

South Yemen Update

Dream no small dreams for they do not have the power to move the hearts of men

Newsletter of the Friends of South Yemen

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LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Yemen's Presidential Council announces new era

A UN brokered two-month renewable truce between the warring parties in Yemen is holding. The Presidential Council, one of the most representative in the country's history, has announced the dawn of a new era for the country and is making moves towards ushering in a lasting peace. The head of Southern Transitional Council, Major General Aidarus Qassem Al-Zubaidi is the council's deputy leader and the southerners have been given their rightful place in the new governing structure. The Houthis have not yet come to the negotiating table but the UN's Special Envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg has held discussions with both the Houthis and Iranians. And donor countries have pledged more than \$33 million to prevent a catastrophic oil spill from the FSO Safer moored off the coast Yemen.

So, for the first time since the tragic war started in 2015 there is light at the end of the tunnel as Yemen enters a new era.

Commenting on the newly formed Presidential Council and the ceasefire announced by all the parties signals some hope in ending the war as a significant confidence-building measure, FOSY's Chairman Dr Abdul Galil Shaif said. "Sanaa airport has finally been reopened allowing for commercial flights. The embargo on fuel entering the Houthi-held port of Hodeida is being lifted. These measures are designed to bring the Houthis into more meaningful negotiations with the possibility of a federal state.

"The parties also committed to reopening talks over road access to Taiz, a city in central Yemen, which the Houthis have encircled since 2016.

"So far the presidential council is in Aden and there is great anticipation on the formation of a new government. It appears that the resignation of President Hadi and his deputy Ali Mohsin is seen by many as an opportunity to start afresh with a more peaceful transition. All those united in their opposition to the Houthis are now under one leadership and hence there is a clear message to the Houthis to end the conflict once and for all. The weeks ahead will reveal the true nature of progress in this regard and whether peace will triumph over war."

Despite his optimism, Shaif is dismayed by the lack of a clear foreign relations strategy that defines Yemen's external activity for the transitional period. He criticized favoritism in appointments to the Foreign Ministry in recent years. "This has reflected negatively on the performance of our embassies and our government abroad has given a bad image of the leaders. The Council needs a comprehensive



evaluation and major changes in its appointment procedures and years of serious diplomatic work for Yemeni diplomacy to return to its natural position among peoples and nations," Shaif said.

The most positive sign of the new era is the drop in civilian casualties by over 500 percent since the two-month truce took effect in early April. The Norwegian Refugee Council - which has been providing food, shelter and

other necessities to mitigate what the United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis - said civilian casualties totalled 95 in April, down from 213 in March, citing data from the Civilian Impact Monitoring Project.

But the humanitarian situation is still dire. The United Nations World Food Program Representative in Yemen, Richard Ragan, confirmed that the truce has brought hope to Yemenis and eased the movement of humanitarian organizations and the distribution of aid. Ragan described the food situation in Yemen as "catastrophic," especially with the repercussions of the Ukrainian crisis, which he expected to raise food prices by about 30%.

Four million tons of food have been imported since 2017, and only 48,000 tons were rejected as invalid by the authorities. The Yemeni situation had improved since the truce. The ceasefire had allowed the UN to better mobilize its aid programs in the war-torn nation.

"Today's question is what will happen at the end of May? Next month will be difficult to establish the truce" he added, noting that oil tankers had docked at the port, progress is underway for operating flights from Sanaa airport, and there are talks about opening the crossings in Taiz.

In his latest briefing to the Security Council, Hans Grundberg described the truce "as a moment of respite and possibility, for pursuing peace."

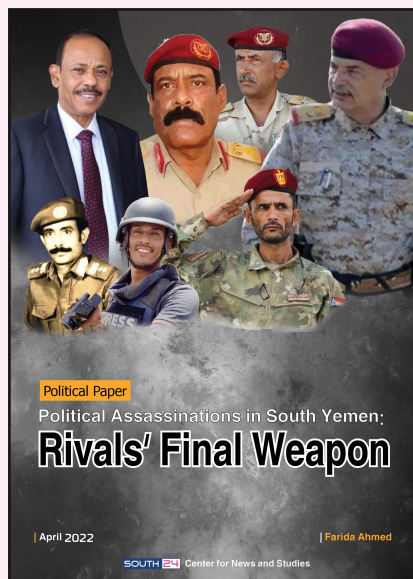
He noted that "continued commitment" is required from the Saudi-led coalition, Houthi forces, the region as a whole, and the international community, to ensure that it holds and becomes "a turning point toward peace."

The recently-announced \$3 billion economic support package that includes fuel and development assistance as well as a new \$2 billion deposit in Yemen's Central Bank bodes well for the country's economic recovery.

In Yemen there is now a rare opportunity to pivot toward a peaceful future. For the peace to be permanent and lasting all parties to the conflict must abide by the truce and be genuinely committed to finding a political solution acceptable to all parties - a grand bargain - which ensures the country never again slides into the abyss.

POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS IN SOUTH YEMEN

Rivals' Last Weapon



For the first time, an analysis paper highlights the political assassination file in South Yemen in conjunction with the recent increase in the assassination of prominent Southern political figures.

The paper, issued by South24 Center and authored by researcher Farida Ahmed reveals the scale of the intensified wave of assassinations most of which targeted influential Southern leaders and figures over several historical periods that preceded Yemeni Unity and continued after the 1994 war until after the 2014 war.

It also focused on assassinations in South Yemen from a wider perspective by presenting the reasons and the motives behind the killings.

The paper added that political assassination in Yemen is not a strange phenomenon in Yemen's modern political history. Such operations often take the lead amid unstable political and security conditions. Some parties

rely on assassination as the last tool to silence rivals and undermine their strength.

It pointed out that many details about assassination operations are still unknown or are being attributed to anonymous culprits. This hinders the work of investigation committees. Subsequently, they turn out to be mere memorial events in which people list the virtues of the victims.

According to the paper, the intensity of the assassinations increased after the Yemeni regime embraced some jihadist figures as part of its structure in the government and the army. They helped the regime in the war against the South in 1994 as admitted by the then Yemeni Prime Minister Abdulkarim Al-Eryani.

The paper also described political assassinations after the 1994 War including that of Dr Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf who was run over by a car in Sanaa's Haddah Street and Mohammed Thabet Al-Zubaidi, a founder of the anti-Saleh regime self-determination movement Hatm who was assassinated in an ambush in Al Dhale's Zabid area.

When the peaceful Southern Movement (Hirak) became increasingly active in 2007, the paper said that "the assassinations took a new and intensified curve as most operations were carried out in broad daylight. Some of them succeeded while others failed". Reports pointed out that the number of assassination operations implemented by the former Yemeni regime and its intelligence agencies from 1995 and 2007 is twice the number of people assassinated before the 1994 war. From 2009 to 2013, over 126 assassination operations were carried out against Southern military and security officials.

The paper addressed the multiple motives and reasons behind assassination operations which range from political, religious and retaliatory ones. It made a link between the recent increase of the successive assassinations and the Yemeni-Yemeni Consultations held in Riyadh amid claims that it could lead to "a broader participation of the Yemeni components in sovereign decision making especially the Southerners". This comes in light of the control of one political party over presidential decisions.

The researchers addressed the assassination operations which targeted opponents of extremist religious ideas including the two young men, Omar Batawil and Amjad Abdulrahman who were physically eliminated as well as some religious figures in Aden and Hadramout.

The paper concluded the involvement of extremist religious groups at the top of the list of perpetrators of most assassinations in Yemen as the AQAP, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Houthis are repeatedly accused. It highlighted the role played by Yemeni intelligence agencies which partially depend on these groups to carry out some operations, or they implement them independently through their security organs.

In its recommendations, the paper stated that strengthening economic, social and other policies while neglecting security would aggravate the phenomenon of assassinations. Integrative action must be adopted to enhance all policies and achieve general stability, especially after the Southern military and security forces took control of most of the Southern areas. Southern media and human rights activists should take the responsibility for following up the growing assassination files most of which are classified as terrorist operations in South Yemen.

CHRONOLOGY

Apr 16: Ten jailed al-Qaida militants escape from prison in Hadramawt.

-The Yemeni government accuses the Houthis of banning the Tarawih, night prayers during Ramadan.

Apr 17: Yemen's new leaders are "ready for war" should the latest push for peace with the Houthis fail, but a senior official tells AFP they genuinely want the years-long conflict to end soon.

-Fighting rages in Marib despite the truce.

Apr 18: The STC President and Presidential Council member Aidrous Al-Zubaidi and other Yemeni officials arrive in Aden.

Apr 19: Yemen's internationally recognized presidential council is sworn in in Aden.

-The United Nations envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg arrives in Aden as part of his efforts to consolidate the two-month truce.

Apr 20: Iran welcomes the ceasefire in Yemen, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says hoping for the launch of Yemeni negotiations with an end to the war and the removal of the siege on the country.

Apr 21: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken encourages Yemen's new leader to work towards a lasting peace amid rare bright spots after seven years of devastating war.

Apr 22: The Chairman of the new Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), Rashad al-Alimi, underlines the importance of international pressure to make the Houthis commit to the two-month truce.

Apr 23: The first commercial flight due to take off from Sanaa is cancelled as some of the passengers were travelling on passports issued by the Houthis.

-Luke Symons a British man who was held captive in Yemen without charge or trial for five years has been released from jail.

Apr 24: The Houthis make a new offer to the United Nations that includes the release of 200 prisoners from each of the warring parties before the Eid holiday.

Apr 25: The Deputy head of Yemen's Presidential Council Major General Aidaroos Al Zubaidi says while the presidential council wants peace, the option of war is also on the table if the Houthis continue their intransigence.

-The Presidential Council accuses the Houthis of seeking to renege on the two-month United Nations truce.

Apr 26: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) distributes 80.25 tons of Ramadan food baskets to underprivileged families in Al-

Mahrah which benefited 4,500 individuals.

-The Masam Project, which is supported by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, for clearing mines in Yemen, dismantled, during the third week of April 2022, a total of 1,550 mines planted by the Houthis.

Apr 27: The head of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council, Gen Rashad Al Alimi, arrives in Jeddah.

-Both the government and Houthis are accusing one another of obstructing a UN ceasefire and not resuming operations at the international airport in Sanaa.

Apr 28: The Presidential Council launches a new era.

Apr 29: The Yemeni army says two civilians were killed by the Houthis.

-Saudi Arabia sends 15,400 tons of diesel to Yemen.

Apr 30: Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince meets with the head of the Presidential Council.

-Aid agencies need \$4.3bn to help 17.3 million Yemenis as the humanitarian crisis escalates.

May 1: The Houthis strike Jeddah oil depot ahead of the F1 race.

-The Houthis claim the coalition has violated the ceasefire 124 times.

May 2: Egyptian authorities succeed in releasing 20 Egyptian sailors who were held in Yemen over the past several days over charges of trespassing into Yemeni territorial waters.

May 3: UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet call for the immediate release of two of their staff members who have been detained in Sanaa since last year.

-The family of former Houthi prisoner Luke Symons say they will push for a UK inquiry into why he remained in jail in Yemen for five years on trumped-up spying claims before any deal was made to bring him home.

May 4: The Houthis claim the Saudi-led coalition has breached the ceasefire 5,000 times.

May 5: The Saudi-led coalition frees 100 prisoners.

May 6: Suspected al-Qaida gunmen attack security headquarters in Dhala.

May 7: Houthi ceasefire violations have exceeded 3,000 since the truce took effect on April 2, Yemeni army field sources claimed adding that the Houthis intensified combat preparations and deployed more heavy military vehicles to battlefronts.

-The United Nations warns that it would cost \$20 billion to clean up an oil spill in the event of the imminent break-up of an oil tanker abandoned off Yemen.

May 8: The director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross says the organization is ready to expand cooperation with Iran, to dispatch more aid to war-torn Yemen and Syria.

-The US Navy says it is establishing a new multinational task force that would target arms smuggling in the

Women take the lead in Yemeni heritage preservation



Although Yemen is among the most conservative countries in this region, women are among the leading figures in the restoration drive. Despite opposition from some families, a number of young women have received university degrees in engineering and participated in reconstruction efforts in a field dominated by men.

Nuha Al Baqal told UNESCO that while most of her relatives opposed her decision to work in this field, she always had the support of her father who died shortly before her graduation at the head of her class several years ago. While looking for work, she learned of the UNESCO/EU project in Sanaa and received training in assessing historical and cultural properties before taking up her job. Since then she has assessed more than 3,000 damaged buildings.

The Cash for Work Project completed the restoration of the Al Qassimi district in Sanaa's Old City and has begun to rebuild private houses, the city wall, and the national museum. Al Baqal wants to carry on working until Old Sanaa is rescued and then travel to other Yemeni cities to contribute to restoration there.

The BBC reported on another Yemeni woman, Harbia Al Himiary who also signed up for the UN team to restore Sanaa's Old City. She told the BBC's culture writer Jack Needham, "I wanted to be unique in my profession, and join a field where I can break gender barriers."

She initially intended to become a doctor but switched to engineering after two weeks at university. Her parents were surprised but supported her choice. Since the current generation of Yemenis have not learned the necessary skills to rebuild damaged and destroyed buildings, al-Himiary has not only trained her team of 24 specialists but also 211 engineers, carpenters and specialists, half of whom are women. For al-Himiary, who dresses in an enveloping niqab, reconstruction of her country's cultural urban scape also means providing a means for young women to access urgently needed professions.

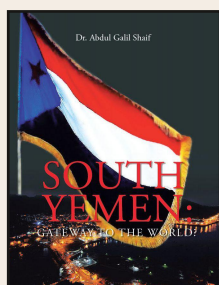
Between mid-1980s and 2006, during a period of relative peace in Yemen, Iraqi archaeologist Selma Al Radi became, the first woman to restore one of Yemen's emblematic cultural heritage sites. This is the magnificent 16th century Amiriya in Rada'a, a palace which housed one of the last Yemeni rulers of the Tahirid dynasty. Its tiny painted mosque is a gem of Islamic art, restored by a team Selma recruited in Rome. The Amiriya's architecture was borrowed from Moghul Delhi and its decoration was the work of Indian craftsmen.

A fiercely independent woman educated in India and at Cambridge University in Britain, Selma worked in Cyprus, the Iraq Museum in Baghdad and the Yemeni Museum in Sanaa before she saw and fell in love with the Amiriya. Selma raised the money and assembled a team which reinvented the materials and recovered the skills used in the construction of the Amiriya 500 years earlier. Selma spent 23 years this hard labour of love.

Selma was awarded the Aga Khan Prize for Architecture. Selma also has the honour of being a female pioneer in the restoration of Yemen's cultural heritage. She would be proud that today Yemeni women are following her example with commitment and dedication.

Michael Jansen, *The Jordan Times*

Extract from South Yemen: Gateway to the World

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Afghan Arabs in Yemen

1990-1994 was a period when Salih, with the support of Ali Mohsin, began the process of recruiting the Afghan Arabs returning from Afghanistan with the tacit support of Western states. These Afghan Arabs, mostly Yemenis were seen by the US and the UK at the time of fighting against the Soviet Union as freedom fighters—as they were widely known. They arrived in the south under the leadership of Ali Mohsin with numerous leaders including Tariq Al Fadhli and became a useful military tool for Salih against what they perceived as southern communists closely connected with the Soviet communists.

Some members of this group later developed into the AQAP branch in Abyan south Yemen with other members spreading widely around the country but mostly settling in South Yemen.

In his book, *The Last Refuge*, Gregory Johnsen addressed the discrepancies between Yemen and other Arab governments in their support for the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviets, especially as more Arab fighters travelled to Afghanistan in the mid-1980s. Johnsen noted that most Arab governments “publicly supported the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan while privately discouraging their young men from traveling to Afghanistan.” In contrast, the northern Yemen Arab Republic sent many of their fighters including a good number from the South to the front lines, with the journey becoming a rite of passage for many.

After the “Mujahidin” returned to a unified Yemen in the early 1990s, they were welcomed as heroes by northerner President Saleh’s government—with some even receiving official military positions. Ali Mohsin during this period and his close connections with these mujahidin was working very hard to indoctrinate these men to fight in support of Salih and the unification of the republic. Much of the finance to support these mujahidin was channelled through various networks but mostly through the ministry of defence. There was no diplomatic or military resistance to the mujahidin engagement in Salih’s forces mainly because at the time these mujahidin were not perceived as enemy combatants.

Summer Ahmed working for the UN on women’s issues, described the situation during the first years of unity. She said that this deep rift in ideology would play a role in “returning Afghan Arabs” attitudes towards the south. When civil war broke out in the summer of 1994, the northern jihadis overran South Yemen, armed with a religious fatwa justifying the killing of Socialist infidels in the south. The fatwa came from the northern Yemeni Justice Minister Abdul Wahab Al Daylami and the religious cleric Abd Al-Majid Al-Zindani, now on the U.S. Global Terrorist list.

As the International Crisis Group notes, Salih and his general Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar relied on these forces as proxies, rewarding some of these men afterwards. After northern groups defeated the southern military forces, the “Afghan Arabs” never left. Instead, they became the arm of the northern government in southern Yemen, used to defend and protect the Yemeni union.

The government’s attitudes towards extremists in the country were called into question through a series of government appointments, the most famous of these being the “returning Afghan Arabs” including Tariq Al-Fadhli and Jamal Al-Nahdi, as well as current Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. The former, considered one of the founding members of AQAP, served in the Majlis al-Shura council and Salih’s General People’s Congress party. Al-Nahdi was also on a permanent committee of the General People’s Congress—despite his role in the 1992 bombing of the several hotels under the direction of Osama bin-Laden. Moreover, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, who also played a major role in Saleh’s government, is widely seen in the south as a man with deep connections to the south’s extremist elements. Ultimately, through empowering men such as these and through a variety of restrictive policies, the Northern-based government took full control of the south, implementing unity by force.

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waters around Yemen, the latest American military response to Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

May 9: An estimated 77 percent of the 4.3 million people displaced in Yemen are women and children, according to factsheets released by UNDP.

May 10: In a video conference the Iranian Foreign Minister’s Senior Advisor for Special Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji and the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Yemen, Hans Grundberg discussed peaceful solutions to the Yemeni crisis.

May 11: Yemen’s government has agreed to allow Houthi-issued passport holders to travel outside Yemen, removing a major obstacle that had stalled resumption of commercial flights from Sanaa under a truce deal.

-United Nations envoy to Yemen Hans Grundberg arrives in Aden as part of his efforts to consolidate the two-month truce in the country.

May 12: King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, has directed to transfer Yemeni Siamese twins Mawaddah and Rahmah from Yemen to the King Abdulaziz Medical City of the National Guard in Riyadh to conduct medical examinations and check on the possibility of separating them.

-The humanitarian shortfall, is forcing the WFP to make hard decisions about how to distribute food aid fairly in Yemen.

May 13: The Saudi-led said it transported more than 100 freed prisoners to Yemen in coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross in a humanitarian initiative to support the UN-brokered truce.

-New investigations by an NGO coalition have highlighted the impact of arms sales from Spain and elsewhere in Europe on the long and bloody war with Yemen, which has cost hundreds of thousands of civilian lives.

May 14: Saudi Arabia executes two Saudis and a Yemeni after they were found guilty of terrorism charges.

-The Presidential Leadership Council in Yemen mourned, with great sadness and sorrow, the passing of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan the President of the United Arab Emirates.

-An aid to Iran’s foreign minister says the ongoing UN-brokered ceasefire in Yemen is a unique opportunity to politically resolve the Yemeni crisis.

May 15: Save Nimisha Priya International Action Council is exploring all options including getting a pardon for an Indian nurse facing capital punishment in Yemen for allegedly killing a Yemeni businessman in 2017.

-Brig Gen Saleh Ali Al Dharhani, the commander of the joint operations forces in Aden, survives an assassination attempt.

-An oil pipeline in eastern Yemen was blown up and set on fire by unidentified gunmen for the second time in a month.