Houthi insurgents seize Yemen's presidential palace

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Houthi Shia militants forcibly entered Yemen's presidential palace after overpowering security forces in capital city of Sanaa Tuesday.

The militants seized arms caches and military vehicles located on the palace grounds, established checkpoints and launched new patrols throughout the city. The Houthi fighters also captured a rocket base near Sana'a as well as strategic positions overlooking the city, according to reports.

Intense fighting in Sanaa on the previous day killed at least 9 and wounded 90, as Houthi militants bombarded government buildings and seized control of state-run media facilities. As of Wednesday morning, Houthi fighters riding on armored vehicles were posted outside of both the palace and Yemeni president Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi's private residence.

Yemeni officials immediately described the moves as a coup d'etat.

"This is a coup. There is no other word to describe what is happening but a coup," top officers of the Presidential Protection Force told the Associated Press.

"The President has no control," another top Yemeni official told CNN Tuesday as fighting continued.

In brief televised remarks immediately following the takeover, rebel leader Abdulmalik Houthi insisted that Tuesday's incursions into the presidential compound resulted from a "security incident" and did not represent an effort to overthrow the Hadi government.

Houthi threatened that the offensive would continue unless the Hadi-led government entered a negotiation process to implement the terms signed by Hadi after the Houthi takeover of Sanaa in September 2014, through which the Houthi leaders are seeking integration into the top civilian and military institutions of Yemen.

The militants "will not hesitate to impose any necessary measures to implement the peace and partnership agreement," Houthi said.

Wednesday evening, Hadi agreed to constitutional changes demanded by the Houthis in exchange for a vow to leave the presidential grounds, according to Yemeni media outlet SABA. The latest deal will grant the militant group an even greater share of state power than the previous draft constitution.

The capture of Sanaa last September by Houthi forces, after a four-day assault by the militants, left some 340 dead. It was the culmination of an extended campaign against the central government waged by the group since 2004, which has left the insurgents in control of nine provinces in the north of the country.

Tuesday's events, which may have struck the final blow to Hadi's remaining legitimacy, will likely spur secessionist forces in the south seeking to retain a greater share of southern oil resources for local elite layers. A power vacuum is opening up in Yemen comparable to those filled by Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, according to Riad Kahwaji of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis. Without outside intervention to stabilize the official government, Yemen risks descending into social chaos comparable to that created by the 2011 NATO war against Libya, Hadi spokesperson Rajih Badi said Wednesday.

Reports of desperate food shortages and new outbreaks of violence across the country substantiate these assessments.

Overlooking waters along the Bab al Mandab strait, where cargo ships transport some 3 million barrels of oil per day, Yemen's destabilization has enormous strategic significance for the US and its Gulf allies, which have issued official statements denouncing the Houthi moves as an illegal coup.

The US remains "firmly committed" to backing the Hadi government, according to an official response from US State Department. As of Monday evening, however, US Navy warships were positioned off the coast in preparation to evacuate the US embassy, according to CNN. Arab leaders met in Riyadh Wednesday for emergency discussions to coordinate a collective response.

For the Obama administration, the Houthi coup represents yet another policy debacle in the Middle East. The "peaceful transition" to the Hadi government, orchestrated by the Obama State Department in league with the Saudi monarchy

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and touted as a "model" for policymakers globally, has now fully unraveled.

Until 2011, Hadi's predecessor, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was a favored pawn of US imperialism, described by the *New York Times* as "a long time autocrat and ally of the United States."

Saleh built up a governing coalition around his family network that enabled him to remain in power for 30 some years, leading the government of North Yemen for over a decade before unification in 1990. Saleh allowed heavy involvement by the US military and CIA in Yemeni affairs, including the organization of armed gangs to serve as proxy forces for the US, numerous drone strikes and the deployment of US Special Forces teams inside the country.

The so-called Yemeni Revolution of 2011, despite being contained under the leadership of non-working class political forces, fatally destabilized the Saleh government. When a major section of tribal elites turned decisively against Saleh in May 2011, Yemeni police and military forces loyal to Saleh killed hundreds of protesters in an attempt to shore up the regime.

In response to the region-wide 2011 "Arab Spring" protest movements, US imperialism sought to prop up its neocolonial regimes by orchestrating new power-sharing agreements. By integrating certain opposition elements into the existing states, imperialist planners sought to dissipate the protest movement before it began to catalyze a broader mass movement in the working class.

The transitional agreement drawn up by the Obama administration and Saudi monarchy and imposed on Yemen by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), upheld unconditional immunity for all involved in the mass killings of protestors in 2011.

Saleh's family members and close associates were left in control of major government departments. This included Saleh's son, who as head of an elite military unit oversaw the massacre of protesters during the 2011 upsurge.

Saleh then signed the GCC's transitional agreement on behalf of his General People's Congress (GPC) party in November 2011.

The GCC agreement provided the foundation for a new coalition of the country's right-wing and supposedly left-wing parties, all of which are hostile to the working class. The Stalinist Yemeni Socialist Party, which ruled the USSR-aligned South Yemen until embracing unification with the Saleh regime in the north in 1990, signed the agreement, with the Islamist Al-Islah Party as part of a political alliance called the Joint Meeting Parties (JPM).

The agreement came to fruition in February 2012, when Hadi became president, receiving 99.8 percent of the vote in a one-man election. His term in office will apparently be far shorter than that of his predecessor, despite the hopes of the Obama administration.

Just three years after boycotting Hadi's election, the Houthi have succeeded in imposing a new constitutional order, forcing the new president to accept their terms at gunpoint, while occupying his private home as well as the official state residence.

They have done so despite the more than $340 million in US aid money that has gone to the Hadi regime since 2011, most of it flowing to the security apparatus. Yemen's military is slated to receive another $125 million from the US in 2015 alone.

Through their opposition to the Saleh and Hadi regimes, which carried out violent repression against Shia tribal groups in the north and against the mass protests that began in January 2011, the Houthi have been able to channel anti-government and anti-imperialist sentiments by draping their sectarian power struggle in populist and "revolutionary" appeals.

"The revolution continues," read a banner strung up behind the Houthi leader as he spoke Tuesday. The official Houthi flag prominently features an anti-Israeli and anti-American saying.

In reality, the Shia insurgents have nothing to offer the workers and oppressed masses. They are primarily concerned with increasingly their share of state power and gaining access to the lavish military aid doled out by US imperialism to client regimes throughout the region.

In the words of a 2014 US State Department report, the Houthi are seeking to "maximize their position in Yemen's internal powers structure through a redrawing of the federal regions that would formally provide them with an outlet to the Red Sea and/or access to oil pipelines, reserves, or export facilitates."

This analysis is already being confirmed by the Houthi leadership's efforts to integrate their militias into the existing state machinery.

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