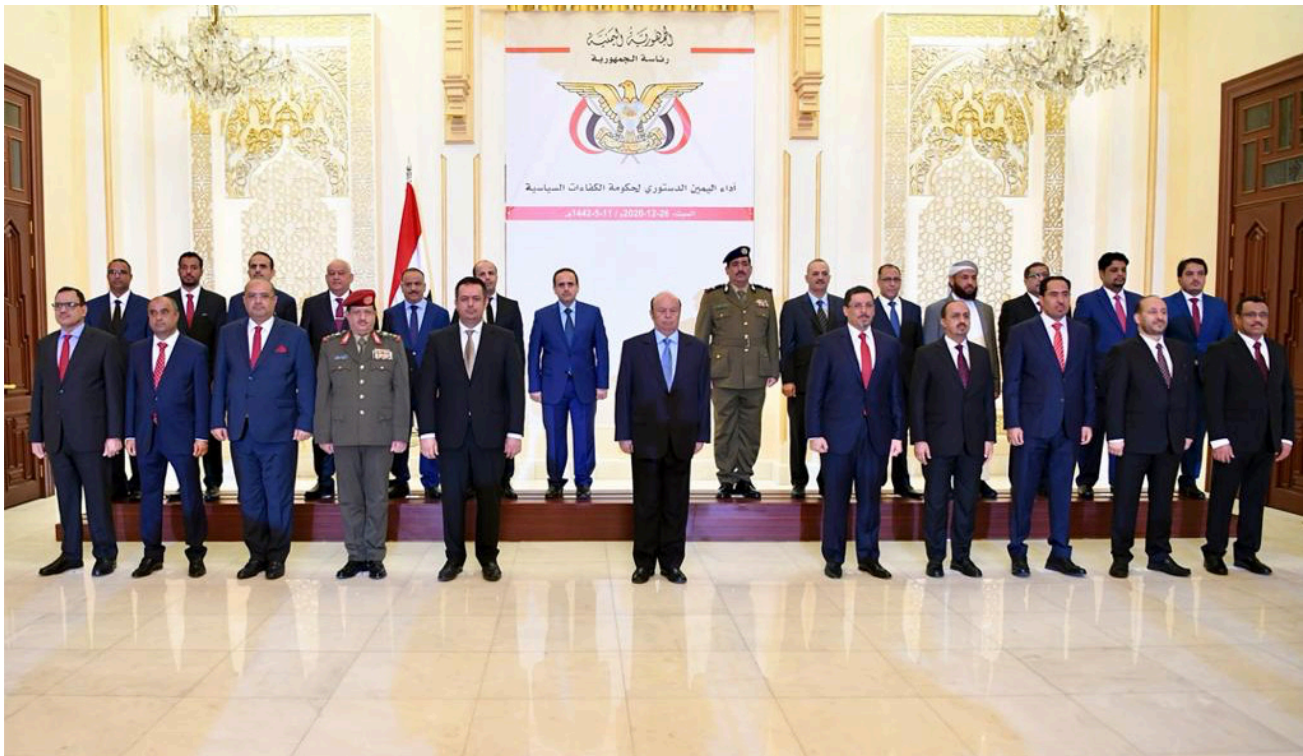


# YEMEN'S POWER-SHARING CABINET: WHAT'S AT STAKE?



By  
**KHALED AMEEN**

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April 5, 2021

*\*EDITOR'S NOTE: The author is a Yemeni political analyst with access to the internal dynamics of Yemen's internationally recognized government. They are writing under a pseudonym in order to speak frankly and without reprisals.*

*COVER PHOTO: Yemen's unity government is sworn in before President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi in Riyadh on December 26, 2020. // Photo by Saba News Agency*



This paper was produced by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies in partnership with Hala Systems Inc., as part of the Leveraging Innovative Technology for Ceasefire Monitoring, Civilian Protection and Accountability in Yemen project.

It is funded by the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada and the European Union.



Federal Foreign Office



the European Union



*Note: This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada and the European Union. The content and recommendations expressed within this document are the personal opinions of the author(s) only, and do not represent the views of the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies or Hala Systems, or any other persons or organizations with whom the participants may be otherwise affiliated. The contents of this document can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the positions of the German Federal Government, the Government of Canada or the European Union.*



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## Yemeni government (December 2020)



**Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed**  
Prime Minister



**Ibrahim Ali Ahmed Haidan**  
Minister of Interior



**Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates



**Mohammed Ali al-Maqdishi**  
Minister of Defense



**Saleem Saleh bin Breik**  
Minister of Finance



**Muammar Motahar al-Iryani**  
Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism



**Abdel Salam Abdullah Salem Baaboud**  
Minister of Petroleum and Minerals



**Najib Mansour al-Awj**  
Minister of Telecommunications



**Badr Abdoh Ahmed al-Ardah**  
Minister of Justice



**Ahmed Mohammed Arman**  
Minister of Human Rights and Legal Affairs



**Nayef Saleh al-Bakri**  
Minister of Youth and Sport



**Mohammed Mohammed al-Ashwal**  
Minister of Industry and Trade



**Khaled al-Wasabi**  
Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research, Technical and Vocational Education



**Qasim Mohammed Buhaibeh**  
Minister of Health and Population



**Mohammed Eydhah Shabeebah**  
Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and Religious Guidance



**Abdel Nasser Ahmed al-Wali**  
Minister of Civil Service and Insurance



**Abdel Salam Salem Humaid**  
Minister of Transport



**Manea Yaeslem Benyamin**  
Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure



**Mohammed Saeed al-Zaouri**  
Minister of Labor and Social Affairs



**Salem Abdullah Issa al-Socotri**  
Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Fisheries



**Anwar Mohammed Ali Kolshat**  
Minister of Electricity and Power



**Tawfeeq Abdel Wahid al-Shargabi**  
Minister of Water and Environment



**Waa'ed Abdullah Batheeb**  
Minister of Planning and International Cooperation



**Hussein Abdel Rahman al-Aghbari**  
Minister of Local Administration



**Tarek Salem al-Akbari**  
Minister of Education



# INTRODUCTION

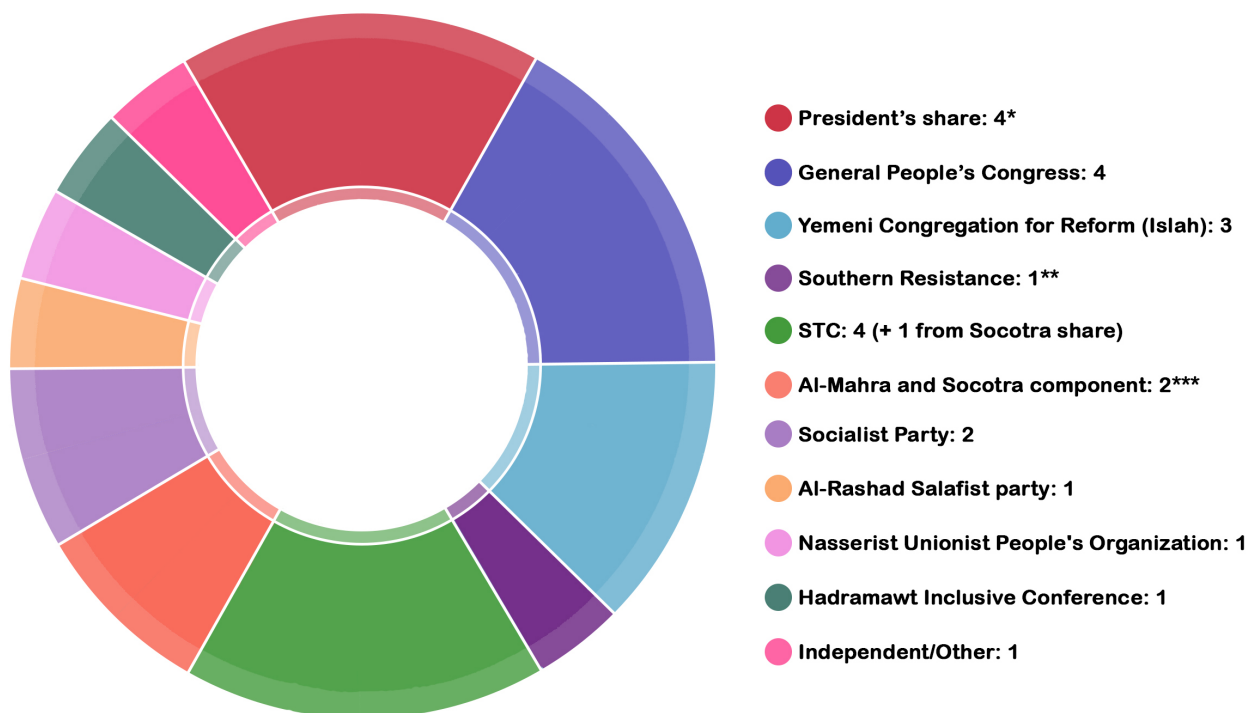
On December 30, 2020, shortly after the arrival of a Yemenia flight carrying members of the newly-formed government to Aden airport, three missiles struck between the runway and the reception hall in less than a minute, killing **at least 26 people** and injuring more than 100 others. However, the missiles failed to achieve their goal: the elimination of the members of **the newly-formed Yemeni government**.

The place and timing of the attack were significant. The number of missiles launched in such a short timespan indicates that the perpetrator intended to do more than intimidate or threaten; rather, it seems they wanted to destroy it all: the new cabinet, the Riyadh Agreement that brought rival factions together and generated enough consensus to eventually form a unity government, and overall efforts to build toward a comprehensive peace process. If the prime minister and ministers had not been delayed and disembarked the plane when planned, the assassination attempt likely would have succeeded and Yemen would be in a very different situation today.

The new government was not formed in a stable country and of one party, or even from a coalition of harmonious parties. It was formed after long and difficult negotiations between warring sides that have thousands of fighters, brigades and heavy weapons and do not agree on principles, paths or goals. This process began in November 2019 with the signing of the Riyadh Agreement, the Saudi-backed deal to end the conflict in southern Yemen between the Yemeni government and the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and bring them together in a unity government. However, the two sides continued fighting on and off throughout 2020 in parallel to cabinet formation negotiations before finally reaching an agreement on December 18 to form a 24-member government. Its return to the interim capital Aden marked a homecoming of sorts, after years of operating largely in exile, before the missile attack nearly brought the emerging consensus to an end.

Yemen is currently at an inflection point. The cabinet formed in December 2020 faces a litany of challenges. Its ability to address critical issues and navigate Yemen's fractured political landscape will determine the new government's success or failure in regaining public trust and governing with heightened legitimacy, and ultimately, the future direction of the country. In an effort to judge the cabinet's chances of increasing stability, deescalating violence and political tensions, and setting the stage for a future political process to end the conflict, this policy memo analyzes the main priorities and opportunities for the new government, and the challenges and risks it faces from various domestic and international actors. It ends with recommendations on how international stakeholders on Yemen can positively contribute to the success and stability of the new government.

### Allocation of ministerial posts by party/actor



\* As part of the Riyadh Agreement, President Hadi was given the prerogative to put forward candidates to head Yemen's four sovereign ministries (Interior, Defense, Finance, Foreign Affairs)

\*\* The minister representing the Southern Resistance is also a member of Islah.

\*\*\* The minister representing Socotra is also a member of the STC.

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## A POLITICALLY SYMBOLIC CABINET

The perpetrator of the Aden airport attack was likely well-aware that eliminating a government could have triggered harsh local and international reaction, but they proceeded to execute the reckless and risky plan regardless of the consequences. This fact is compelling evidence of the government's significance, and reflects the serious challenges and threats it is facing. It must be immediately noted that the significance of this cabinet is not due to its members and their exceptional expertise; many of them had not assumed any prominent governmental posts before. Rather, its significance lies in its political symbolism.

After the new government was announced, many Yemenis were hopeful that the new cabinet could bring greater stability to the country. This optimism is partly attributed to the fact that the cabinet brings together most major Yemeni political actors together under a single umbrella.<sup>[1]</sup> A united front on the government side is a major achievement, and has been seen as a necessary precursor for eventually negotiating a comprehensive peace to end the civil war. Forming a unity cabinet also forestalled local and international fears over the potential complete collapse of the Yemeni state, which had been growing over the past year amid military setbacks against the Houthi movement and the entrenchment of militias and non-state actors in nominally government-held areas. Finally, there are hopes that the new government can work immediately to halt Yemen's economic deterioration, improve the humanitarian situation and focus on the provision of essential services.

On the negative side, the parties represented in the government failed to nominate a single woman to a cabinet post. This gross oversight was raised after the final list of proposed ministers was leaked to the media, but no move was made to change the agreed-upon lineup. The new Yemeni government is the first in 20 years to include no female representation in cabinet. Still, in many respects, this government represents the last chance for increased stability in government-controlled areas and a possible step toward more comprehensive stability for the entire country. There is also a recognition that if consensus were to collapse and the government was dissolved, it would be almost impossible to bring parties that had reluctantly put aside differences together again. All chips are currently in and the future of Yemen is at stake.

1) The cabinet was formed with equal representation between the north and the south and includes all major Yemeni political movements except for the Houthi movement. The parties represented in government are: the General People's Congress (GPC), Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah), the Southern Transitional Council (STC), the Southern Resistance, the Socialist Party, the Hadramawt Inclusive Conference, the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization and the Salafist Al-Rashad party.

## CABINET'S PRIORITIES

The new government has a long and urgent to-do list. Many of the challenges it faces are not new, but rather issues left unresolved in past cabinets, which suffered from infighting and the fact most ministers did not reside in Yemen, while the year-long delay in forming the current cabinet also wasted crucial time. According to Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek Saeed, the cabinet's main priorities are “**reforming the economy, stopping the deterioration of the value of the Yemeni rial and fighting corruption.**”

Other major tasks that the new cabinet is expected to tackle are:

- Resuming implementation of the military and security aspects of the Riyadh Agreement;
- Refocusing on the humanitarian and aid file and increasing governmental coordination with international bodies that operate in this field;
- Halting the collapse of public services (electricity, water, health and education), especially in the interim capital of Aden;
- Restoring citizens' trust in the government, given that they have received broken promises and been let down in the past by the state;
- Reactivating security and civil state institutions, particularly in areas where the ongoing conflict has weakened citizens' commitment to law and order and has resulted in the appropriation of property, unregulated construction and security chaos;
- Controlling governmental expenses and fighting corruption, especially by focusing on issues that are currently the most costly to the public treasury – such as the import of petroleum products for electricity generation and fake names on the civilian and military public wage list;
- Resolving economic imbalances in the country and increasing government revenues, particularly from oil and gas exports in Marib and Shabwa;
- Increasing revenues from taxes and customs, especially from major economic actors who evade paying them, and by focusing on the collection of water and electricity bills in government-controlled areas, the majority of which go unpaid in the absence of the state's authority;
- And subjugating armed groups and forces affiliated with the parties that are part of the government to the authority of the central state and the government in Aden.



## *Chances of success*

Although the government is facing unprecedented challenges, it's supported by the circumstances during this exceptional political opening. As noted, there is generally a sense of optimism and popular trust among the Yemeni public for this new government, which should encourage the latter to work to make a tangible difference. The international community's backing of the new government also helps generally while Saudi and Emirati support for Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek specifically, given the influence of the two main players in the Arab coalition with a spectrum of Yemeni actors on the ground, should help to facilitate the cabinet's agenda.

The new cabinet also benefits from its small size and the absence of previous rivalries. Cabinet sessions were often contentious and inefficient during the tenure of the previous government, which included 36 ministers total and several deputy prime ministers. The biggest fissure was between Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek on one side, and then-Interior Minister/Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed al-Maysari and Transport Minister Saleh al-Jabwani on the other. While the prime minister retained his post in the new government, the latter two did not. The number of ministers, 24, is the smallest cabinet in Yemen's modern history. This cabinet also includes no deputy premiers, another rarity that has only occurred once before, during a brief period under former prime minister Mohammed Basindawa (December 2011- September 2014). Both of these factors should limit challenges to the prime minister's authority and help him push forward the work of the entire cabinet.

Another positive indication was that political factions participating in the government did not select their most hardline members to represent them in cabinet; rather, the ministers chosen are generally viewed as non-confrontational. For example, this is the first government in which both Islah and the STC are represented, and the ministers selected to represent each party do not have a history of personal hostility toward the other. This effort toward greater harmony starts at the top with Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek, who avoided major clashes with the country's major political stakeholders over the past two years and managed to keep open lines of communications with many rival parties, including the STC and Islah. The attacks on the airport further solidified the conviction that everyone in this government is targeted, and thus, they are in it together.

Finally, popular sentiment among government and STC supporters appears to be trending toward consensus. There is little support among Yemenis in general, and Adenis in particular, for a renewed battle for the interim capital, which remained a constant worry as fighting in neighboring Abyan governorate continued to drag on in 2020. Exhausted government and STC troops also see little point in resuming fighting. On the government side, officials prioritize the threat from the Houthi movement, which has achieved major victories on fronts in Nehm, Al-Jawf and Marib since the start of 2020, benefiting at least partially from the government's preoccupation with confronting the STC. Among STC supporters, meanwhile, there seems to be a growing realization that secession for South Yemen is unlikely in the near term, especially after the STC's declaration of self-administration in Aden and other southern governorates failed to achieve a measurable improvement in governance and service provision.

## THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Threats and challenges to the success and longevity of the cabinet may potentially come from a variety of domestic and foreign actors. These include: the new government itself, President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi, Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and the Islah party, hardline allies of President Hadi, the Houthi movement and Iran, jihadist groups Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS), the STC, UAE-backed Yemeni components other than the STC (former Aden security chief Shalal Ali Shayea, Brigadier General Tareq Saleh, the Giants Brigades), the UAE itself, and Saudi Arabia.

### *The cabinet and its performance*

While the new government has thus far seen harmony among its members, especially after the return to Aden, maintaining this unity is the first challenge this government faces. There is still a dispute between the government and the STC over unimplemented aspects of the Riyadh Agreement. For example, the handover of responsibilities to Aden's new security chief has been nominal so far, and both parties' forces still hold positions in Aden, Abyan and Lahij that they are mandated to relocate from.

The possibility of disputes simmering and resurfacing over time could lead the parties to entrench behind their various armed militias deployed in Aden and its surrounding areas. Increasing tensions may also lead the cabinet to factionalize. A cabinet made up of opposing blocs working to weaken rivals, rather than focusing on its agenda, poses the biggest threat to its own continuity and risks collapse from within.

Moreover, in the previous government Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek avoided confrontations with Yemen's main political players. This was a very tough job – to keep pleasing Hadi, his sons, Ali Mohsen, Islah, and the STC, along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE – and the strategy proved to work well. However, continuing with this approach under the new government risks him becoming a weak and paralyzed PM who avoids pushing for and taking the right decisions for the country in order to remain in his position.

It's also worth noting here that the cabinet has been formed at a time when the Central Bank of Yemen's treasury is almost empty. There are scarce government resources and the Saudi deposit to subsidize imports is about to run out. In Aden specifically, there is popular discontent over the deterioration of services and the pervasive lack of security. It will be summer soon, and if service provision, especially electricity, continues to fall short, citizens' complaints against the government may grow. Thus, a failure to achieve any real success in terms of stabilizing the economy and service provision, and normalizing life in government-held areas, will erode popular support for the new cabinet. The storming of Maashiq Presidential Palace by protesters on March 16 should serve as a warning to the government of the dangers of failing to address such issues.

### ***President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi***

President Hadi has a long history of not committing to agreements that would limit his monopoly on power. When parties attempt to contest unilateral decisions, Hadi waves the sword of 'constitutional legitimacy' granted to him as the elected head of state.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative – intended to end the political instability following Yemen's Arab Spring uprising – brought Hadi to the presidency in 2012. It stipulated that the president share authority with the prime minister, Mohammed Salem Basindwa, the representative of the opposition Joint Meetings Parties. However, Hadi was quick to disregard any illusions of power sharing and begin making decisions on his own. This included violating prerogatives reserved for the prime minister and changing cabinet ministers without consultation. This angered the other parties in government at the time, but they had no recourse to challenge the president.

In 2016, Hadi unilaterally sacked Vice President And Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, angering many Yemeni political movements along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE – which had intervened in Yemen with the stated purpose of restoring the Hadi government to power in Sana'a. However, even Riyadh and Abu Dhabi could do little to influence Hadi's behavior after he reminded them of his 'legitimacy' and how their military intervention rested on it. Hadi made a similar move in April 2017 when he sacked the UAE-backed Aden governor Aiderous al-Zubaidi. This

attempt to weaken rivals fast tracked the formation of the STC, with Al-Zubaidi as president. In October 2018, Hadi suddenly sacked Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher and referred him to investigation over 'government negligence'.

In the end, Hadi derives his power from the fact that all parties need the legitimacy he provides. In the case of Prime Minister Maeen Abdelmalek's current cabinet, Hadi still represents a threat, given that constitutional jurisdictions and his 'legitimacy' grant him more power than the components of the Riyadh Agreement that restrain his government. Thus, there remains a risk that Hadi can, without any prior warnings and based on calculations that have nothing to do with the cabinet's performance, topple the government with a stroke of a pen.

### ***Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Islah***

General Ali Moshen and Islah play the role of the fighter and the negotiator very wittingly. They are with the legitimate government's stance of engaging in dialogue and reaching consensus, but at the same time they stand ready to fight, aided by staunchly loyal forces on the ground.

As the STC seized control of Aden in August 2019, expelling the government and forces loyal to Hadi before heading east and capturing Abyan, Islah and their ally, Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, were readying for a showdown in Shabwa. They considered the governorate the last stand for the government against the STC's goal of extending control over all southern governorates. After government forces supported by Ali Mohsen and Islah defeated STC-aligned forces in Shabwa's capital Ataq, they counterattacked into Abyan and advanced toward Aden, with the goal of restoring the government to power and curtailing the STC's power once and for all. This advance, however, was halted after Emirati jets bombed government forces at the gates of Aden, prompting them to retreat to temporary bases in Shaqrah, Abyan. Seeing that the coalition would not allow a military offensive on Aden, Islah and Ali Mohsen accepted negotiations sponsored by Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, which eventually led to signing the Riyadh Agreement in November 2019. Although they reluctantly supported the deal in public, their forces stationed on the frontlines in Abyan made use of every opportunity in 2020 to attempt a military advance and override the Riyadh Agreement.



Islah and Ali Mohsen will continue to engage in politics and work to normalize the government's presence in Aden, as this represents the return of their influence to the city after years of efforts by the STC and UAE to weaken them and their allies in the interim capital. While Islah shares Aden with the STC, the latter does not share control over Marib, Shabwa, Taiz and northern Hadramawt.

Still, both Islah and Ali Mohsen pose a grave threat to the cabinet's current consensus if they perceive that the government is working against their interests and goals. It is also likely that they will try to postpone implementing aspects of the Riyadh Agreement that pertain to the withdrawal of loyalist forces from Abyan and Shabwa, as well as the mandated replacement of Shabwa governor Mohammed bin Adio, a member of Islah.

### *Hadi's hardliners*

In his struggle against the STC and the UAE, President Hadi has relied on a loyal network of political and military leaders.

The most prominent loyalists on the political level are former interior minister Ahmed al-Maysari and former transportation minister Saleh Al-Jabwani, the pair that led the government side in the losing battle against the STC in Aden in August 2019, along with Shabwa's current governor Mohammed bin Adio. The most prominent military leaders are the commanders of the Presidential Protection Brigades, army commanders, and the special security forces in Abyan and Shabwa.<sup>[2]</sup> This network of hardliners does not necessarily represent the convictions of all governmental forces. Not all the national army and the formations under the government's banner support confronting the STC and other UAE-backed forces militarily.<sup>[3]</sup>

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2) The commanders of the Presidential Protection Brigades currently present in Shagrah in Abyan are Brigadier General Sanad al-Rahwa, Brigadier General Louay Zamiki, Brigadier General Yusran al-Maqtari and Brigadier General Abdullah al-Subaihi. The army commanders in Shabwa are Brigadier General Jahdal Hanash and commander of the Ataq Military Axis Brigadier General Aziz al-Ateeqi. The commander of the Special Forces in Shabwa is Brigadier General Abdo Rabbu Laqab and the commander of the Special Forces in Abyan is Brigadier General Mohammed al-Awban.

3) There are prominent military leaders and brigades affiliated with the governmental forces in Aden and its surroundings that remained neutral in the August 2019 battle for the city. Others announced they would join the STC, like Thabet Jawas, commander of Al-Anad base in Lahij, Fadl Hassan, commander of the Fourth Military Region, and Fadl Ba'ash, commander of Special Forces in Aden.

Hadi's hardliners, well-known for their extreme hostility toward the STC and the UAE, are convinced that the legitimate government will not impose its control over southern governorates by implementing the Riyadh Agreement but rather by crushing STC-aligned forces militarily. This hostility pushed them to ally with General Ali Mohsen and Islah to battle the STC in the south both before and after signing the Riyadh Agreement. They only gave up recently under pressure from Hadi and after forces loyal to Ali Mohsen began withdrawing from frontlines in Abyan.

Hadi is faced with a problem as the Riyadh Agreement stipulates changing all leaders involved in the August 2019 clashes.<sup>[4]</sup> The STC, backed by the UAE, insists on the replacement of Governor bin Adio and military and security officials in Shabwa and Abyan, or else threatens to withdraw from the Riyadh Agreement and the government. However, this would require Hadi to sacrifice some of his most loyal allies.

Therefore, it remains likely that these loyalists will continue to work against the further implementation of the Riyadh Agreement unless Hadi and Saudi Arabia find a way to contain these players and guarantee their interests. Until then, they pose a continuous threat to the stability of the unity government.

## *The Houthis and Iran*

The government has officially accused the Houthi movement of perpetrating the attack on Aden airport with Iranian-made precision missiles. [Open-source intelligence](#) and a UN investigation also points to the Houthis as the most likely culprit, which would signify a strategic transformation in the list of Houthi targets. The group had previously targeted the defense minister and other senior military leaders, but never the government as a whole. Thus, assuming Houthi culpability in the Aden airport attack, the group poses a direct and existential threat to the current government.

4) Some of the leaders have already been replaced, such as Al-Maysari and Al-Jabwani, who were not given positions in the new cabinet. There are now fears among other loyalists, for example, Shabwa's governor Mohammed bin Adio, leader of Ataq Military Axis Aziz al-Ateeqi and commander of 21st Mika Brigade Brigadier General Jahdal Hanash, that they will also be sacrificed.

The Houthi movement believes that: 1. the consensus of the Riyadh Agreement and the end the military conflict between the government and STC has unified them against it; and 2. the government's return from Riyadh to Yemen and any potential success in reactivating the services sector and stopping the deterioration of the value of currency will strengthen it on the popular level – not only in liberated areas, but also in areas under Houthi control. This eventuality would threaten the movement's popular support and weaken its claim as the rightful representative of the government of Yemen.

Iran is likely to view any strengthening of Saudi allies in Yemen (particularly Islah and to a lesser extent, the STC) as coming at the expense of its ally, the Houthi movement. While this calculus represents a threat to the government, Iran is unlikely to take any direct action against the current government, and instead will leave the task to the Houthis.

### *AQAP and IS*

Jihadist groups Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State (IS) do not factor among the major potential spoilers to the government. While they still are capable of carrying out assassinations or attacking individual targets, their capabilities have decreased substantially since 2015-16. AQAP and IS do not pose a real challenge to the longevity of the cabinet, as they lack the ability to control large areas or key cities. As further evidence, the 'threat' posed by the jihadist groups rarely, if ever, comes up in daily discussions on the ground in Yemen.

### *The STC*

The STC achieved several wins through the Riyadh Agreement – the most important is the legitimacy gained by participating in the government and the right to be partners in authority. This is a big step up from its former status as a single-issue secessionist organization with a militant component, backed by

a foreign party. The other major victory is that it did not abandon its right to demand separation for the south in the future – despite its participation in a unity cabinet – or accept conditions that would force it to give up its military power. As a result, the STC is one of the parties most pleased with the current environment of consensus and partnership.

Still, the STC is a relatively newly-established, undisciplined grouping that is easy to provoke. It lacks extensive political experience or rooted networks in the state and across Yemeni geography compared to its main rival, Islah. Over the past few years, STC leaders have been known for their shallowness and tendency to take reckless escalatory measures that they quickly back down from. Its declaration of self-administration in the south is just one of the latest examples. In addition, it cannot be overstated that many of the STC's decisions depend on the desires and interests of its main backer, the UAE.

### ***UAE allies (other than the STC)***

#### **Shalal Ali Shayea, former Aden security chief**

While Hadi's hardline allies and the government forces in Abyan and Shabwa may act as spoilers because they feel that the Riyadh Agreement comes at the expense of their influence, former Aden security chief Shalal Ali Shayea and his forces represent a similar threat on the STC side. Over the past five years, Shayea managed to arm and mobilize more than 5,000 troops under the banner of protecting security in Aden and fighting terrorism, thanks to generous Emirati support. Today, these forces are not in harmony with the forces loyal to Aiderous al-Zubaidi or the rest of the STC.

While a new Aden security chief was appointed to reorganize security forces in Aden according to the terms of the Riyadh Agreement, it is unclear whether he will be able to exercise full authority on the ground. Shayea remains an immensely influential figure in Aden. He recently refused an appointment to be the military attaché in Yemen's embassy to the UAE, opting instead to stay in Aden. Thus, Shayea remains a looming threat, and any move against him risks igniting a crisis within the government and renewed conflict in the interim capital.

## **Brigadier General Tareq Saleh**

Brigadier General Tareq Saleh, the nephew of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and commander of the coalition-backed Joint Forces along the Red Sea Coast, was not included in any of the negotiations related to the Riyadh Agreement or in the distribution of ministerial posts. He is, however, indirectly represented in cabinet via the GPC's share.

Saleh and his forces are unlikely to represent a threat to the new government. He has repeatedly declared his neutrality in the rivalry between the government and the STC, saying his forces will only direct their weapons against the Houthis. The end of fighting between the government and the STC may also expedite the transfer of Joint Forces on the west coast – where they have remained since the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement – to other frontlines, including in Al-Dhalea and Al-Bayda.

## **Giants Brigades**

The Giants Brigades is a military strike force whose formation and arming was supervised by the UAE. Its camps extend from the west coast to Lahij and Aden and, at the end of 2020, some units deployed to frontlines in Abyan to separate government and STC forces. The Giants Brigades' mostly Salafist command has announced its relative neutrality in the government-STC conflict, but the loyalty of individual leaders is divided, with some leaning toward the government and others toward the STC. However, the fact that the Giants Brigades are mostly influenced by the major coalition parties, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, means they are unlikely to pose a direct threat to the new government.



## *The UAE*

The UAE's extreme stances toward former prime minister bin Dagher and his government, and later toward ministers Al-Maysari and Al-Jabwani, played a major role in thwarting the government's stability in previous phases in Aden. It is no secret that the UAE remains hostile toward influential components of the new cabinet, most notably Islah, which it views as the Yemeni offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite announcing its support for the cabinet and welcoming its return to Aden, it is not yet clear whether the UAE will continue to target Islah and Hadi's allies by passing its agenda through STC ministers or other allies in the government. Such an outcome would negatively affect the current consensus and stability of the government.

On the flipside, the Emiratis may see benefit in allowing a temporary truce to facilitate the government's work, especially since its most prominent Yemeni ally, the STC, is now stronger from within the government and has a legitimate cover.

## *Saudi Arabia*

Saudi Arabia is the party most concerned with implementing the Riyadh Agreement and most invested in its success. It requires continued harmony and consensus among the Yemeni parties it sponsors to proceed toward a safe exit from the country after being increasingly exhausted politically, militarily and financially over the past six years of war.

Looking at how Saudi Arabia has managed the Yemen file, it is clear that it lost control on many occasions and missed several opportunities. Most recently, after appointing Ahmad Hamed Lamlas as governor of Aden, a measure viewed as an important breakthrough in implementing the Riyadh Agreement, Saudi Arabia sent him from Riyadh to Aden without providing any financial support to cover the costs of rehabilitating the deteriorated services in Aden. Saudi Arabia also sent the new cabinet members from Riyadh on one plane without the necessary security protection or the requisite financial support to guarantee the cabinet can begin work.

This government's existence relies mostly on Saudi Arabia, and the latter is responsible before the entire world for its success or failure. Thus, Riyadh has no other choice except to throw all its weight behind the new cabinet to guarantee its success. Two immediate steps that Saudi Arabia can take to strengthen the government would be resuming implementation of outstanding military and security aspects of the Riyadh Agreement, and providing financial support to the Central Bank of Yemen in Aden and the government.

Saudi Arabia would be the biggest winner from the successful implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and consensus among the parties currently present in Aden. However, the kingdom's past mismanagement of the Yemen file, its reluctance and slow action, and a lack of requisite political and financial support represent threats to the success and permanence of this government.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendations for International Stakeholders relating to Yemen's New Government**

- Reiterate support for the internationally recognized government. The visit of EU ambassadors to Aden in February was a positive gesture of support, but additional pressure should be exerted on the parties represented in government, particularly by the UN, US and European countries, to sustain its current unity, commit to dialogue and keep lines of communication open, and put the government's interests above individual political considerations.
- Call on all parties to resume implementing the military and security aspects of the Riyadh Agreement, under the logic that all that has been achieved since signing the agreement could collapse if the two sides were to resume fighting.
- Pressure Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two main parties in the military coalition, along with President Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi and Yemeni political leaders to isolate hardliners from all sides that oppose implementing the Riyadh Agreement and pose a threat to the stability of the new government. While the UN and EU can make positive efforts in this regard, the United States remains the actor with the greatest ability to influence the behavior of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The Biden administration's increased focus diplomacy related to Yemen, exemplified in the appointment of a special envoy for Yemen, should be seen as a constructive step in Washington's ability to coordinate with, and if necessary, pressure Gulf allies, to help realize positive policy outcomes related to Yemen.
- Support government measures to tackle Yemen's economic crisis, improve the humanitarian situation, increase service provision, and fight corruption. Areas of immediate focus could include: ending the monopoly on the import of oil derivatives; activating the government's supreme economic council; and auditing and transparently accounting for state expenses related to the purchase of fuel used for electricity generation and the payment of salaries to the military, security forces and public sector employees.
- Call on Riyadh to support the Yemeni government's 2021 budget and renew its deposit at the Central Bank of Yemen to finance imports, with the goals of stabilizing the domestic currency, preventing any further deterioration in the humanitarian situation and enabling the government to better provide public services in liberated areas, especially the interim capital Aden.

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