

Shia insurgents disband US-backed Yemeni government

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Tribal-based militant groups associated with the Houthi insurgency moved last week to dissolve Yemen's parliament and other official government institutions, completing a slow-motion process that began last September when the insurgents seized effective control of the capital Sanaa.

After laying siege over the four intervening months, the militants took over the presidential palace and personal residence of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi in January, conducting negotiations with Hadi at gunpoint in his home.

Hadi initially agreed to Houthi demands for control of large sections of the Yemeni state, but he resigned within days, together with the country's prime minister and leading cabinet members. The Houthis have taken advantage of the ensuing power vacuum to establish a new "Revolutionary Committee," and they are currently engaged in discussions aimed at formation of some sort of coalition government.

Yemen has been a critical base of operations of American imperialism, and the Obama administration is currently considering means to maintain its control. This includes the option of working with the Houthis, despite Obama's recent enthusiastic celebrations of the toppled Hadi regime as a "model" for US policy throughout the region.

The US developed close relations with long-time Yemeni ruler Ali Abdullah Saleh and his successor. Saleh left office in 2012, and his successor Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi worked closely with a US special envoy to coordinate Yemen's participation in the "war on terror." Both Saleh and Hadi also relied on financial support from Saudi Arabia, a chief US ally in the region, which has cut off aid in response to the Houthi takeover.

Indicating that the Obama administration is willing to

work with the Houthis to insure the continuity of the US drone war and US special forces operations targeting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), an administration official told the *Los Angeles Times*, "We're talking with everybody, everybody who will talk with us." Thus far, however, the Houthis have reportedly refused to meet with US emissaries.

"The central question for US officials is whether that next government can be persuaded to join in counterterrorism against Al Qaeda at all—let alone as enthusiastically as the last government," the *Times* noted.

While framed in terms of a struggle against Al Qaeda, the main concern of US imperialism is to ensure that it controls Yemen, which occupies a key geostrategic position, particularly for oil transport.

At the same time, other factions of the US state have called for military action against the Houthis. Senator John McCain has called for more "boots on the ground" and has demanded a region-wide military escalation against Iran and its allies, including the Houthis.

The Houthi takeover demonstrates that "Iran is on the march" throughout the Middle East, McCain has warned.

In a paper released in late January, Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), pointed to the strategic interests at stake for the American ruling class. "The United States has been involved in a low-level war in Yemen for years and seems to be losing it decisively. Yemen may seem far away, but it is on the border of Saudi Arabia and a critical center of the oil exports that feed the global economy, as well as that of the United States. Yemen is also the center of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—arguably the most direct terrorist threat to

the United States.”

Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia—the main regional allies of the US—have also expressed opposition to the Houthis.

In a reflection of rising tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has issued a formal condemnation of the new government. The coup represents a grave threat to “the security and stability of the region and the interests of its people,” the GCC said.

The Houthi victory represents a significant blow against the Saudi monarchy, which waged a brief and disastrous military campaign against the militants in 2009.

The Houthi takeover also threatens to spark a civil war within Yemen itself. The new Houthi-led government is already preparing air strikes against targets in the country’s western provinces including Maarib, where much of Yemen’s oil resources are located, according to sources cited by *Asharq Al-Awsat*. “The situation is very, very seriously deteriorating with the Houthis taking power and making this government vacuum in power. There must be a restoration of legitimacy of President Hadi,” declared UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

These developments are part of a broader breakdown of the nation-state framework throughout wide areas of Africa and Asia, which is accelerating under the impact of endless neocolonial wars and occupations by the US and European powers.

Yemen’s commanding position overlooking one of the world’s most critical strategic arteries—the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, which controls access to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal—means that whoever controls Yemen’s government can potentially halt the flow of North African oil shipments, as well as US and European grain exports to Asia, into the Indian Ocean.

“Yemen is one of the worst places on earth to cede to terrorists due to its key strategic location, including a long border with Saudi Arabia. It also dominates one of the region’s key waterways, the Bab al-Mandeb Strait which controls access to the southern Red Sea,” noted a US Army War College paper, “The Struggle for Yemen and the Challenge of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.”

The Egyptian military regime of Abdel Fattah El Sisi also has massive interests at stake, having allocated

more than 60 billion Egyptian pounds for the New Suez Canal project.



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