

South Yemen Update



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

Ignore the legitimate demands of southern Yemen at your peril: STC official warns during charm offensive to the West

The current situation in Yemen is highly fragile, Amr Al Beidh, President Adrius Al Zubaidi's special representative on foreign affairs warned during a charm offensive to the West in which he sought to explain the position of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) to Western politicians and decision makers.

During a discussion meeting in London which was also attended by prominent STC members, Shaikh Harhara and Mohammed Alsaahmi and Dr Abdul Galil Shaif and journalist Neil Patrick who focuses on Yemeni affairs, Al Beidh emphasised that there is no fully functioning state in Yemen and the balance of power remains uncertain. Efforts to suppress the STC risk further destabilisation, particularly given the ongoing threat posed by the Houthis and the absence of a strong counterweight in the South.

Ultimately, the STC maintains that any lasting solution must involve genuine representation of Southern aspirations. It continues to push for recognition within the political processes while relying on its popular support to sustain its position. The organisation argues that excluding it will not resolve the conflict, but rather deepen it.

Al Beidh's visit to London, Geneva and the USA followed the bombing of STC forces by the Saudi airforce when they took control of all South Yemeni territory in Operation Promising Future at the beginning of December last year. The STC was welcomed by the people who raised southern flags and photos of Adrius Al Zubaidi.

After the bombing in January 2026 the Saudis installed a puppet Saudi-backed administration in south Yemen which falsely claimed the STC has been dissolved after some of its members were forced to issue statements in favour of the Saudi takeover under duress while attending a meeting in Riyadh.



Amr Al-Bidh

In an introduction to the STC, Al Beidh said that it was established as a continuation of the Southern liberation movement that began in the early 2000s. It formally joined the Yemeni government in 2019, emerging from a combination of Southern resistance forces and the broader Southern movement. Over time, the STC became a key political and military actor in southern Yemen.

Up until 2026, the STC played a major role in stabilising much of the South. Its forces were heavily involved in fighting extremist groups and maintaining security, with the primary objective of preventing hostile forces—particularly from the North—from entering southern territories. In some cases, STC-aligned forces even conducted operations beyond their area to pre-empt threats.

Alongside its military role, the STC also participated in governance. It joined the government, provided services, and sought to represent the Southern cause within peace negotiations. However, tensions escalated, particularly following events in late December and early January, including developments in eastern regions such as Hadramawt and Al-Mahra.

The Saudi-led intervention in early January marked a turning point. Questions were raised about its legality and motivations, but more broadly it reflected a shifting global dynamic in which states increasingly act based on perceived national interests rather than established norms. From the STC perspective, the intervention—framed by Saudi Arabia as a matter of national security—resulted in direct military action against Southern forces.

On the ground, the STC continues to operate as a political movement. While it emphasises peaceful resistance and political engagement, it warns that



continued repression—such as closing offices, arresting activists, or using force—could escalate tensions and potentially lead to wider instability.

Amr Al Beidh is the son of Ali Salem Beidh who

served as the General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in South Yemen and as Vice President of Yemen following the unification in 1990.

The meeting was chaired by Karen Dabrowska, former Director of Communications of Friends of South Yemen who drew attention to the fact that when the STC offices were closed by Saudi-backed government the people reopened them by force.

“Yemen, cannot become a pawn of Saudi Arabia to establish its hegemony over the Gulf. When the British withdrew, they sought to leave behind a Federation of South Arabia an umbrella for a collection of emirates, not unlike how seven separate emirates and sheikhdoms united under the umbrella of the United Arab Emirates. With the Hadramawt still demanding autonomy

and Aden rejecting Saudi rule, a state of South Arabia remains the only model that can put Humpty-Dumpty – the failed Yemeni state which has fallen off the wall - back together again. The only question is how many Yemenis and Saudis die before Mohammed bin Salman recognizes that,” Ms Dabrowska said in an introduction to the meeting.



Karen Dabrowski

Building Bridges in Yemen: A Gulf Opportunity to Stabilize the South

Recent geopolitical shifts in the Middle East are reshaping Yemen's strategic landscape. This evolving context presents an opportunity for Gulf states to pursue a Yemen policy that prioritizes the country's long-term stability. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates could play a vital role in this effort, provided they reconcile their policy differences over the separatist movement in South Yemen.

One of the most consequential of these developments is the weakening of Iran's regional leverage. Mounting economic pressure, diplomatic isolation and security challenges across several fronts have constrained Tehran's ability to sustain influence through its proxy networks. This has direct implications for Yemen, where the Houthis have benefited significantly from Iranian political and military support.

A report by a UN Panel of Experts on Yemen has highlighted how Iranian support has enhanced the Houthis' missile and drone capabilities, enabling the group to conduct attacks not only within Yemen but also against regional infrastructure and maritime shipping routes. Should Iran's ability to maintain support for the group decline, the Houthis' operational reach and political leverage will diminish, thereby creating space for new political arrangements to stabilize the country.

Gulf strategic realignment and opportunities for cooperation

For Saudi Arabia, the evolving regional context presents an opportunity to reassess its Yemen policy. Over the past decade, Riyadh's approach to Yemen has largely been driven by immediate security concerns, particularly the necessity to counter Houthi expansion and limit Iranian influence along Saudi Arabia's southern border. While these priorities remain relevant, changing regional dynamics may enable Saudi Arabia to adopt a broader strategy that emphasizes long-term stability over short-term security considerations.



The Middle East is undergoing profound geopolitical transformations driven by shifts in global power balances, evolving alliances and intensifying conflicts. While analyst often focuses on the impact of such changes on major regional players, these developments also affect fragile states. Yemen, in particular, has become a key arena for regional competition, and the recent geopolitical developments are reshaping the country's strategic landscape.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) could play a vital role in this expansive strategy.

Although tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE have intensified in recent years due to their competing visions over Yemen's political future, especially regarding the role of the Emirati-backed southern separatists, the wider regional security environment is shifting rapidly.

Escalating tensions following the US and Israeli attacks on Iran, which prompted an Iranian retaliation on shipping routes and energy infrastructure in the Gulf, have underscored the interconnected nature of Gulf security.



through which an estimated 10–12% of global seaborne trade passes via the Red Sea corridor. Ensuring security along these waterways is therefore both a regional priority and a matter of global economic significance.



In this context, current regional instability may paradoxically create an opportunity for cooperation, as heightened security threats often encourage greater coordination among partners who share common security vulnerabilities. The issue of Southern Yemen could therefore transform from a point of divergence into a platform for renewed strategic cooperation between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Current regional dynamics offer Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, the opportunity to expand their role in Yemen beyond short-term security objectives. Moreover, geopolitical developments provide an opportunity for Abu Dhabi and Riyadh to reconcile, thereby contributing to a more stable future for southern Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula.

Stabilization prospects in Southern Yemen

Despite years of conflict, Yemen’s southern regions have retained relatively functional security structures and administrative institutions. These local capacities provide a solid foundation for broader stabilization efforts in the region focused on governance reform, economic recovery and institutional development. Through coordinated Gulf support, strengthening such capacities could help create conditions conducive to sustainable stability.

However, it is vital for southern political actors to strengthen governance performance and demonstrate commitment to inclusive and accountable administration. Yemen’s long-term stability will ultimately depend on political arrangements that reflect realities on the ground and address the aspirations of the country’s diverse regions.

The past decade of conflict has demonstrated that a military approach alone cannot deliver lasting peace in Yemen. Durable stability in the country will depend on political inclusion, effective governance and partnerships rooted in local legitimacy.

This is particularly important given South Yemen’s strategic geographic location. The region borders the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the world’s most vital maritime chokepoints,



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