

Yemeni president resigns as Houthi insurgents consolidate control over capital

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With Houthi militants still stationed in front of Yemen's presidential palace, President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi announced his resignation from Yemen's government Thursday. Hadi's prime minister and entire cabinet also resigned.

The Houthi rebels continued to press new demands Thursday, even after Hadi accepted major political concessions including constitutional changes granting the Houthis a substantial share of state power.

Hadi's resignation marks a major defeat for US-Saudi efforts to counter the growing breakdown of Yemen's political order since mass protests in 2011. From late 2011, the US-Saudi controlled Gulf Cooperation Council oversaw a managed transition process that left elements of the old US-backed dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh regime in control of key departments and placed Hadi in the presidency through a one-man election in February 2012.

Since 2001, the US government provided massive funding for Saleh's military and "counterterrorism" units, as well as developing training programs for Yemeni special forces.

The Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have carried out systematic assassination programs in Yemen for years, with each maintaining its own kill list of potential targets in areas across the country. These operations were conducted in close collaboration with both the Saleh and Hadi governments.

The US military maintained an undisclosed number of liaison officers in Yemen to coordinate its drone strikes and special forces raids with the Hadi government. A joint US-Yemeni military compound near Sanaa served as the center for the drone war in Yemen.

A US State Department official told Reuters that the US Embassy remains open for now. According to Reuters, "US authorities have made clear they want to avoid shutting the compound, which is important for counterterrorism cooperation with Yemeni security forces..."

The fall of the Hadi government is the culmination of an extended civil war within Yemen, involving conflicts

between forces backed by different regional and imperialist powers. Less than three years after Hadi assumed the presidency, the Houthi militias (which belong to the Zadi branch of Shia Islam and have been supported by Iran) seized control of Yemen's capital of Sanaa. Hadi (supported by the US and Saudi Arabia) had since been forced to rule the country from his private residence and presidential compound.

Immediately after seizing the capital, the Houthi leaders signed a Peace and National Power Sharing Agreement (PNPA) with Hadi and various elements of the political establishment. The PNPA provided for the Houthi to be integrated into the existing governmental structures in exchange for the insurgency's disarmament.

Far from disarming, the Houthis continued to press their advantage in the months following the fall of Sanaa, expanding their areas of control.

The Houthis have exploited the sharpening class antagonism between the masses and the Yemeni ruling elite to bolster their image as a "revolutionary" insurgency. The group has emblazoned anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans on its banner in an effort to appeal to the Yemeni masses' hatred of imperialism.

When, in July 2014, the Hadi government enforced an end to fuel subsidies, the Houthis responded by demanding the reinstatement of the subsidies and calling for mass demonstrations against the government.

As a result, the Houthis were able to win some degree of popular sympathy "far beyond their core support base," according to an International Crisis Group analysis from late 2014.

By the time Houthi-organized protests in Sanaa developed into an armed struggle for control of the city, the government was so thoroughly discredited that the militants were able to take the capital with relatively light resistance.

However, the Houthis represent the interests of factions of northern Yemen's semi-feudal property-owning elite. They have risen to power on a wave of growing social turmoil, as the force that proved most capable, in the short run, of filling

the political vacuum that is opening up across the region. The insurgency serves narrow sectarian interests, and does not offer a political program capable of unifying the country or pointing a way forward for the masses.

The Houthis have made clear that they have no intention of dismantling the security forces built up under Saleh, and are open to compromises with other sections of the Yemeni elite. Even after Tuesday's assault on the presidential palace, Houthi leader Abdulmalik Houthi claimed that the attack aimed at enforcing the terms of the PNPA, and that the group continued to recognize the legitimacy of President Hadi and the constituted government.

The Houthi leadership, who have reportedly benefited from Iranian support, have even made implicit overtures to US, presenting themselves as a potential proxy force against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

An orchestrated political-media campaign is underway to utilize the Houthi takeover as propaganda fodder for the ongoing escalation of military operations across most of Africa and the Eurasian landmass. Central to this campaign is the claim that Yemen's Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), whose supposed status as the "most deadly" Al Qaeda affiliate is endlessly repeated by the capitalist media, will take advantage of the fallout from the Houthi takeover to launch new terrorist attacks.

Fox News led its report on the developments in Yemen by citing claims of unnamed US government officials that the Yemen-based AQAP is collaborating with the "Khorasan Group"—a fictitious entity invented by US intelligence—in Syria to attack commercial airplanes with bombs embedded in electronic gadgets.

The Houthi advance also threatens to derail ongoing covert operations by US military and intelligence units inside Yemen according to unnamed US officials cited by Fox News.

US politicians are making similar noises. "The government is hanging by a thread. This has really scrambled our counterterrorism strategy there and it gives al-Qaeda a great new opportunity," Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff said Thursday.

"A dangerous situation just went from bad to worse with grave implications for our counterterrorism efforts. Our relationship with the Yemen government has been vital in confronting [al-Qaeda] and keeping the pressure on its leadership, and every effort must be made to continue that partnership," Schiff said.

Despite these declarations, there is substantial evidence to support suspicions—widely shared among Yemenis—that AQAP maintains close ties to "powerful elements in the government," according to a Foreign Policy report published this week.

Indeed, none other than Yemen's longtime US-backed dictator Saleh—himself an enthusiastic proponent of the US "war on terror"—reportedly contracted the services of AQAP last year as part of efforts to destabilize the Hadi government. AQAP carried out "assassinations and attacks against military installations" on behalf of Saleh, according to a November 2014 report by a UN security council committee.

Without explanation, the UN report was modified weeks later to accuse Saleh of support for unnamed "violent groups."

The Houthi takeover will only intensify the political and economic crises gripping Yemen. Yemen's economy has avoided collapse in recent years largely through the infusion of billions of dollars in economic aid from Saudi Arabia's semi-feudal elite. These are reportedly being cut off by the Saudis in response to the Houthi victories.

The Houthi decapitation of the official government has fueled the growth of secessionist forces in southern Yemen, which are seeking support from the Saudi monarchy for their plans to establish nominally independent micro-states in southern Yemen.

Already numerous experts are pointing to the possibility that the Houthi takeover will unravel the unified political structure established in 1990—amid the worldwide wave of political reaction accompanying the dismantling of the Soviet Union—under the hegemony of the Saleh regime.

Conditions are emerging for "a sectarian conflict that the country has never experienced," according to a December ICG report. Following the strategy of its US and Saudi godfathers, AQAP is fomenting sectarian conflict through calls for war against Shi'ite population as part of its long-term strategy in Yemen, according to ICG.

All of this raises the prospect that the imperialist powers—including France as well as the United States—will intervene directly to ensure their domination of the region. Such an intervention threatens to develop into a broader regional war engulfing the entire Middle East.



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