based upon interviews the researcher conducted with a group of experts and analysts. The fourth last part discusses some challenges which may hinder the establishment of a Southern state. They include international, regional and local ones in addition to economic challenges and others related to the demographic structure and the terrorism file.

## General background

Since the start of the "Southern Hirak" in 2007, most Southerners seek the establishment of an independent Southern state like the one (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) which was part of the unity agreement with North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) signed by presidents "Ali Abdullah Saleh" and "Ali Salem Al-Bidh" in 1990. During the transition period following the unity declaration, Southerners faced extensive assassination operations which

targeted more than 160 of the Southern civilian and military figures. Most of these operations had an ideological dimension along with a political one.<sup>1</sup>

Southerners suffered from gradual alienation and marginalization from the decision-making centers. This gradually led to the explosion of the military situation between the two parties of unity. This was in the summer war of 1994 led by "Ali Abdullah Saleh" and a number of extremist religious militias including groups affiliated with the AQAP and the Islah Party (MB's branch in Yemen). The religious "fatwa" issued by the latter gave the Northern army the right to kill Southerners including women and children. This fatwa was based on a pretext that Southerners live in areas controlled by the Communist Socialist regime in South<sup>2</sup> which was deemed by these forces as being an "infidel one".

The war led to catastrophic results in South including the systematic destruction of its infrastructure as well as plundering its public institutions, its security and military and judiciary bodies. The war executives and the centers of power adopted policies to eliminate the Southern identity, culture and history. They considered South Yemen as being a branch which returned to its origin. They excluded many Southern civilian and military staff from the state institutions after 1994 and looted the Southern resources and capabilities. Such an approach caused deep cracks in the hearts of Southerners who still suffer from their impact.

Southern movements began to call for correcting the path of unity and providing justice for Southerners directly after the 1994 war. However, these voices were being ignored. Those grievances were accumulated over the following year and led to the outbreak of the peaceful struggle movement led by a group of Southern retired military personnels<sup>3</sup> who were referred to early retirement by the Salih regime. They were joined by a number of Southern political entities founded after 2007. People stood in solidarity with them against the Sanaa regime. For years, the Southern Hirak constantly called for the restoration of the state to the pre-1990 borders. However, these demands about "the Southern issue" or "the Southerners issue" remained marginal and inaudible even at regional and international levels. Following the youth revolution in 2011,

<sup>1</sup> [Al-Ayyam newspaper, March 26, 2022](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Al-Dailami fatwa - Wikipedia \(wikipedia.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Al-Ayyam newspaper - Military retirees.. 15 years of stability and clarity despite obstacles and challenges \(alayyam.info.\)](#)

Southerners joined Northerners in the squares to overthrow the Saleh regime. However, when the traditional Northern military and religious forces <sup>4</sup> who participated in the invasion of South joined the “Youth revolution”, the Southerners backtracked their participation in the Northern fields and resumed their peaceful march demanding independence.

After signing the Gulf Initiative in April 2011, the power was politically transferred to the then Vice President “Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi” while President Saleh and his family members were given “unconditional immunity” regarding the violations that occurred during more than 3 decades in power. The transitional period was completed by electing “Hadi” as the new President while the Southern Hirak boycotted this election in which Hadi was its only candidate. Regional and international communities supported Hadi as President. They also backed the National Dialogue Conference in 2013 and showed a great amount of interest towards it. Nonetheless, the conference, boycotted by the majority of the Southern Hirak, failed to find solutions for the complicated issues in the country. Most Southern participants withdrew from the conference to object not implementing the 20 points drafted by the technical committee to prepare for the dialogue in addition to disregarding the 11 points related to the Southern issue. <sup>5</sup> Later, other Southern groups withdrew at the end of the conference because of the failure to find a fair solution to the Southern issue after all attempts and political efforts were exhausted.

In early 2014, President “Saleh” cooperated with the Houthis after the 6 wars launched by his army against them, the latest of which ended in 2019. It was apparently a fragile alliance which lacked common intellectual foundations although it was initially a tactical one. However, the desperate attempts by Saleh and his former regime’s pillars to stay in the forefront of the Yemeni political scene led him to a dramatic scene that ended by his assassination in December 2017 <sup>6</sup> by those with whom he had formed an alliance of necessity. For the Houthis, the military and political arena became empty.

President Hadi’s escape to Aden from his besieged house in Sanaa and retracting his resignation <sup>7</sup> in February 2015 contributed to changing the political equation.

<sup>4</sup> [Ali Abdullah Saleh \(5\)... The Summer War of 1994 | Independent Arabia \(independenterabia.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Southerners withdraw from the dialogue conference in Yemen | Reuters](#)

<sup>6</sup> [The killing of former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa \(alarabiya.net\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi officially withdrew his resignation \(france24.com\)](#)

This came at a time in which the party dominated the scene in Sanaa although it was the beginning of a new stage in North shared temporarily by two parties (the Houthis and Saleh). Other Yemeni forces, including the traditional parties and the political entities formed after 2011 lacked influence. The conflict of political forces in North, especially the Islah and the General People's Congress parties enabled the Houthis to invade the city of Amran and the subsequent control on Sanaa on September 21st, 2014.

The Houthi were not only intended to control Sanaa and its surroundings as they attempted to Control Aden in March 2015 with the participation of "Saleh" forces in a war deemed by Southerners as being a second invasion against South. This battle caused thousands of civilian casualties and the displacement of dozens of thousands. The regional factor engaged in the confrontation line at the dawn of March 26th, 2015, when a Saudi-led military coalition <sup>8</sup> consisting of 9 Arab countries launched the so- called military operation "Decisive Storm" (Asifat Al-Hazm) at the request of President Hadi to restore what he called "the Yemeni legitimacy". However, the regional influence represented in the Arab Coalition was not the only one at that time as it was preceded by the influence of Iran through the Houthis who penetrated in many forms since pre-2014.

If we read the map of the Southern resistance which was shaped in Aden to confront the Houthi and Saleh forces, we will find that they mostly consist of Aden's citizens and the Southern Hirak, some military units affiliated with President Hadi's army and the Salafis. Accordingly, Aden was liberated with support of the Arab Coalition, especially from the UAE, militarily and logistically in July 2015. Gradually, this contributed in changing political and military dynamics as well as the local actors on the ground in comparison with the pre-war phase. A number of UAE-backed Southern military forces emerged under numerous names including the Security Belts in Aden, Lahj and Abyan as well as the Hadrami and the Shabwani Elites. These military and security units played a pivotal role in securing the governorates and strategic coasts. They contributed in a very effective way in fighting the AQAP as part of counterterrorism efforts there led by the UAE.

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<sup>8</sup> King Salman launches Operation Decisive Storm against the Houthis ([alarabiya.net](http://alarabiya.net))

In 2015, the Southern Giants Brigades were established<sup>9</sup> in the western coast months after the beginning of the Coalition's military operations against the Houthis. Those troops included thousands of fighters who quickly engaged within their ranks. This was in parallel with the Tihamah Resistance until they were joined by "Tariq Saleh" forces in late 2018. The three forces worked under the so-called "the Joint Forces" in the Western coast controlled by one operation room tied with the Coalition and worked separately from the "National Army" in Marib which was led by the then Vice President "Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar".

Meanwhile, STC was established<sup>10</sup> on May 4th, 2017. It is chaired by Aidrous Al-Zubaidi, the former Governor of Aden after the assassination of former one Jaafar Mohammed Saad in an attack that targeted his parade in Al-Tawahi and which was later claimed by the extremist group "ISIS".<sup>11</sup> Al-Zubaidi's critics argue that the establishment of STC came after he was removed from power as Aden Governor. However, the idea of establishing a Southern political entity was present since October 2016 to preserve military and political gains on the ground according to a previous statement by Al-Zubaidi.<sup>12</sup> STC represents today the demands of a wide sector of Southern people whose movement began in 2007 in the form of the "Southern Hirak ". STC enjoys wide popularity and included some leaders of Yemeni political parties such as "the Socialist", "the League" and "the Congress" as well as other community and tribal figures across all Southern governorates.

The waves of conflicts which began in January 2018 and recurred in August 2019<sup>13</sup> between the anti-Houthi forces in Aden, represented in forces affiliated with the government of President Hadi and STC allowed the latter to control the whole capital of Aden. STC believed that it had the right to run Aden as A a fair political and military entitlement. This is due to the victories achieved by its affiliated Southern military forces in more than one front, especially amid the military indolence and retreat by the "National Army" affiliated with the Hadi government in several Northern governorates. STC saw this as an opportunity

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<sup>9</sup> [The forces of the southern Giants turned the tide of the war in Yemen - \(al-omana.net\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Southern Transitional Council – stc-eu.org](#)

<sup>11</sup> ["ISIS" claims the responsibility of killing of the governor of Aden in an explosion targeting his car \(photos + video\) - RT Arabic](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Aidrous Al-Zubaidi, STC President of the Southern, in an exclusive interview with "Sputnik" - 19.07.2018, Sputnik Arabic \(sputnikarabic.ae\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [The Events of Aden...Do they Reflect the Conflict of two Projects in Yemen? | Independent Arabia \(independenterabia.com\)](#)

to discuss the Southern issue which was repeatedly relayed from the agendas of Yemeni, regional and international politicians. This is an attempt to bring the issue to the surface again, especially amid the insistence of the internationally recognized government to monopolize the Southern representation to engage in any peace negotiations or consultations through using the “unity” concept.

The Riyadh Agreement on November 5th came to treat the tension and the military escalation between the Hadi Government and STC. Although the delay of implementing some of its clauses related to political, military and economic arrangements lasted about 14 months but it was one of the political gains won by STC although the latter gave up the “self-management” which it unilaterally declared in April 2020<sup>14</sup> under the pressure of regional and international parties. Afterwards, STC became a formal partner in the internationally recognized government which gave it the legitimacy to assume a bigger political role that allows it to raise the issues which it represents at the final negotiating table for a solution.

In the early days of this year, the role of the “Southern Giants Brigades” largely emerged after the liberation of three districts in the governorate of Shabwa from the Houthis who seized them in September 2021 after a sudden withdrawal of the forces affiliated with the government and controlled by the Islamic Islah Party. This included the Arab Coalition’s support of the Southern Giants Brigades to liberate Shabwa. Simultaneously, “Shabwa Defense Forces” was formed and deployed to enhance security in the governorate. Ultimately, this led to the removal of Governor “Mohammed Bin Adyo” who is affiliated with the Islah Party and was succeeded by “Awad Mohammed Al-Awlaki” as the new Shabwa Governor. This has contributed in normalizing the conditions in the governorate and stabilizing it politically and socially after it has experienced military and security tensions for every now and then due to the state of political polarization within it.

On April 7th this year, the general political scene in Yemen wrapped off the phase of President Hadi a decade after he took office. The most important outputs of the intra-Yemeni consultations which was held in Riyadh for several days under the auspices of the GCC was the new changes in the top layer of the

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<sup>14</sup> [Aidrous Al-Zubaidi, STC President of the Southern, in an exclusive interview with "Sputnik" - 19.07.2018, Sputnik Arabic \(sputnikarabic.ae\)](#)

“legitimate authority” by establishing the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) consisting of a president and 7 deputies, half of them from South. This is in addition to enhancing the institutions, completing the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and its call to negotiate with the Houthis. However, the most important for the Southerners was the assortment by the Riyadh Consultations’ statement about including the “Southern people issue ” in the peace negotiations for a final solution in Yemen within a special framework. For the first time, the Southerners who call for the independence of South Yemen joined the new presidential body after STC’s President Major General Aidrous Al-Zaubaidi and the Leader of the Southern Giants Brigades Abdulrahman Al-Muharrami “Abu Zaraa” became its members.

In total, recalling this background constitutes an essential importance for the reader as it illustrates a gradual development of the political scene on the Yemeni arena. This came 15 years after the Southern Hirak flocked to the squares calling for fair solutions to the Southern issue.

One can’t ignore that these demands have not been limited to political or public activities, but they have been enhanced in events, artworks, tv channels, media, trade unions, and social and religious bodies. The Southerners, even in their political and public meetings and in the official schools chant their own “national anthem”.<sup>15</sup>

## General concepts and the prerequisites of a state

First of all, we have to understand the meaning of a state to understand its prerequisites and basic elements. The state here means “a nation or a region. It is considered an organized political community under one government. In other words, it is the political organization which enjoys a superior civilian authority and a political authority and works as a basis to the “government”<sup>16</sup>. A state can be also defined as “a regional community” in which people live in certain areas which are organized within a joint frame. It has a governing body which assumes a certain degree - if not a complete one of authority - over it in any way”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [6\) Watch | Facebook](#)

<sup>16</sup> [What is State in Political Science? \(swedcarebd.com\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Essential Elements of State - Political Science \(politicalscienceview.com\)](#)

Usually, political considerations play a basic role in the establishments and the disappearance of states. For example, the world's political map changed three times during the 20th century. World Wars I and II led to the disappearance of states and the emergence of many new ones on the European stage. The anti-colonial movements in the post-World War II led to the independence of too many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and their subsequent emergence for the first time on the international political stage.<sup>18</sup>

New states can be established through unity. This happened to some European countries such as Germany and Italy in the 19th century. This included many other states, some of them were Arabian such as the union between Syria and Egypt in one state (United Arab Republic) in 1958. In 1971<sup>19</sup>six Arab Gulf emirates united to establish the UAE. Likewise, there was a unity between North Yemen and South Yemen in 1990. While new states emerge due to unity and integration, they can be a result of disintegration and separation. This happened when the Soviet Union collapsed and was dismantled into a large group of countries, some of which emerged for the first time as independent states on the international stage. The separation itself can be achieved through a peaceful way such as what happened with former Czechoslovakia and South Sudan. It can also be achieved by using violent ways or through war like what happened to the state of Yugoslavia.<sup>20</sup>

As for the prerequisites, they are based upon basic elements in the nature and the core of each country. They are represented in people, land, the government and sovereignty<sup>21</sup>. A brief preview of each element shows that people are the one who make the state. Without people, no one will be there. The population must be large enough to establish a state and maintain it. The second element is the region or land. There is no state without a fixed land, whether big or small, towards which a person feels affiliated. With the presence of people and land, the aim of living can't be achieved without organizing people on the ground. This can be achieved through a government which imposes the rule of conduct and determines policies and common affairs for the state. The element of sovereignty can't be attained if the governing authorities share its territories with another one. A member of a certain state should not pledge allegiance to another country.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the absence of any of these elements negates the existence of the state.

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<sup>18</sup> [Political Encyclopedia \(political-encyclopedia.org\)](http://political-encyclopedia.org) The concept of the state

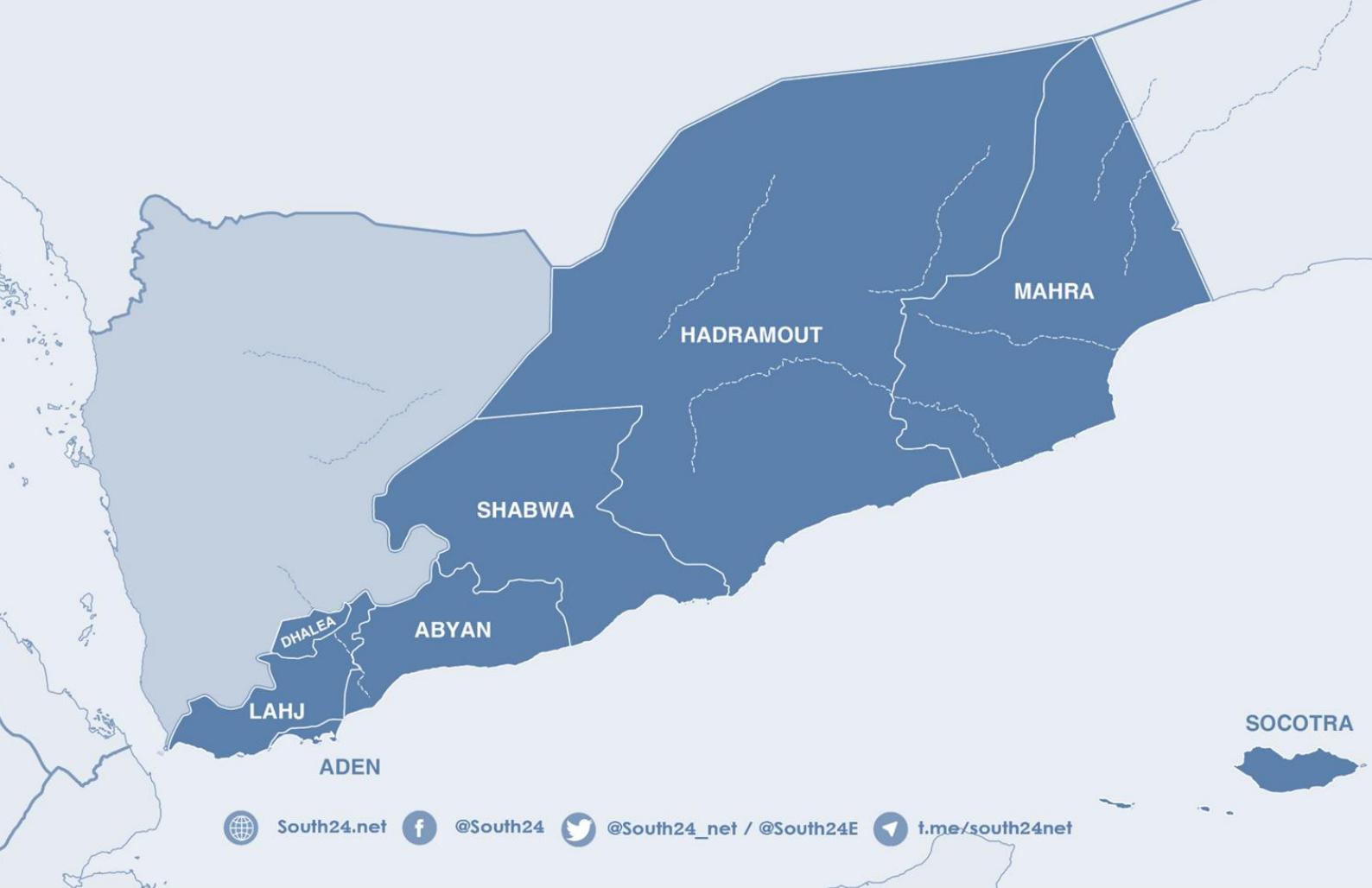
<sup>19</sup> The same previous source

<sup>20</sup> The same previous source

<sup>21</sup> An analysis of essential elements of the State, International Journal of Engineering Science Invention,2016.

[D053024028.pdf \(ijesi.org\)](http://D053024028.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [Essential Elements of State - Political Science \(politicalscienceview.com\)](http://politicalscienceview.com)



## The current prerequisites in South Yemen

In light of the current prerequisites owned by South Yemen in the context of the political, military and security control by its forces over the majority of the Southern areas, it can be said that the aforementioned elements or prerequisites (the people, land and government) are relatively achieved. This is except for the fourth element (sovereignty) which is currently absent due to Chapter VII approved by the UN Security Council. This was a result of threats and violations against peace in Yemen since the beginning of the conflict there. This was decided by the UN Security Council Resolution 2216, adopted on April 14th, 2015.<sup>23</sup>

The factors of nature, the vast geographical area estimated at about 360,000 square kilometers, the strategic location overlooking Bab Al-Mandab, through which international shipping lanes pass, the oil and gas resources in Hadramout and Shabwa, in addition to the agricultural, fisheries, mineral, industrial and

<sup>23</sup> [S/RES/2216 \(2015\) | United Nations Security Council](#)

other resources in South Yemen constitute a strategic importance and an additional advantage along with its. However, these privileges are not important for other countries which exist without them and are recognized by the international community considering the availability of the aforementioned basic elements.

The civil war, which erupted in Yemen in 2014, has changed the political and the military equation on the ground for North and South. The Southerners hold almost full control over their territories.

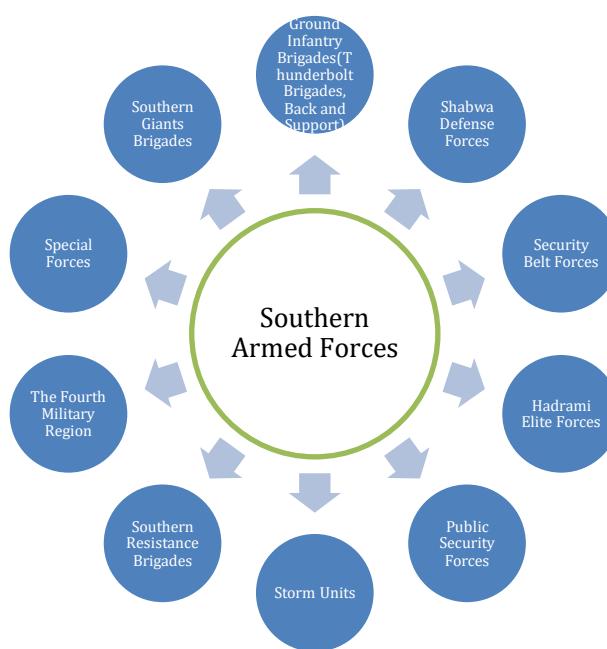
In This regard, we can detail some of the current prerequisites owned by South Yemen through which one can predict what they represent for the establishment of a state. The most prominent of these prerequisites include the following elements:

## **1- The Southern armed forces**

According to estimates by “South24 Center”, the Southern armed forces consists of roughly 100,000 soldiers deployed on many military and security units in the governorates. The most important of which are Backup and Support Brigades which were established in May 2015 before the battle to liberate the city of Aden from the Houthi grip, the Hadrami Elite Forces which were formed prior to the battle to liberate the Hadramout’s capital city of Mukalla from AQAP’s control in April 2016, the Shabwani Elite Forces (currently known as Shabwa Defense Forces) which played a central role in liberating Shabwa from extremist groups in 2018-2019, the Security Belt Forces which played a role in driving out AQAP cells from Aden’s Al-Mansoura district in 2016 and from Abyan and Lahj in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, there have been the Southern Giants Brigades which participated in the battle to liberate Al-Makha District in 2017-2018 as well as the Shabwa’s three districts at the beginning of this year. Moreover, units belonging to Yemen’s security and army joined the Southern armed forces including the Special Forces Camp, the 5th Marine Infantry Brigade, the 33rd Armored Brigade and the brigades affiliated with Al-Anad Air Base on the

background of the conflict which erupted between the Yemeni government and STC in August 2019 in Aden.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the aforementioned brigades are part of the STC-affiliated 4th Military Region, led by Major General "Fadl Hassan" constitute an important weight. It is one of the military regions whose troops are deployed in South, especially in Aden, Lahj and Abyan governorates and whose commander's headquarters is located in Aden. Moreover, there are Military Thunderbolt Brigades which along with Back and Support Brigades constitute the Ground Infantry Forces. Furthermore, the Southern Resistance Brigades in Al-Dhalea played a prominent role in securing Al-Dhalea front from the Houthi attacks over the past years. The Special Security Forces in Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Al-Dhalea and Socotra led by Major General "Fadhl Baash" joined the Southern armed forces after August events in 2019.<sup>25</sup> Finally, there are Shabwa Defense Forces which were formed before the battle to restore the three Shabwa's districts from the Houthis and include previous units from the Shabwani Elite Forces.



Security and military brigades and units that constitute the Southern forces (an official military source to "South24 Center", September 25th 2022)

Practically, STC militarily controls the governorates of Aden, Lahj, Al-Dhalea, Socotra, Abyan and Shabwa. Additionally, some forces close to it as part of the

<sup>24</sup> [The Southern Armed Forces: Strategic Importance and Existing Challenges \(south24.net\) Badr Qassem, 2021](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Major General Fadhl Baash, Commander of the Special Security Forces, announces that he and his soldiers will join the Southern Resistance - YouTube](#)

2nd Military Region control the Hadramout's coast. However, both Hadramout's Wadi and Sahara (valley and desert) are still under the control of the Yemeni forces affiliated with former Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar.

As for Al-Mahra, it is almost the only governorate which does not have formal military forces affiliated with STC. The latter counts on the grassroot movement there. Additionally, STC allied with the General Council of Al-Mahra and Socotra citizens, led by Sultan "Abdullah Bin Afrar".<sup>26</sup>

It is important to say that the latest political changes in the structure of the Yemeni Presidency which overthrew the former President, and the Vice President dismantled the Islah-affiliated military units which were present in Abyan and Shabwa as most of their elements moved to Marib and Wadi Hadramout.

Military Operation "Eastern Arrows", announced by the Southern Forces on August 22nd, 2022,<sup>27</sup> to liberate Abyan from the "terrorist groups" contributed to enhancing the position of the governorate and restoring its political and military weight again. Aidrous Al-Zubaidi's meetings with Abyan's military and security leaders<sup>28</sup>, foremost of whom was Abyan's Security Chief Ali Al-Kazemi were helpful for strengthening Southern relationships. For that reason, Al-Zubaidi stressed the importance of what he described as "intensifying efforts and working to remove the reasons of tension witnessed by Abyan during the past stage. He also called for" reparation to alleviate anger, create a state of<sup>29</sup> solidarity and open a new page in which the Southern interest is above all interests and considerations.

The presence of the Joint Southern Forces in the districts of the central area in Abyan and the bumpy geographical areas in Shabwa<sup>30</sup> will likely contribute in protecting the roads which connect the Southern governorates, ending smuggling weapons across the coastal strip in Abyan to the areas controlled by

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<sup>26</sup> A prominent official local source, Aden.

<sup>27</sup> [«Eastern Arrows» Military Operation in Abyan \(South24\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Al-Zubaidi meets with Brigadier General Abu Mishaal Al-Kazmi and a number of security leaders in Abyan Governorate \(stcaden.com\)](#)

<sup>29</sup> The same previous source

<sup>30</sup> ["Eastern Arrows" ...An operation by the Southern forces to combat terrorism in Abyan \(al-ain.com\)](#)

the Houthis in Al-Bayda and countering AQAP. This makes it difficult for any other force outside South Yemen to regain controlling them.

## 2- The political lever

Since the beginning of the war, South Yemen enjoys a strong political lever represented by STC whose biggest essential power relies upon its wide popularity in the Southern governorates. This advantage enabled it to be one of the most important political entities in Yemen at regulatory and administrative levels indoors and outdoors. The local community interacts with STC based upon its establishment circumstances as it represents the demands of a wide sector of Southern forces and people who constituted the Southern Hirak in 2007 as well as calling for restoring the state and independence.

STC consists of a Presidential body led by "Aidrous Al-Zubaidi" and includes 26 members. It also includes the "National Assembly" which serves as an unelected Southern parliament and consists of 303 members that represent different Southern districts and governorates, led by Ahmed Bin Brik. STC established branches in all governorates through local leaders who run them. Their tasks vary between regulatory, executive and representative ones. STC also has a decision-making support center. Moreover, it established special departments including the "Foreign Relationships" which run the STC's activities abroad and a "national media authority". For many Southerners, STC is considered a suitable political symbol to represent the Southern issue. It has clearly expressed it through its goals and statements.

Parallelly, other Southern political forces affect the political scene including political parties such as the Southern Arabian League Party led by Abdul Rahman Al-Jafri. Additionally, there have been Southern entities including the Supreme Council of the Revolutionary Movement "Southern Hirak" led by Hassan Baoum, the National Congress of the People of the South led by "Mohammed Ali Ahmed", the Inclusive Hadramout Conference led by its Secretary General "Amin Al-Akbari", the Southern National Coalition led by "Ahmed Al-Essi", the "First National Conference of the Peaceful Hirak" led by "Abdulmajeed Wahdeen" and other Southern components which mostly represent the

Southern issue in numerous forms. Some of them match the STC's goals to solve the unity crisis by restoring the two states. Others such as the Southern National Coalition demand that South Yemen will be part of a federal union with North that consists of 6 provinces.

In mid-2021, the STC launched an initiative for holding an intra- Southern dialogue abroad that aimed to reach maximum degree of harmony and coordination among the Southern parties. It largely succeeded in its first stage to increase the degree of convergence. Along with its aim to meet the requirements of the stage and to overcome challenges, the initiative has played a supplementary role to the UN efforts by enhancing the dialogue among Southerners before moving to a wider dialogue or a comprehensive negotiation in an upcoming peace process. To boost the activities of the Southern external dialogue team, Al-Zubaidi issued a decision to establish an internal dialogue team in late August which consists of 14 members.<sup>31</sup> Its tasks include conducting consultations and dialogues with the internal Southern elites, figures and entities and the attempt to make convergence of views in a way that could lead to compromised formulas to determine the features of the political solution for the Southern issue.

There is a tendency to believe that the Southern political forces lack harmony and that there have always been permanent disputes among them. Such a belief has been promoted by forces who are against the Southern independence project. They attempt to convey this image to the regional and the international community. It seems that the Southerners today adopt more variable and open visions including the federal form of an independent Southern state in a way that preserves the position and the history of each region as well as its historic, social and cultural privacy.

Having said that, it is necessary to note the important presence of a Southern political lever in South Yemen whether within the ranks of the authorities or the opposition, and whether the Southern parties agree with each other or not. The existence of "a political life" paves the way for an open and participatory atmosphere in which there are a variety of opinions and stances and where one party monopolizes the decision making. This reflects an impression that South

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<sup>31</sup> [Al-Zubaidi issues a decision to form the two southern national dialogue teams \(stcadn.com\)](http://stcadn.com)

has a semi-ready political environment that can expand the workable base and to treat conditions in the state at all levels in addition to enhancing the concepts and the values of the modern democratic national state.

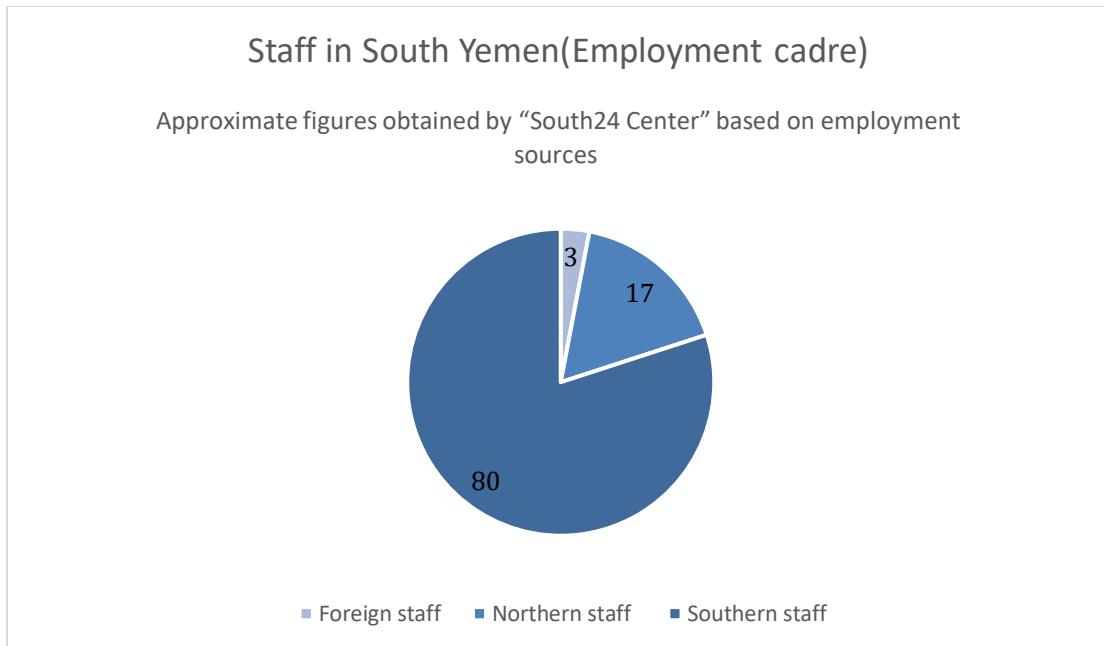
### **3- Southern staff (cadres)**

The basic services are very important to the path of local communities. Ensuring providing these services to citizens improves the continuity of the relationship between them and the state. This can't be attained without the presence of qualified staff. It is worth mentioning that since the beginning of the Yemen conflict in 2014, there has been a growing impact related to the ability of the local communities to run its areas in South Yemen to a large extent, especially from the security and the military aspects. The appointment of Southerners as governors in their areas has led to providing Southern qualified staff who are able to manage their service institutions. They have been given sufficient powers to supervise them despite the decline of funding these institutions due to the economic collapse caused by the war whose impact is still persistent.

"South24 Center" contacted more than one official authority <sup>32</sup> and inquired about the number of the current staff in the state institutions. We reached a conclusion that the percentage of the Southern staff in South including general managers and director managers in the ministerial offices, local authorities, directorates, executive offices of ministries and governorates and all elements related to the operational career ladder within these institutions is about 80%. A large part of them are qualified Southern staff who have sufficient certificates and experience. The other 20% includes Northern employees, most of whom are displaced persons who came from the Northern areas after 2015 and were appointed for their competencies and experiences especially in the fields of health and education. There are also employees who were appointed after the war because of nepotism.

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<sup>32</sup> The Ministry of Civil Service and Insurance declined to respond to "South24" requests to provide us with accurate data on the list of staff working in South Yemen.



The staff percentages in South Yemen

Naturally, the presence of qualified and ready Southern staff in most of the institutions will ensure controlling the state, including managing and organizing its institutions in case of declaring the establishment of the state. It seems that STC works in light of that by restructuring itself at the level of central governmental institutions, governorates, districts, cities and neighborhoods. According to a speech by Aidrous Al-Zubaidi,<sup>33</sup> this aims to “enhance and develop work as well as presenting it in a proper way that seeks to move the Southern issue to the highest levels by duplicating efforts along with the high skills that enables competent people to achieve the desired results”. Initially, it seems that making such a restructure is necessary for STC to improve its performance and correct missteps and failures that have accompanied it since its establishment. Additionally, it is a positive move to achieve reforms and political stability.

It is remarkable that the restructure will include young staff from both genders in its whole regulation structure. It seems that this will direct the youth’s energy towards the job market in different political, economic and social fields. This also

<sup>33</sup> [Aidrous Al-Zubaidi inaugurates the workshop on developing and modernizing the STC structures \(aden-alhadath.info\)](http://aden-alhadath.info)

could help in equipping and enabling youth and making use of the experience of seniors to take responsibility and manage appropriately.

#### **4- Diplomatic corps**

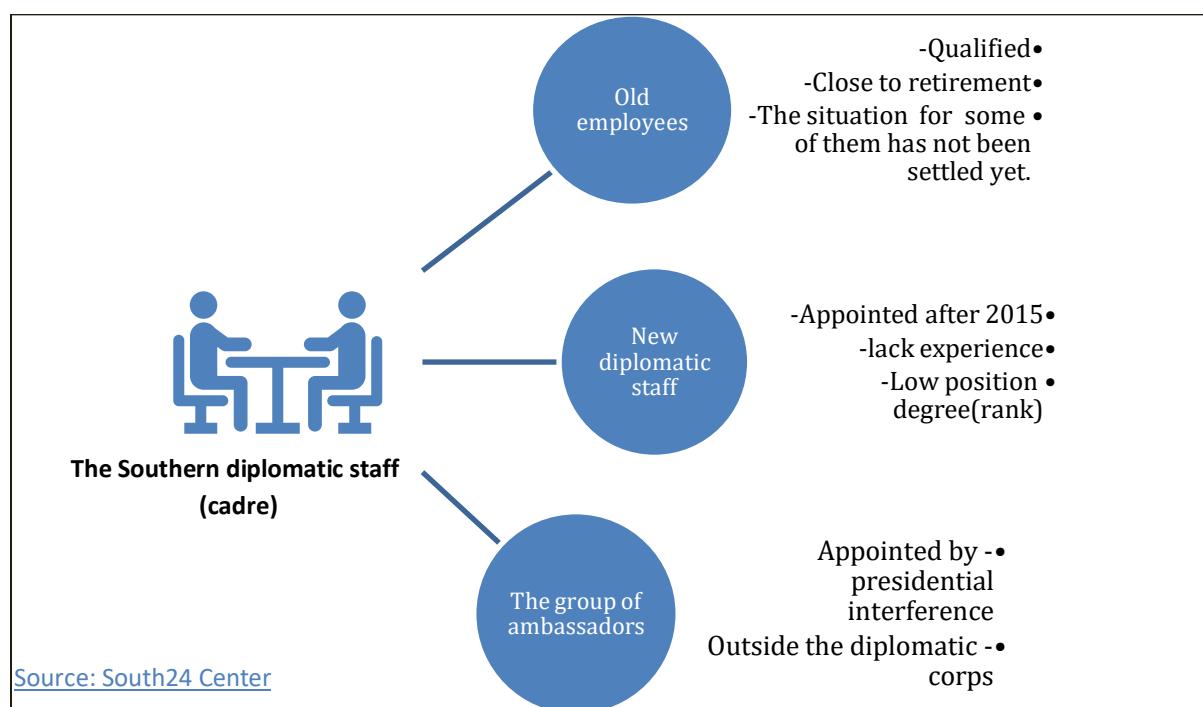
The diplomatic context is part of the Southern staff. However, its most distinctive feature lies in its activities abroad. The Southern diplomatic cadre has been largely affected by the union between North and South in 1990. Former Advisor to the Yemeni Permanent Delegation to the UN Abdul Rahman Al-Musaibili said: "The Southern diplomatic and consular circles since the first months of merging between the two foreign ministries were subjected to a systematic reduction process, if not a scraping one, with an aim to reduce the experienced professional staff and render them to mere employees. This deprived them from the partnership spirit in the unity and the nation. The whole number of the diplomatic, consular and Southern missions was reduced by nearly a third and this continued for long years".

After 2015, Yemen's diplomatic representation took a new path, especially in light of the changes in political and military data on the ground. A decent number of Southerners came to hold governmental and diplomatic positions abroad. Northern activists argue that the percentage of "Southerners" who hold diplomatic positions increased in the Hadi era to about 60% while the share of the Northerners decreased to 40%. Southern ambassadors have held important embassies abroad, including Riyadh, London, Paris, Moscow, Cairo, and others, including appointments of advisers, secretaries, and attachés.

However, according to former diplomat Al-Musaibili, the main dilemma lies in the reality of the Southern diplomatic staff. He said that they are divided into three groups: The first of whom are the seniors who are qualified and experienced. They laid the foundations of Southern diplomatic work and contributed to its successes.

However, most members of this category are about to retire, and some of them have not yet settled their status or have not received their 'forcibly stolen' entitlements by the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime. The second group, according to him, is the new diplomatic staff, whose members were appointed after 2015.

This group lacks experience, qualification, and the conditions for joining the diplomatic work, because many of them were appointed by the intervention of influential leaders and as exceptional cases. Their diplomatic ranks are still low, while the higher promotions are held by Northern employees due to their seniority, especially since the percentage of Northern diplomatic staff during the Saleh era was 80%. The third one is the group of ambassadors who are appointed from outside the diplomatic corps through Presidential recommendations. They constitute a large number and all of them reached an advanced age. They have no diplomatic experience, and act unprofessionally and according to their party affiliations. This whole situation confirms that the presidency has breached the law, which grants it only 10% to appoint ambassadors for exceptional cases.<sup>34</sup>



In fact, the proportion of Southerners in the diplomatic corps may be better than before, but what they lack is practice and experience, a matter that may affect the level of job performance in these positions. There are more than 50 embassies expected to be run by Southerners if an independent state is declared. In order to address the situation of the Southern diplomatic staff,

<sup>34</sup> An interview conducted by the writer with the former advisor to the Yemeni permanent delegation to the UN, Abdul Rahman Al-Musaibili, on August 5, 2022.

Abdulrahman Al-Musaibili, suggests that the following points must be taken into consideration:

- 1- Retaining the Senior members of the Southern diplomatic and consular staff and freezing their retirement for the next five years at least, to enable the young staff to benefit from their experiences and training at their hands, especially in missions. They should bear in mind that the next representation will take place under circumstances of the restoration of the Southern state. This requires a strong political and diplomatic background.
- 2- Settling the employment conditions of those who were dismissed from their jobs due to their support of the Southern cause. They have to be rehabilitated and to receive their salaries, rights, and compensation for the damages they sustained.
- 3- Opening the door for employment as well as qualifying the new diplomatic staff. They should be equipped with training courses, similar to the ones that were implemented at the Diplomatic Institute<sup>35</sup> under the management of Ambassador 'Ali Abdullah Al-Bujairi'.
- 4- Reconsidering the appointment of ambassadors to be from the qualified diplomatic staff who are affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and limiting presidential interventions to no more than 10% as exceptional cases.

In practice, it will be necessary to prepare the Southern diplomatic staff in embassies abroad and try to give them the necessary skills such as learning languages, negotiating, managing relations and crises. This is in addition to providing them with consular services and others, especially those related to information technology and the accompanying digital data. This would re-crystallize the level of the young Southern staff currently in the embassies and prepare them to manage the state's work from abroad.

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<sup>35</sup> The Diplomatic Institute: It was working to equip diplomats, ambassadors and others with various fields including the history of diplomacy, knowledge of the path of political events in the world, public and private international laws, diplomatic and consular agreements, regulating international relations, rules of protocol and etiquette, the origins of diplomatic correspondence required by state relations, the skills of diplomatic negotiation, how to face crises, general culture in geography, economic relations and how to deal with modern medi. It also requires that the diplomat be fluent in one of the international languages, especially the language of the country that will be sent to.

## 5- Southern unions and civil bodies

Many Southern unions and civil bodies began working to be completely independent from the central Yemeni unions, some of which have been merged and others were established after the Yemeni unity in 1990, given that most of their headquarters are in Sanaa. For many Southerners, these unions have not improved the protection of their members, including the Southerners who were dismissed from governmental jobs after the 1994 war. The voices of some Southern members of the Southern workers' unions at the beginning of the Southern Hirak were influential alongside the popular force with all its affiliations through strikes and demonstrations. These civilian forces were largely marginalized compared to their counterparts in Sanaa, which received many privileges and opportunities. This problem and vacuum were not limited to the Southern governorates but extended to other Yemeni governorates. This largely led to the decline of the role of the remaining other professional sectors and their branches.

It is important to note that after 2015, the Southern trade unions and various other bodies in South have had an upward institutional curve compared with the institutional building in the North, which has become regressive and ineffective in light of the Houthi control over most of the Northern geography. This made some liberated governorates, such as Taiz and Marib, focus heavily on civil society organizations so as not to separate from the center in Sanaa. Even the number of human rights organizations increased significantly after the 2015 war. This was confirmed by Hassan al-Shabwani, Director General of the Office of Social Affairs and Labor earlier. He indicated that "the number of active local organizations in Marib has increased significantly in recent years. Their number increased from 90 to nearly 160 operating organizations within a few months".<sup>36</sup>

Many Southern bodies have been established until now. This includes the Southern Judiciary Club, the Southern Academic Authority, the National Media Authority and others. Some of them were formed before or after the war. Regarding the beginning of the establishment of these bodies, specifically the Academic Authority, Dr Hussein Al-Aqil, a professor at the University of Aden

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<sup>36</sup> [4 new UN and international organizations are preparing to open offices in Marib | Althawra Net \(althawra-news.net\)](#)

and a member of the National Assembly, said that “personal moves began among groups of colleagues to hold secret meetings in which they exchange opinion and discuss political, economic, educational, academic and other issues. The objective conditions of the Southern social community had begun to crystallize to oppose the occupation regime [the regime in Sanaa] and overthrow it peacefully”.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Aqil clarifies that the Southern academics didn't hesitate in expressing their positions against the Sanaa regime. He added that 'a number of colleagues in the University of Aden called for their first meeting on December 16th, 2007, and the academic group was established, whose name was later turned into The Southern Academic Authority, to perform their duties in the cultural struggle and to deliver awareness and guidance lectures to people of the peaceful Hirak in the squares and the public plazas".

As for the Southern unions, the General Federation of Southern Trade Unions, which was established on February 4th, 2018,<sup>38</sup> played a major role in motivating the rest of the unions to form independent Southern unions, after it had been under the management of the General Federation of Yemeni Trade Unions in Sanaa for more than 25 years. Every professional sector has come to see that it needs a union to defend its members. The list of the most important Southern unions that were formed in this regard includes the following:

- Southern Teachers and Educators Syndicate
- Southern Lawyers Syndicate
- Southern Physicians and Pharmacists Syndicate
- Southern Engineers Syndicate
- Southern Writers' Union
- Southern Electricity Workers Union
- Forcibly Dismissed Workers Syndicate
- Southern Agricultural Cooperative Federation
- Fisheries Cooperative Federation of Southern Fishermen
- Southern Journalists and Media Syndicate [under establishment]

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<sup>37</sup> An interview conducted by the author with Dr. Hussein Al-Aqil, Professor in the University of Aden, September 21st, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> [Al-Ayyam newspaper - The southern unions peacefully regain their headquarters which were seized 25 years ago.. Inviting former union members to join their brothers in the Federation of Southern Trade Unions \(alayyam.info\)](http://alayyam.info)

The latter (Southern Journalists and Media Syndicate) will be among the outputs of the first foundation conference for Southern press and media professionals, which is expected to be held in October 2022. This aims, according to its organizers, to develop the performance of media and journalism in South Yemen. For the Southerners, too, it is important to restore the Southern professional entities and unions that were alienated after the Yemeni unity, by breaking the monopoly of the Northern political parties over them.<sup>39</sup>

The revival of the Southern unions reflects a vision that expresses the revival of a Southern national identity independent of the North. This apparently allows them to open the road for them to engage in relationships even within the framework of regional and international professional entities and will allow Southerners to publicize their issues directly.

## 6- Southern communities

The political transformations in Yemen from 2007 until today have had the greatest impact on the Southern communities to take other roads independent of the Northern communities to express themselves, their issues, and their concerns abroad. This has played a notable role in strengthening the home front of popular demands in Southern Yemen. Southerners abroad have held hundreds of events in front of decision-making headquarters in the countries of their residence.

Communities focused on national issues because they recognized the importance of conveying voices and demands abroad. Expatriate Southerners also appear more organized and compatible in political stances than their Northern counterparts especially after the last war in Yemen since 2014, in which Northern positions were divided between supporters of Yemeni legitimate government or the Houthis. This caused clear cracks in the structures of Yemeni communities abroad in general.

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<sup>39</sup> [South24 Center discussed a paper related to the control of the Islah Party over the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate. \(South24 Center\)](#)

For example, Saleh Al-Noud, a Southern lawyer in Britain<sup>40</sup> said that "the internal impact has negatively affected the relationships between the Southern and Northern communities throughout Britain. There has been an emergent separation between the two communities in terms of activities and events. Some of them are held in the name of South and others in the name of Yemen." He added: "Southern activities are more present and effective, and we as Southerners abroad try to unite our efforts so that we can be a cohesive community in the face of the challenges we face."

Al-Noud continued: "There should be clarity about the political issues which have their own paths and platforms, and which are not supposed to impact the social relations, especially since we are among large Arab and Muslim communities, and we try to assume our responsibility to raise political matters appropriately and explicitly. We have also been active in communicating with many official organizations on behalf of South."

In order to expand the presence of Southern communities abroad, Al-Noud believes that their role is important in building awareness about the current stage, through soft events and events that serve the interest of the communities themselves.

Therefore, the establishment of a "general union of Southern Yemeni communities" could facilitate the process of communication, coordination and organization at national seasonal events. This would also unite the discourse and messages in the protests, as well as introduce the cause of the South, and work to direct the Southern competencies and lobbies to be introduced through peaceful diplomatic means.

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<sup>40</sup> An interview conducted by the author with Saleh Al-Noud, on September 24, 2022. "Al-Noud" is a southern lawyer, who served as the head of the Yemeni community from 2007 to 2011 in Sheffield, Britain, and witnessed the changes that were reflected and affected the Yemeni communities abroad, as a result of internal changes.

## Possible challenges

There are some challenges that may face the establishment of a state in South Yemen, the most prominent of which can be illustrated as following:

### First: International and Regional Challenges

#### 1- International Challenges:

In general, international recognition of the Southern state will be the first challenge in the face of Southerners. This is particularly in light of the fact that the international community does not speak positively about the project of independence that Southerners have been demanding for 15 years. The attempt to amplify the conflicts between Southern political entities by Northern and regional parties, and to turn a blind eye to the deep-rooted conflicts among Northern political and partisan entities also contributes to pushing the West to refrain from dealing with Southerners. Some international decision-makers apparently believe that dealing with Southerners will give them promises of independence, so some prefer to avoid communicating with them directly. Although Southerners are looking for an external backer who is more open and accommodating to the visions and ideas they put forward as solutions to Yemen's unity crisis, the continued neglect of these voices by the international community will necessarily lead to more cycles of violence in Yemen.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to say that the lack of understanding about the importance of the Southern issue, its roots and its various dimensions by international officials including UN envoys will prevent the peace process from moving forward which is an important stabilizing factor for Yemen. Even if the super powers realize the importance of the South issue and its link to the stability of Yemen, they take into consideration the interests of their allies in the region which are more important for them. They will not take any step in this regard without consulting the Arab Coalition states to a large extent.

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<sup>41</sup> [The European Approach Towards South Yemen Needs to be Reconsidered \(South24.net\)](http://South24.net)

## 2-Regional Challenges:

This challenge can be seen from two directions:

The first direction: It is represented by the Saudi-led Coalition states. These countries are not apparently ready to adopt the Southerners' project of independence currently, and do not want to propose it except for what suits their interests and understandings with the major powers. This trend has been clearer with the developments of global crises, especially the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, and the impact it could have on the global oil supply through the international shipping lanes on which these countries depend, including Bab Al-Mandeb and the Red Sea. This comes amid possible threats against them, as well as the growing threats by extremist organizations and the possibility of escalating their activities and expanding them to neighboring countries. This would hit regional security as well as internal security.

The second direction is represented by the countries of the region that have been against the independence project from the beginning, such as Qatar, Oman, Iran and Turkey. It has worked intensively on this aspect in the media, security and financial fields, relying on parties loyal to it in the on pro-Muslim parties at home and abroad, foremost of which are the Muslim Brotherhood and the Houthis.

## **Second: Local Challenges**

### 1-At the Southern level:

It can be divided into two directions:

The first one is supporting the project of independence and the restoration of the Southern state, but it needs more unification of opinions and positions. It has to seek for more common ground upon which the Southern parties can take as a basis to move forward towards broader representation, away from seeking to impose one opinion or trying to pour society into one mold.

The Second one: This includes the Southern parties that support the unity project or the federal union emanating from the outputs of the Comprehensive National Dialogue 2013. Although the number of these parties is ineffective compared to their counterparts which oppose both projects, they still pose a challenge that requires dealing with it with awareness and responsibility.

Of course, the Southern parties still need to be more in harmony especially in light of the efforts of the intra Southern Dialogue launched by the STC in mid-August last year and whose fruits have recently<sup>42</sup> emerged. The various parties must engage in a more effective and coordinated dialogue to produce a unified stance on the Southern project and its issue.

## **2- At the Northern level:**

So far, North does lack the land necessary for the establishment of the state against which the Houthis launched a coup. The "legitimate authority" in North Yemen controls three districts in Marib. The National Resistance Forces control two districts in Al-Hodeida. The forces of the fifth military region control two districts North of Hodeida which is administratively affiliated with Hajjah governorate. Additionally, regular military forces control part of Taiz governorate along with militias affiliated with the Islamic Islah Party.

Practically, the Houthis hold 80 percent of the Northern territories. Therefore, the Northern anti-Houthi forces still consider the South part of the state that represents the 'Republic of Yemen'. However, if South is restored as an independent state, some of these forces will likely resort to an alliance with the Houthis to confront South militarily. This is a major and potential challenge for the Southern military forces.

A Northern approach recognizing that Southern independence may contribute to the restoration of the state from the Houthis in North may be helpful. This is related to several considerations including that Southerners will not have a negative attitude or grudge toward Northerners related to their lack of political right to independence. The most obstacle against the unification of North-

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<sup>42</sup> [Al-Zubaidi receives the head of the Political Bureau of the Revolutionary Movement Council, Fadi Hassan Baoum \(stcadn.com\)](http://stcadn.com)

Southern efforts is the Southerners' conviction that Northern parties stand against this right. Most non-Southern political actors deal with the issue of unity in a constant and indisputable manner in light of the current conflict. Opening a debate about it and supporting Southerners in gaining their right to independence could significantly help restore the state from the Houthis. In this case, Northerners would receive broad support from Southerners, especially since it has become difficult for the Houthis to control South although the threat persists and may continue.

The most dangerous scenario, however, is the unification of the Northern forces against South by handing over the Houthis their remaining positions and engaging into a single Northern battle against South. A similar scenario occurred late last year, when the military forces run by the Islamic Islah Party handed over three districts in Shabwa to the Houthis, as admitted by many army commanders in the governorate<sup>43</sup>. It was not an easy task to drive out the Houthis from these areas without the intervention of the Southern Giants and Shabwa Defense Forces with the support of the Saudi-led Coalition, to liberate them completely.

After the recent Shabwa events last August, and with the launch of the "counter" military operation by its Governor, Awad Al-Awlaki, to establish security and stability in the governorate due to what the official media described as an insurgency led by military forces loyal to the Islamist Islah Party, the latter had issued a statement in which it threatened to withdraw from the legitimate government <sup>44</sup>. The Houthis soon exploited the statement to offer their protection to the party's forces through the Houthi missile and air forces. Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis' political bureau clearly expressed this meaning by saying that "with our cooperation together we will quickly <sup>45</sup> resolve the battle." This development could pose a new challenge to the Coalition and Southerners, if handled in a way that restores military balances on the ground.

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<sup>43</sup> [Brigadier General Saleh Al-Kulaibi accuses parties of carrying out a plot to hand over Shabwa to the Houthis - YouTube](#)

<sup>44</sup> [The Islah Party officially adopts the insurgency in Shabwa and threatens to withdraw from legitimacy - Al-Sharea newspaper \(alshareanews.com\)](#)

<sup>45</sup> [A tweet by Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, August 11th, 2022](#)

### Third: The Economic Challenge

South Yemen may not face a challenge like the confusion that may occur due to the separation of institutions. This is because of the inclusion of the local authorities which are run by Southern figures. Moreover, there is a reasonable percentage of Southerners in the government and its institutions. However, the independence of a Southern central bank requires international recognition of the independent state, and this economic dilemma requires a political solution.

South will also face a great challenge from within, especially since various aspects of life in Southern Yemen have been systematically destroyed for more than three decades. Southern people have been the most affected by this destruction followed by infrastructure and all the economic, administrative and service components. Economic researcher Dr. Mahmoud Saleh Jabari<sup>46</sup>discusses the most important economic challenges that can face an independent Southern state. He made a review of the most prominent of them and introduced some treatments and solutions to them as illustrated below:

- **The issue of corruption:** It is a thorny and complicated issue that the former regime sought to instill in many state institutions after Yemeni unity and sponsored it for many years. In order to uproot this corruption, an anti-corruption body has to be established and to include Southern competent and impartial figures from both genders. They will practice financial and administrative supervision. The eradication of corruption will be an entry to reform the entire economic system. Without a similar body, South will not be able to build an economy based on developing the state and improving the quality of people's lives. There are many examples, including Malaysia, of countries that faced corruption and uprooted it to build modern developed states.
- **Recovery and building of economic institutions,** the most important of which are:
  - The port of Aden and its pivotal role in the national economy, as it is one of the largest natural ports in the world. In the 1950s, it was ranked as the second most important port in the world for refueling after New York.

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<sup>46</sup> The author conducted an interview with the economic researcher, Dr. Mahmoud Saleh Jabari, on August 16th, 2022.

Therefore, it is important to put restoring the importance of the Port of Aden as the top priority of building the national economy. This can be done by contracting with a global company which has experience in the field of port management. They should care about developing the infrastructure and provide all security and logistical requirements, with high technical capabilities for fast inspection, facilitating procedures, activating transit trade, developing the free zone and preserving its territory. The port and free zone administrations should be unified like many regional and global ports. This can be similarly applied to the ports of Hadramout and Shabwa.

- Maintenance, operation and development of Aden Refineries. Aden refineries are one of the most important economic facilities in South Yemen, and are a major source to the state treasury, due to the critical and the important function they play in importing, refining and exporting of crude oil and oil derivatives. After North invaded South in 1994, Aden Refineries suffered from constant neglect and destruction of its production capacities in addition to the changes that hit its administrative and functional mechanism. Therefore, within the framework of the remedies of its current situation, such neglect should be removed, the electricity should be restored to it, as well as developing and modernizing its assets. This would contribute to solving the fuel crisis afflicting the country and feeding the state treasury with foreign exchange resources. There is a need to restore understanding with the Chinese company to resume work there.
- Holding full control on oil and gas fields and transferring their revenues to the government's account in the Central Bank. transparency in production from all fields is needed. This has been kept as a secret for three decades including oil ministers who do not know about the amount of production. Therefore, it is necessary to treat everything related to the oil sector, starting with the conclusion of contracts, production quotas, oil services, security guards and etc...

- Making an investment map, preparing economic feasibility studies for promising projects, in all fields, especially oil and gas industries. Furthermore, it is a must to invest in factories that were destroyed in South under the name of privatization. The way they are managed has to be changed in light of competition and economic feasibility, as well as the efficiency of their staff. The most important is to provide an attractive investment environment, especially as South Yemen is full of promising opportunities in all fields.
- Paying attention to the agriculture and fisheries to operate them according to scientific methods and accumulated practical experiences, based on the seasonality of production, breeding periods, and fishing by using sophisticated methods. Additionally, shoveling and random fishing should not be used. Territorial waters have to be protected from the infiltration of foreign fishing companies. There are other economic fields that can meet the requirements of building a national state to create sustainable development, especially if there is a focus on the pivotal sectors that contribute effectively in moving other sectors.

#### **Fourth: Demographic composition of the population**

The conflict, which has entered its eighth year in Yemen, has changed the demographic composition of South Yemen. Many Northerners have moved to Southern governorates over the past years, either as displaced people or for permanent stability. This comes in light of the Houthis' continued construction of a new identity and environment in line with their project. They attempt to encircle areas under their control by building new population communities for the Hashemite families in order to replace the old ones, especially in densely populated areas such as Sanaa and its surroundings. Moreover, there is a population displacement from areas in Taiz and Marib, which are controlled by the Islah party, towards Aden, Lahj and Abyan. Some Southerners believe that this is a deliberate strategy aimed at disrupting any political entitlements related to the future of South Yemen.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> [Are Demographic Changes Taking Place in Al-Mahra?\(South24.net\)](#)

In this thorny file, the STC's Presidential body has called on the local authority in Abyan to end the systematic process to change the demographic structure in the delta districts through the ownership and selling of large areas of delta land to displaced people in an effort to settle them<sup>48</sup>. Al-Mahra and Hadramout have also witnessed a significant demographic change in the population through the displaced persons. For example, Abu Bakr Salem Saad, Director of the IDP Unit in Mahra, explains to "South24 Center", that the exodus to Mahra began in 2013 during the AQAP war on Abyan and after the 2015 war. So far, nearly 3,100 families, 17,000 individuals have been displaced to the governorate's districts. He added that most families are concentrated in the capital city of Al-Ghayda, followed by Shahan District. Most of the basic needs of displaced people are shelter, food, education, water and environmental sanitation.<sup>49</sup> Hadrami journalist Abdullah al-Shadli, who recently visited al-Mahra, confirmed the issue of displacement by saying: "I found some displaced people renting apartments and houses in AL-Mahra while others owned them. Surprisingly, many people came with their families, not for the purpose of displacement, but for permanent settlement. They don't even think of returning. Due to the Northern population density in Al- Mahra, some consider themselves as if they are locals"<sup>50</sup>

For Hadramout, recent years have witnessed a remarkable shift in the composition of the population. The demographic change in Wadi Hadramout in particular does not appear to be an outcome of a normal humanitarian displacement, but related to systematic political considerations, or what some describe as "political displacement". The main cities of Wadi Hadramout including Seiyun, Tarim, Al-Qatn and Shibam have witnessed a housing crisis as a result of the high cost of renting houses, due to the ability of many displaced people to pay money, without going to the camps to receive them in Al Wadeah, Al-Abar , Maryama, Madouda and Al-Sawm.<sup>51</sup>

The migration of displaced people into South Yemen without security or administrative coordination could pose a threat regarding the presence of

<sup>48</sup> [STC warns of the danger of changing the demographic structure in Abyan \(eremnews.com\)](#)

<sup>49</sup> An interview conducted by the author with "Abu Bakr Salem Saad", Director of the IDPs unit in Al-Mahra, on August 3rd, 2022.

<sup>50</sup>An interview conducted by the author with "Abdullah Al-Shdly", a journalist and editor at South24 Center, on August 7th, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> [Wadi Hadramout: "The Reform Syndrome" and the Reality of Demographic Changes \(South24.net\)](#)

outlaw elements, whose entry may be a deliberate one to cause security unrest and turmoil. Moreover, the heavy presence of displaced people in certain areas may add to the burden of service and livelihood. Accordingly, this may pose a major challenge for the establishment of a state in the South. However, the presence of Southern staff in civil service institutions is expected to deal with Northerners who have property or trade in the areas of Southern Yemen officially, by granting them residency permits to carry out their business freely. This is similar to how the Yemeni Arab Republic used to deal with Southerners by imposing a residency system before the unity under the name of (Southerner residing in Sanaa).

## Fifth: The file of terrorism

The biggest security challenge that South Yemen can face after independence is terrorism and militant groups. AQAP elements have long been present mainly in various areas of Abyan, Shabwa and Wadi Hadramout, in addition to areas in the North including Taiz, Al-Bayda, and Marib. In previous years, the Southern security forces have been able to exert great counterterrorism efforts backed by the Arab Coalition. Between 2016 and 2018, two operations were launched by the Hadrami and Shabwani elites in Hadramout and Shabwa. This is along with the operations launched by the Security Belt in Abyan, Lahj and Aden. In August 2022, Southern forces announced a military operation they called "Siham al-Sharq" (Arrows of the East) to "purify" Abyan from "terrorist groups".<sup>52</sup> Simultaneously, the Joint Southern forces in Shabwa also announced Operation "Arrows of the South" to pursue ISIS elements in the "Masinaa district" which borders Abyan. Southern forces were able to take control of a number of ISIS strongholds in Shabwa and Abyan, including Wadi Oemran in Al-Media district, one of AQAP's largest strongholds on the Arabian Peninsula. In response, AQAP through its local wing, Ansar al-Sharia, sought a counter-operation in an attempt to break the attack, but it failed. The U.S. data analysis center (ACLED) described the AQAP's activity in mid-September 2022 as the largest since January 2015.<sup>53</sup> More than thirty soldiers of the Southern military and security forces have been killed since the outbreak of Operation "Eastern Arrows" including 21, in an AQAP

<sup>52</sup> [STC launched Operation "Eastern Arrows" in Abyan to combat terrorism](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Regional Overview: Middle East September 10-16, 2022 \(acleddata.com\)](#)

attack on a security post in the Khobar al-Maraqsha area of Ahwar district in Abyan. The joint Southern Forces announced that 24 AQAP members had been killed in the recent clashes.<sup>54</sup>

A previous report by the US State Department in 2020<sup>55</sup> hailed the important role played by the Security Belt Forces in counterterrorism efforts to control large parts of Aden, Abyan, and Shabwa.

The focus of 'terrorist' operations on South Yemen stirs many questions especially since most of their targets are Southern military and security forces, especially who hold high ranks. For example, Maj. Gen. Thabet Jawas was assassinated in a car bomb in Aden in late March this year. Likewise, Maj. Gen. Saleh al-Zarhani was subjected to a failed assassination attempt. Additionally, there have been random operations targeting Southern security points in Shabwa, Hadramout, Abyan, Aden and Dhalea over the past years.

The identity of the bodies which stand behind carrying out systematic 'terrorist' operations targeting that target Southerners alone are still unclear. However, most sources point to suspected AQAP perpetrators. In less than a month, AQAP carried out more than 6 operations, including a bloody attack in Shabwa<sup>56</sup>, as well as the Ahwar attack in Abyan. These operations came after the decline of the Islah Party's influence, which is accused by STC of having links to al-Qaeda elements.

It was proved that Some of the recent 'terrorist' operations in Aden, including the killing of General Thabet Jawas, the attempted assassination of General Saleh Al-Zarhani, and the targeting of the governor of Aden's convoy have been linked to the involvement<sup>57</sup> of some cells in Aden with links with military leaders such as Amjad Khalid and Mohammed al-Masri, who reside in the city of al-Turba in Taiz Governorate, which is under the control of the Taiz Military Axis run by the Islah party.

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<sup>54</sup> Abyan Governor during a press conference, September 24th, 2022([Twitter](#))

<sup>55</sup> [Yemen - United States Department of State](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Will AQAP Escalation in South Yemen Accelerate the Decisive Battle?](#)

<sup>57</sup> [A new cell run from Taiz is behind targeting Jawas and Al-Dharhani \(south24.net\)](#)

The recent political changes in Yemen, on April 7th, angered AQAP which expressed that in a 7-page statement<sup>58</sup>, in which it lambasted PLC and advised the Islah Party to quickly control the situation before everyone drowns.

In this regard, AQAP had issued in late August an audio recording by an unknown leader called Abu Ali al-Hadrami who belongs to the group's middle ranks regarding the recent events in Shabwa.<sup>59</sup> He criticized the Saudi-led Arab coalition as well as PLC and STC with its Southern Forces. He addressed the youth of the Islah Party to adhere to the slogan of "Islam is the Solution", urging them to continue fighting. He also juxtaposed between the battle against the Islah Party of Shabwa represented in the removal of former governor of Shabwa "Mohammed Saleh Bin Adyo" and the war against Islam. This proves that AQAP experienced its golden phase during the Bin Adyo area. That is why it spoke as if AQAP, not only the Islah Party, lost control over the governorate.<sup>60</sup>

The Southern security and military forces must be fully prepared to confront the consequences of an independent Southern state regarding such a challenge. They will need to develop strategic plans and security arrangements parallel to the political activities which are more advanced than other files in the South. Undoubtedly, this can be achieved by mobilizing the efforts of regional and international allies and enhancing cooperation in the field of counterterrorism to support the security and military forces in South and raise their capabilities.

## Conclusion

The paper attempts to open a debate and encourage local, regional and international actors to back Southerners in dealing with their proposed options. The most important of which include gaining independence and the building of a federal Southern state independent of North. This would pave the way for sustainable peace and stabilization in the region as a whole. It would also support the liberation and stability of North.

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<sup>58</sup> [An AQAP's statement from the Twitter of British researcher Elisabeth Kendall](#)

<sup>59</sup> [AQAP Warns of the «Secession» of South Yemen \(south24.net\)](#)

<sup>60</sup> [A reading in AQAP's recording about the recent events in Shabwa \(South24 Center\)](#)

The paper answered the central question of whether there is a possibility of establishing a state in Southern Yemen with a number of key elements that could constitute an important factor for stabilizing the future state, even if initially. This is in spite of the potential challenges it may face that should not be underestimated. The paper also attempted to clarify and analyze some of its axes with contributions from a number of local experts.

In general, given the circumstances of the current stage with all its trajectories , it will become important to begin developing more logical approaches to dealing with reality through policies which are open to all solutions and possibilities, without being restricted by traditional and fixed concepts related to the unity crisis between North and South. This needs international and regional and local determination to bring about this change.

In this context, the paper made a number of recommendations, the most important of which are:

#### **First: To international and regional bodies:**

- International policymakers should not draw a link between Yemen's stability and unity. Their concepts should not be juxtaposed with the old narratives related to outdated circumstances which have varied after Yemen's civil war that erupted in 2014.
- Supporting Southerners in building an independent state would bring stability and security to the region, and essentially help stabilize the North and South from within.
- Seeking for a balance between local Yemeni forces at the expense of weakening parties which have political and military weight on the ground, such as the STC is not in the interest of the project of restoring the Yemeni state from the Houthis, nor the regional countries which oppose Iran's project in the region.
- It is a mistake for the issue of the South to remain at the bottom of priorities of international and regional officials. It is of great importance to listen to Southerners, understand their cause with its political, historical, geographical, economic and social dimensions more deeply.

Moreover, it is necessary to meet with the largest number of Southern politicians, political experts, military and economic experts and civil society activists of both sexes.

- Paying attention to the full scene of the crisis along with its causes and roots while providing material and political strategic support to Southern parties directly and not through Yemeni mediators would pave the way for a sustainable peace in Yemen. Strengthening the overall support of international organizations for dialogue with Southerners will create a kind of balance between the Yemeni parties and ensure that everyone has been understood and listened to in a fair way.
- The Southern parties, especially STC, will play a major role in maintaining the stability in the Southern areas, especially in the counterterrorism file, in which they showed superiority over the past years. They still counter it with their various security and military capabilities in Shabwa, Abyan and Hadramout. This requires strengthening them with broader capabilities and programs.

### **Second: To the local authorities:**

- The continuation of more intra-South dialogues called for by the STC before the start of the upcoming comprehensive peace negotiations with other Yemeni forces would form a Southern national front that would establish a political life in Southern Yemen.
- Directing support to Southern think tanks can be helpful for changing the perspective of international decision-makers on the unity crisis issue and paving the way to more realistic solutions.
- It may be worthwhile for Southern parties to seek to revive their role abroad by communicating with international organizations and bodies intensively. This would help to understand the nature and sensitivity of the Southern issue and provide those interested in it with many correct answers.

- It is recommended to form a 'general union of Southern communities', to facilitate coordination and organization among communities abroad, in order to unify the discourse and message on the Southern issue and to guide the Southern competencies and lobbies to be introduced through peaceful diplomatic means.
- It is important for the Northern parties to realize that the liberation of North from the Houthis is tied to the independence of South, and that being dragged into the calls by some Northern parties to consolidate unity in light of the changes witnessed by South prolongs the Houthi control over Northern territories.
- It became important for political and military forces to prioritize between defending unity and liberating North from the Houthis. The two issues have become incompatible and cannot be combined together. The priority of defending unity necessarily means handing over North to the Houthis who will continue their attempts to annex South. On the other hand, the priority of liberating North necessarily means recognizing the right of the Southerners to enhance their options on their own lands.

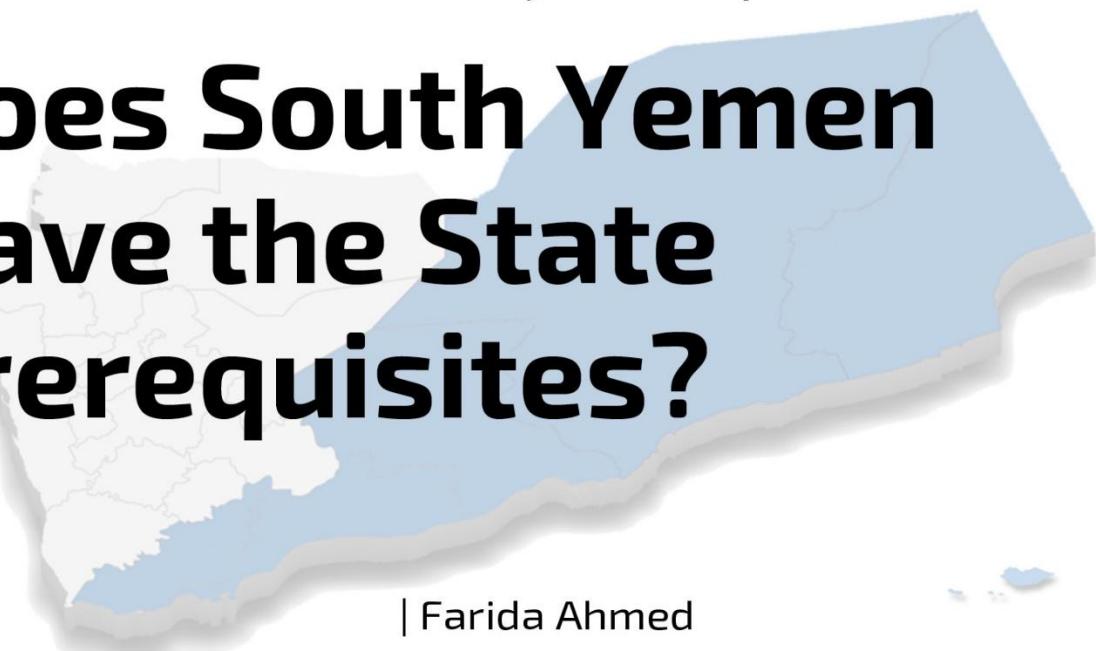
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An Overview in the Reality of Independence:

# Does South Yemen Have the State Prerequisites?



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