



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 5 January 2021

The New Yemeni Government: Formation, Prospects and Challenges

Unit for Political Studies

The New Yemeni Government: Formation, Prospects and Challenges

Series: **Situation Assessment**

5 January 2021

Unit for Political Studies

The Unit for Political Studies is the Center's department dedicated to the study of the region's most pressing current affairs. An integral and vital part of the ACRPS' activities, it offers academically rigorous analysis on issues that are relevant and useful to the public, academics and policy-makers of the Arab region and beyond. The Unit for Political Studie draws on the collaborative efforts of a number of scholars based within and outside the ACRPS. It produces three of the Center's publication series: Assessment Report, Policy Analysis, and Case Analysis reports. .

Copyright © 2021 Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All Rights Reserved.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies is an independent research institute and think tank for the study of history and social sciences, with particular emphasis on the applied social sciences.

The Center's paramount concern is the advancement of Arab societies and states, their cooperation with one another and issues concerning the Arab nation in general. To that end, it seeks to examine and diagnose the situation in the Arab world - states and communities- to analyze social, economic and cultural policies and to provide political analysis, from an Arab perspective.

The Center publishes in both Arabic and English in order to make its work accessible to both Arab and non-Arab researchers.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

Table of Contents

Government Formation and Representation	1
The Sudden Announcement of the Government Formation	2
The Transitional Council in Government	2
The Fate of the Military and Security Arrangements	3
Conclusion	4



The Yemeni Information Minister Muammar Al Eryani, speaking for the government, accused the Houthi militia forces, which control the capital, Sanaa, of targeting the new Yemeni cabinet. Arriving at Aden Airport from Riyadh on 30 December 2020, cabinet members were attacked by rocket-propelled grenades that landed in the airport building. The attack killed over twenty people, most of them civilians, while no government deputy was injured. While the Houthi authority denied its connection to the attack, which apparently aimed to impede the Riyadh Agreement, or perhaps remind the next government what the balance of power in the south looks like, no other party has claimed it.

Government Formation and Representation

Thirteen months after reaching the Riyadh Agreement, on 5 November 2019, between the internationally recognized Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, on 18 December 2020, issued Resolution No. (7) for the year 2020, regarding the formation of the government. He thus implemented the first paragraph of the political arrangements stipulated in the political and economic annex of this agreement. The decision to form the government came about five months after President Hadi issued Decision No. (35) for the year 2020, according to which he tasked the former prime minister, Maeen Abdulmalik, to form the government.⁽¹⁾ The government included 24 ministers, in addition to the president, who hailed from the northern governorate of Taiz. Government portfolios were divided equally between the north and south so that the southern governorates were given 13 while the northern governorates were given 11 in addition to the position of prime minister.⁽²⁾

President Hadi has reserved the exclusive right to nominate candidates for the key defence, interior, foreign affairs and financial portfolios. Women and youth representation was neglected, along with the Tihama region, which includes the Hajjah, Raymah, Al Mahwit and Al Hudaydah governorates. Conversely, Az'zal was given three portfolios, al-Janad six portfolios, Hadramout six portfolios, Saba two portfolios, and Aden seven portfolios.⁽³⁾ All parties were given shares in government except for Deputy Speaker of Parliament Abdul Aziz Jabbari's justice and construction party, likely due to his comments against Emirati and Saudi interference in Yemen.⁽⁴⁾

Notably, the government formation did not name a deputy prime minister. The quota system in ministerial portfolios marginalized the standards of competence, integrity and appropriate experience required by the Riyadh Agreement. The southern governorates accounted for three of

1 "The Final Version of the "Riyadh Agreement" between the Yemeni Government and the Southern Transitional Council, *Anadolu Agency*, (4/11/2019), accessed on: 22/12/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3nJPgWi>.

2 Republican Decision to Form the Government and Name its Members," *Yemeni News Agency Saba*, (8/12/2020), accessed on: 22/12/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2WCeOIK>.

3 "A Parliamentary Objection ... Will the Government Enter a Crisis of Confidence with Parliament?" YouTube, 22/12/2020 at: <https://bit.ly/3aEJVMj>.

4 "Without Borders - Abdulaziz Jabbari: The UAE Wants to Become a Superpower at Our Expense so We Call on the Coalition to Leave Yemen," *Without Borders*, Al-Jazeera (YouTube), (13/9/2020), at: <https://bit.ly/2MkoF46>.



the four sovereign ministerial portfolios that were previously mentioned, and the fourth, defence, was handed over to incumbent Lieutenant General Mohammed Ali Al-Maqdashi, who hails from the northern Dhamar Governorate, under Houthi control.

The Sudden Announcement of the Government Formation

The disagreement between the politicians in the previous government and the Southern Transitional Council over the implementation of the military and security attaches from the Riyadh Agreement was the most prominent obstacle to the formation of the new government. The government demanded starting to implement provisions related to military and security arrangements before the formation of the government. These arrangements include disarming the forces of the STC, assembling them in a specific location in Aden, then removing these forces from the governorates of Aden, Abyan, Lahj, and Dhale, before being handed control of the ministries of defence and interior, in addition to Aden appointing a security director. Meanwhile, the STC was insistent on starting the formation of the new government before moving after that to implementing the military and security measures.

The matter was further complicated by the STC announcing, in April 2020, the Autonomous Administration in its areas of influence, and the imposition of its armed control over the governorate of Socotra, in June 2020. This prompted the government to resort to force to regain control.⁵ In July 2020, Saudi Arabia tried to break the deadlock by proposing a mechanism to accelerate the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, but the dispute over the division of government portfolios prevented that. The situation remained unchanged until 18 December when the agreement to form the government was suddenly announced before any military and security arrangements were undertaken.

The victory of Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, in the US presidential elections seems to have been a decisive factor in pushing towards the formation of the new government. This is because he stated during his election campaign that he will reassess the US position on the war in Yemen, the continuation of which is strongly opposed by Democrat voters. The US president-elect is also likely to reassess his country's relationship with Saudi Arabia, especially arms sales, which will have a clear impact on the military and political sides of the conflict in Yemen. The UAE seeks to anticipate any change in the US policy towards the conflict in Yemen by showing some flexibility, to preserve its role in any possible UN led political settlement that the Biden administration will push for.

The Transitional Council in Government

The STC came out of the government formation with four portfolios: transport, agriculture and irrigation, civil service and social affairs and labour. The Ministry of Transport in particular is of

⁵ "The Declaration of Self-Rule in South Yemen: Background and Implications", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Situation Assessments, 30/4/2020, accessed on 29/12/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3hFQKP2>.



great importance. Because of its control over ports, airports, and land transportation. In addition to the financial resources it generates, the STC could benefit from its control over the Ministry of Transport to strengthen its political position and enhance its military and security capabilities, especially since these forces are not yet under the government. Likewise, the transitional council's control over the important southern ports in Aden, Balhaf, Mukalla and Socotra, through the Ministry of Transport, will enhance the chances of reviving the 2008 agreement signed with Dubai Ports World over the port of Aden that the Yemeni government cancelled in 2013. Note that the Minister of Transport in the new government is related by marriage to the president of the STC, Aidarus Al Zoubaidi.

Saudi Arabia is seeking to exploit the ports of Al Mahrah Governorate, adjacent to Oman, for the purpose of exporting oil, away from the Strait of Hormuz, which is at risk of shutting down in the event of a military confrontation in the Gulf. In addition, other ministries run by the STC could secure strong support for the plans of the Saudi program for reconstruction in Yemen, which began in May 2019, according to an agreement signed by the program director, the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, Mohammed Al-Jaber, and the then Yemeni Minister of International Cooperation and Planning, Najeeb Al-Awj, who is now the Minister of Communications and Information Technology in the new government.

It seems that the transport portfolio was granted to someone close to the head of the STC as a compromise for the STC's approval of a figure close to President Hadi receiving the ministry of the interior. Two ministers from the previous government who were among the most vocal opponents of the Southern Transitional Council and the UAE were lost their place in the cabinet: the Minister of Transport, Saleh al-Jabwani, and Minister of Interior Ahmed al-Maysari. Moreover, the STC managed to secure former governor of Socotra, Salem Al-Soqotri, as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, despite previously being fired by President Hadi in mid-2017. The STC also grabbed the positions of Governor and Police Director of Aden under the division of political and security arrangements.

The Fate of the Military and Security Arrangements

As noted above, the announcement of the formation of the government was not linked to the implementation of the military and security arrangements stipulated in the Riyadh Agreement. The implementation of these arrangements - until now - has been limited to the repositioning of units of the STC forces and the government in the Abyan Governorate, and the replacement of the withdrawing forces with the Giants Brigades due to the neutrality shown by the latter. The Riyadh Agreement stipulated that the security forces of the local authority in each governorate would replace the withdrawing forces. The announcement also neglected the implementation of the provisions for the restructuring of STC forces and bypassed the decision to form and define the tasks of the presidential protection brigades⁽⁶⁾.

⁶ The Riyadh agreement assigned the first presidential protection brigade to provide security for the leaders of the STC in Aden, under the supervision of the coalition, meaning that it contains elements of the forces loyal to the STC.



In addition, the announcement failed to mention that the agreement formed the “Facilities Protection Force” and with members chosen from among the ranks of the STC affiliated government forces, to protect civilian infrastructure and government headquarters in Aden. Forces affiliated with the support brigades loyal to the STC were chosen at the expense of the Security and Public Figures Protection Police Force. The situation is mirrored in the governorates of Lahj and Abyan, adjacent to Aden. Additionally the directors of the security services in the southern governorates have yet to be appointed and the restructuring of the special forces and counterterrorism forces within the Ministry of Interior has been delayed.⁽⁷⁾

Conclusion

The implementation of the political arrangements and the neglect of much of the security and military arrangements stipulated in the Riyadh Agreement, mean that the STC obtained balanced political representation in the government, taking advantage of the pressures felt by Saudi Arabia and President Hadi with the approaching exchange of power in Washington. This situation represents a major challenge to the government in the near future. Likewise, the missile attacks on Aden airport the moment the plane carrying members of the government landed, is a clear indication of the magnitude of the military and security challenges facing the internationally recognized government. This quota agreement does not indicate unitary intentions as much as it indicates temporary accords that do not solve the entrenched problems. Rather, this papers over the cracks in the relations until they burst open again, especially as the UAE sponsored forces calling for the secession of the south can now strengthen their security capacity with governmental legitimacy despite no display of loyalty to the unity of Yemen.

⁷ “The Facilities Protection Force,” Little-Known Military Brigades and Armed Groups in Yemen: A Series, ACLED, 30/11/2020, accessed on 4/1/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/2Kw9GUg>.