

Yemen: US-brokered presidential elections held with single candidate

Will Morrow
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Presidential elections were held on Tuesday in Yemen as part of a US-brokered agreement that retains the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh without Saleh himself. Underscoring the fraudulent character of the elections, Mansour Al-Hadi, Saleh's vice president for 17 years, was the sole candidate.

Hadi, a former general in South Yemen who was appointed vice president by Saleh in 1994 following reunification with the north, is expected to be officially inaugurated on Monday. He will remain president for at least two years before new elections are held.

According to election officials, only 60 percent of the population turned out to vote, and as little as 40 percent in parts of the south. Thousands protested in the capital on the day of the vote to call for Saleh, who until recently was residing in the United States, to be placed on trial. According to Al Jazeera, similar protests have taken place daily in the lead-up to the election. More than 100,000 soldiers were reportedly deployed to polling stations nationally.

The elections are part of an agreement orchestrated by the Obama administration with the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In November 2011, Saleh signed the agreement on behalf of his General People's Congress (GPC) after it had been signed by the official parliamentary opposition—the Joint Meeting Parties. The JMP is a coalition of the Islamist Al-Islah Party and the Stalinist Yemeni Socialist Party, which ruled South Yemen until reunification in 1990.

Under the agreement, the JMP has been provided with 17 of the 34 seats in the new government cabinet. Both the JMP and GPC have supported Hadi as a “consensus candidate.”

Since protests against Saleh began in January 2011, the Obama administration's sole concern has been to salvage the regime, with which the US has developed

close security ties over the past decade. Security forces, likely trained and financed by the US, have killed hundreds of unarmed protesters over the past year. As part of the power transfer agreement, the parliament voted last month to provide blanket immunity to all government and security officials.

At a news briefing on Tuesday, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland cynically hailed the “very strong and positive referendum by the Yemeni people on the transition process that their leaders have agreed to.” She added, “It was obviously a democratic election.” Britain, France, China and Russia also issued positive statements following the election.

In a letter read out by Chief Counterterrorism Advisor John Brennan, who met with Hadi last weekend, President Obama declared to the Yemeni population: “I know you face challenges ahead, but I am optimistic that Yemen can emerge as a model for how peaceful transition in the Middle East can occur when people resist violence and unite under a common cause.”

Clearly, this “model” for transition applies only to regimes deemed supportive of the strategic and economic interests of US imperialism. In Libya and Syria, a different modus operandi has been employed. In those countries, the US, Britain and France have supported armed opposition groups in order to stoke up violence, which was then used to justify imperialist intervention aimed at regime-change.

Brennan told the *Washington Post* on Tuesday that the US would now consider increasing its financial assistance to Yemen's military. He said, “We are looking at their needs,” including logistical support, to “give them the ability to move forces to areas where Al Qaeda now has a strong foothold.”

Saleh left the US on Wednesday, where he has resided since January 28 ostensibly to receive medical

treatment for injuries he sustained in a bomb blast last June. It is unclear whether he will retire or attempt to remain active in Yemen's political life. Deputy Information Minister Abdul Al-Janadi insisted, "There is no rule barring Ali Abdullah Saleh from continuing his career as a politician," according to the *Guardian* newspaper. "We all expect him to remain in the political picture for the foreseeable future," Janadi added.

The bourgeois GPC-JMP government relies on the support of supposedly "left" figures to suppress mass hostility to the agreement and prevent a movement of the working class and oppressed masses from developing in opposition to the entire political establishment.

A particularly foul role has been played in this respect by Tawakkul Karman, a senior member of the Al-Islah party, who camped out with protesters in Change Square near Sana'a University from the beginning of 2011. After being awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, Karman travelled to the US in October to meet with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In the lead-up to the election, Karman told the *Guardian*: "Hadi's presidency is one of the successes of the Yemeni youth revolution that ousted Saleh from power... I urge the youth to participate and vote."

At the same time, so-called revolutionary youth coalitions established last year, many with ties to the JMP, have lined up behind the agreement. Walid al-Emari from the Supreme Coordination Council of the Yemeni Revolution was quoted by the Iranian *Al-Imam* newspaper as saying: "We affirm that we are keen on taking part in these elections, as they are considered a referendum for revolutionary legitimacy and our means of extracting our right to topple the autocrat and his fictitious legitimacy."

In the northern governorate of Saada, a boycott call was issued by al-Houthi Zaidi, an ethnic Shiite group. Government officials claim armed fighters from the secessionist Southern Movement, which also boycotted the elections, were behind a series of attacks on polling booths in southern Yemen that killed two police officers and a soldier. According to the *Telegraph*, a ten-year-old child was among those killed in a fire-fight between police and secessionist fighters.

The secessionist movement is exploiting widespread popular hostility to the US-brokered agreement and the

absence of any opposition to the deal in the political establishment to promote its demand for an independent southern state. Such a perspective would benefit only the narrow interests of the richest layers in the south, where the majority of Yemen's oil is deposited, who want a greater share of the country's wealth.

The agreement signed by Saleh states that all protests against the regime must come to an end. There can be no doubt that the JMP-GPC government will utilise the election to claim that popular opposition to the regime is illegitimate and justify violent crackdowns on protesters.



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