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زبانهای اروپایی

By Daniel Finn / Palestine and the Middle East  
12.09.2022

## Interview with Helen Lackner



Sources: Catalyst Journal

Translated from English for Rebellion by Beatriz Morales Bastos

*Yemen's hope that a protest movement would emerge in 2011, during the Arab Spring, gave way to civil war and a brutal Saudi-led invasion. Thousands of people have died and several million are close to starving to death. A peace deal could help Yemenis regain the dashed hopes of the 2011 uprising, should Saudi Arabia stop demanding victory for its allies.*

**DF:** For the past thirty years Yemen has been formally united into a single state, although the conflict of the last decade has effectively ended political unity. However,

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**previously Yemen had been divided into two states, what was the origin of that division?**

HL: The military coup is known in Yemen as the revolution rather than a coup, even though objectively it was a coup. But the majority of the country's population considered it the overthrow of the imamate (1) and the beginning of a republic, and today it is considered so. It came after decades of frustration against the magnet. The imams ruled in a very autocratic and oppressive manner, especially the penultimate one, Ahmad bin Yahya. There were many uprisings, the most famous of which were those of 1948 and 1955, when groups of educated elites opposed the imam and tried to overthrow him militarily. They were repressed very harshly: many heads were cut off and exhibited in public in various places.

There was a regime that many describe as retrograde and comparable to the one that existed in Oman before 1970. Some of its characteristics were a strong taxation throughout the country, which made life difficult for the general population, and a very limited investment in any of the modern aspects of life that benefited the population, such as health and education. The imam had also sent several officers to Iraq for training, who returned with an Arab nationalist ideology and, consequently, with an anti-monarchical sentiment that made them willing to get rid of the imam.

Ahmad bin Yahya died in bed. His successor, his son Muhammad al-Badr, was quite progressive in several ways and was expected to act much more within an Arab nationalist framework, but he only lasted ten days in power before being overthrown. The reason his overthrow turned into a civil war is that the revolutionaries did not kill him, he escaped and went north, where he gathered the tribes of the area, and received the support of the Saudi regime and others to counterattack.

The Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, immediately supported the revolutionaries and sent many soldiers to Yemen. At times there were some 70,000 Egyptians in Yemen, as well as many administrative and military advisers, who were actually more than advisers. It was a civil war, but with an important international implication, like the current civil war. The Egyptians supported the Republican side, while the Saudis and the British supported the monarchist. British support was somewhat less open, although it was an

open secret. The British sent several Special Air Service units and the royalists even received some Israeli support.

By late 1967 or early 1968 the civil war had reached a stalemate. When Nasser withdrew his troops, the royalists tried to take the city of Sana'a with a seventy-day siege that the Yemeni population still remembers, although this siege failed to overthrow the Republicans. In 1967–1969 there was a process in which the most extreme monarchists were defeated or marginalized while on the other side the left wing of the Republicans was also marginalized. In some cases there were deaths.

This allowed the agreement reached in 1970 in which the signatories agreed to keep the Republic. However, it was a "Republic" of right-wing republicans and the less extremist supporters of the imamate. No relatives of the imam were allowed to return and at the same time the left-wing sector of the movement was also eliminated.

**DF: How did Ali Abdullah Saleh manage to become the leader of North Yemen by the late 1970s?**

HL: Ali Abdullah Saleh was an army officer originally from a small tribe called Sanhan, a minor branch of the main tribal confederation in Yemen, the Hashid. Between 1977 and 1978, three Yemeni presidents were assassinated, including two in the north. The first was Ibrahim al-Hamdi, who is still remembered and revered throughout the country as the great hope of the Yemeni population. He was assassinated in October 1977, when he was about to travel to Aden to sign a unification agreement with the president of the south, Salim Rubai Ali, who is known as Salmine.

Following al-Hamdi's assassination, another officer, Ahmad al-Ghashmi, was appointed president in Sana'a, who was assassinated in June 1978, allegedly by an agent of Salmine. There are some doubts that he really was: the identity of the murderer is clear because he died in it, but another question is whether he did it on Salmine's orders. In any case, the leaders of the south took the opportunity to assassinate Salmine and so it was that by the end of 1978 Yemen had lost three presidents.

Several manoeuvres then took place in Sana'a. I suspect saleh was appointed president with the idea that he was essentially going to act under various figures. When I first went

to Sana'a in 1980, throughout that period and for many years afterwards we all expected a coup the next morning. We thought we were going to wake up and find that Saleh had been killed. It was said that no one was going to sell him life insurance worth a million dollars because he would have to pay right away. Of course, history has shown that it was a wrong assumption, because he has been president for thirty-three years.

**DF: What was the struggle against British colonial rule in Aden like in the 1960s and what was the result of that struggle?**

HL: The situation in Aden was different. After the revolution in Sana'a in 1962, southern nationalists had an incentive to seriously confront British colonial rule. Throughout that period there had been clashes of greater or lesser importance against the British government, but they were very localized: the society of southern Yemen was already very fragmented then.

After 1962 there was, on the one hand, the influence of Nasserism and, on the other, the rise of the trade union movement in Aden. Trade unions were a very important element of left-wing politics in that area and had emerged since the early to mid-1950s. In Aden there was a strong trade union movement since the construction of the refinery.

Several people who had gone to study at the American University of Beirut returned greatly influenced by the Arab Nationalists Movement (MNA) founded in 1958. The NAM was the predecessor of many left-wing movements in the Arab world, such as the two main Palestinian left-wing organizations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as the movement in Oman, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (FPLOGA).

Two movements were combined, one fundamentally rural and related to the MNA, and another urban, coming from the trade union movement. That is why a struggle was reached both between two rival liberation movements and against the British: the Liberation Front of Occupied South Yemen (FLYSO), which was aligned with the trade unions and whose political orientation was very Nasserist, and the National Liberation Front (FLN), in which there were many people belonging to the MNA, others who had an

even more clearly left-wing ideology and others who had a more tribal vision. It was a much more diverse movement than FLYSO.

Before the British left in the summer of 1967 there were more clashes between these two groups than between either of them and the British. The FLN effectively defeated FLYSO in August of that year and is one of the reasons why the British negotiated independence with the FLN and not with FLYSO. Another reason was that, for the British and in reality, FLYSO was closely associated with Nasserism and the British of the time considered Nasser little less than the devil. A third reason is that the British knew very little about the FLN. If you read the documents or memoirs of British officers about that time, these officers often recognize that they basically had no idea what the FLN was.

**DF: Why, after the British withdrawal, did South Yemen come under FLN rule and then become the only Arab country formally committed to Soviet-style Marxism? Beyond the rhetoric, what does this system really mean to the people over whom they ruled?**

HL: The second part of your question is easier. What it meant for the people was a very reasonable standard of living, in fact, a standard of living above the financial capabilities of the state, given its economic circumstances and limited natural resources. It is important to remember that the two main economic resources of that part of Yemen were in the port of Aden, whose activities collapsed with the closure of the Suez Canal after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, and the British base which, of course, was closed when the British left.

One of the main strengths of the regime of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (DPR [South Yemen]) was that it was able to provide good education, health care, infrastructure and work throughout the country. The majority of the population had an income that was not extraordinary, but that was enough to support their families, thanks to food subsidies and other basic aids.

That is the aspect of the regime that people still remember today as part of "the good old days." Other people remember the British colonial period as "the good times", but no doubt those who remember the PDRY remember it positively and also its children and

now its grandchildren, for having provided an adequate standard of living without corruption and without great differences, which happened in both urban and rural areas (even then most people were rural), despite the fact that neither agrarian reform nor rural systems were not entirely satisfactory from any point of view.

As for the first part of the question, why did it become the only country committed to Marxism? By the way, they didn't call it Marxism, but "scientific socialism." The historical period as a whole must be taken into account. We are talking about the 1970s and 1980s, after the formal end of the Sino-Soviet dispute. We also talked about what was left of the impact of the Cultural Revolution in China. At first China's influence was very great: the debates within the Socialist Party of Yemen (PSY) reflected these problems.

In my opinion, it was largely possible because of the international situation as a whole. From 1967 onwards there was the defeat of Nasserism and Arab nationalism, at a time when Baathism (2) in Iraq and Syria was also greatly discredited in the eyes of those who were familiar with those regimes. Therefore, the forms of socialism that seemed to offer a possible or reasonable future were those of Eastern Europe, China or Cuba. There was a large Cuban medical mission in Aden, where Cubans formed and developed the Faculty of Medicine, which had a strong impact from the ideological point of view.

We must also remember that we are in the context of the Cold War, so it was very convenient for the Soviet Union to have access to Aden as a naval position and to have a kind of foothold in the area, especially since the rest of the Arabian Peninsula was ruled by autocratic monarchies, the same as today. Although it is not a complete answer, I believe that the factors I have mentioned contributed significantly to it.

**DF: Why did South Yemen's ruling party then fall into rather bloody power struggles between rival factions in the 1970s and 1980s?**

HL: The short answer is I'd like to know! I lived there for five years, which is an important part of the time the regime existed. It's one of the questions I asked leaders when I had the opportunity. The main question I used to ask them and never got an answer to was why they used external models instead of developing their own Marxist analysis based on the social and economic realities of the country.

At first factionalism was clearly related to what I have just mentioned. For example, among the top leaders Salmine was considered to be a populist who followed the Chinese line, while Abdul Fattah Ismail was considered to be a kind of bureaucrat who followed a very clear Soviet bureaucratic line. Ali Nasir Muhammad was considered to be a pragmatist between the two. You could say that one element was these differences between them.

Many people claim that it was merely a tribal struggle, but I do not think the same. What happened in 1986, which was the bloodiest of all the struggles, degenerated and turned into a tribal struggle. After the first fighting on 13 January, many people were attacked and killed because of their identity documents and provenance. This degenerated into a tribal struggle or a regional struggle, but that's not what it was at the beginning. In my opinion, initially the struggle of 1986 was nothing more than a power struggle: "I want to take your place." A few months later I returned to Yemen. A few months earlier, in October 1985, I had published my book on the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and many people wanted me to write an analysis of the events of 1986 for an Arabic edition, although it was not published. I spent a month traveling through both the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and Sana'a, where the defeated faction had taken refuge, and interviewed every leader I could interview and collected many notes that I still have. I asked them several questions: what are their differences in foreign policy? What are their differences with regard to social, economic and, above all, rural policies? In the end the answers filled meaningless pages. I came to the conclusion that the only thing they were fighting for was to get the summit of power, which is certainly true for 1986.

The previous struggle for power in 1969 was a much more direct confrontation between left and right over different policies. In general, the 1978 movement was considered to be an anti-populist movement, against the pro-Chinese, in which the most directly pro-Soviet side won. I don't know if it answers your question, but I certainly thought then and still think today that these struggles were very counterproductive.

Another element to remember is the support and sponsorship of the Saudis, the British and all sorts of sources for the opposition to the regime of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which they clearly instigated. The regime had to deal with armed incursions and belligerent enemies of all kinds, including those that had been defeated at the end of



British colonialism, and later after the struggles of 1969, 1978 and 1986. There is no doubt that they had real enemies and it was obvious that these enemies were going to use both direct and indirect means to foment division and discrepancies among the leaders. But they could have responded to those provocations with a more united front, which they obviously did not.

**DF: How did the unification of the two parts of Yemen come about in the early 1990s? What kind of system was established in the new state after unification?**

HL: The unification occurred in 1990 due to several factors. For a long time the unity of Yemen had been one of the most popular official political slogans on both sides of Yemen. Every morning in Yemeni schools, children stood up and recited the usual national slogans. Of the three elements, Yemen's unity was the most popular; the other two were the "defense of the Yemeni revolution" and the "implementation of the Five-Year Plan." It was very ingrained.

It was also common to have family in the other part of the country. Many South Yemenis migrated to work for Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States through the north, because the Yemen Arab Republic (RAY [North Yemen]) had a special agreement with the Saudis whereby its citizens did not have to submit to the usual regulations for foreign workers, and could come and go at will and work without the need for a sponsor. Entering with a North Yemeni passport was very convenient for anyone, so many South Yemenis went to Sana'a to ask for a passport from the Yemen Arab Republic, which was allowed.

In my opinion, there is a Yemeni nation, even though there are differences between someone from the far east and someone from the far north. There are several common characteristics shared by the majority of the Yemeni people. For decades I considered it a joke to talk about Arab unity, I never believed that it would occur, while I always believed that Yemeni unity was a real possibility, because there was this cultural and historical relationship between the inhabitants of the country from one end to the other, including a few parts that are not currently part of it.

Of course, there were several political elements. On the one hand, internally, there were crises in both the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (DPR) and the Yemen Arab



Republic (RAY). By then Ali Abdullah Saleh had been in power for ten years. His regime was consolidating and provoking considerable discontent among the population. In 1986-1987 oil revenues had just begun. There was an uprising in a central region against his regime. Saleh had problems to face.

After 1986 the DPRK regime was fundamentally discredited in the eyes of the population because everyone considered the January 13 struggle to be nothing more than a deadly power struggle in which at least five thousand people were killed. There had been mass migrations of successive defeated factions since 1969. That regime failed to regain credibility among the population, despite having several very positive achievements, such as allowing much more freedom of expression and other political parties.

One of the things that triggered the unit was the discovery of oil in a specific place located on the border between both Yemeni states and Saudi Arabia. It was considered, I think rightly so, that if both Yemen started fighting over this oil, the Saudis would simply keep it. Forming a unified state was undoubtedly the least option.

Saleh was in favor. He thought (and I think history has proved him right) that he would handle it and be the strongest element. When unification took place there were about nine million Yemenis from the RAY and about two million from the DPR, so the balance of the population was much more favorable to the north.

There is still discussion about what the unification agreement consisted of, because the Yemeni Socialist Party believed that a federal system had been agreed and that Saleh had deceived its then leader, Ali Salem al-Beidh, into achieving total unity. This is the most widespread account and it may be true, I don't know.

The entire Yemeni population enthusiastically embraced unity because it was something people aspired to: to be able to travel freely and, in the case of people from the south, to have access to the material goods that could be found in the north. Many people expected above all two things from unification that are still worth remembering. As you know, qat is a soft drug that is widely used in Yemen. In the RDPY it was regulated and could only be consumed on weekends and holidays. In the RAY it was allowed all the time and had spread enormously (and has since spread even more). Many people in both Yemen

expected southern rules to be imposed across the country. Another element that many women undoubtedly expected was that the family law of the RDPY prevailed, according to which the position of the woman was much better since, unlike the RAY, it officially guaranteed her all the rights, which did not happen in the RAY.

Of course, just the opposite happened. The regulations on qat that had Sana'a were extended to all of Yemen and now people are seen chewing day and night all over the country. Family law from the north was imposed, after which women from the south and, indeed, women from all over Yemen found that their situation had deteriorated considerably.

In 1994 there was a brief civil war when some southerners tried to reassert their independence. Saleh's forces defeated them militarily with the help not only of several Islamists and "Afghans," as they were called (who had returned *from jihad in Afghanistan*), but also of those who had been defeated in 1986. It is relevant today if you look at the situation regarding the Southern Transitional Council and southern separatism, since among the pro-Saleh forces was the man who later succeeded Saleh in the presidency, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who in 1986 had been on the losing side.

After 1994 the Saleh regime that ruled in the RAY spread throughout Yemen. It was a regime in which there was a formal democracy and other political parties, but in which the decisions were made mainly by a small military clique and in which the benefits went to a small clique of kleptocrats. Of course, this provoked enormous discontent in the south. In the north they didn't like it too much either, but they were used to it.

**DF: What, in your opinion, were the main factors that led to the uprising that ended up overthrowing Saleh from 2011? In your opinion, to what extent did Yemen have traits in common with other Arab countries that overthrew their own leaders at the same time?**

HL: There is no doubt that the points I just mentioned about frustration with Saleh's type of government were fundamental elements that led to the uprising. This frustration was due to the increase in poverty throughout the country. In the early 2000s I saw in Yemen a poverty that I had seen in places like Pakistan or West Africa, but never thought to see in

Yemen. It was because there was no work, the population increased by 3% a year while resources did not, and kleptocrats took over everything they could and left very little for others. Every year more people were seen in poverty, begging in the streets.

There were more and more political tensions. Saleh's "divide and rule" policy affected everyone, although it focused mostly on the far north, where the Houthi movement emerged. Between 2004 and 2010 there were six wars between the Houthis and the Saleh regime. In the south, tension arose in late 2006 due to the southern separatist movement initiated among the thousands of military officers and security personnel who had been dismissed after 1994 and who had been left without any income.

Corruption infuriated everyone. Young people may have studied, but they couldn't find work. In 2009–2010 Saleh tried to change the constitution so he could stand for election again and was preparing his son to inherit the presidency.

This brings us to the second part of the question. Saleh hoped to become a "republican monarchy" according to the model that Hafez al-Assad had managed to implant in Syria and Hosni Mubarak failed to implant in Egypt, and that consisted of passing power to his sons. In other respects, too, the frustration in Yemen was very similar to that of other countries: economic problems, poverty, lack of democracy and freedom.

In Yemen there was much more freedom to say how much you wanted. Saleh had realized that people could be allowed to speak and say whatever they wanted, as long as these people had no influence. This was not the case in Syria, for example, let alone Egypt and Tunisia. But as far as the economic, social and political demands are concerned, I think they were largely the same everywhere. Ten years later there were similar claims in Algeria and Sudan.

**DF: How did the country plunge into civil war after that moment of openness or hope in 2011 and 2012? What role did foreign powers play?**

HL: In 2011 Saleh was forced out of power. The Yemeni army split. Several Saleh supporters joined the protest movement, including a major military unit. Then there were several military clashes between Saleh's supporters and those who supposedly supported the revolution, leading to international intervention. There was a group of States called

Friends of Yemen made up of most of the world's major states and including members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). They supported the so-called GCC Initiative, which subsequently, after November 2011, became the GCC Agreement. One of the terms of the Agreement was Saleh's resignation, but as he remained strong politically, he was not forced to leave the country or leave politics. He maintained control of the General People's Congress, which was his political creation and remains one of the main institutions or political parties in the country.

The GCC Agreement created a transitional state that was supposed to last two years and whose president was Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had been Saleh's vice president. He was elected in an unopposed election with only one candidate. Hadi came from the DPR where he was a prominent member of the faction that was defeated in the 1986 conflict, so he became the first original president of South Yemen.

Between 2012 and 2014 there was supposed to be a transitional state that included several elements: a government of national unity, security sector reform and something called the National Dialogue Conference which, if necessary, should draft a new Constitution and resolve the country's main political problems. All these initiatives failed.

In the national unity government, Saleh's supporters were 50% represented. The other 50% was supposed to be split between the formal political opposition in parliament formed by the Islah party, which is a combination of people belonging to the northern tribes and Islamists, and a whole host of other parties, including the Baathists, Socialists and Nasserists, in addition to what was known as the new forces that had emerged with the uprising: youth, women and civil society.

This government earned a reputation as the most corrupt in Yemen's history. He was paralyzed when it came to doing anything. Security sector reform failed for a number of reasons, notably because it failed to get the major security units to transform their loyalty to Saleh into loyalty to the state. The National Dialogue Conference failed for a number of other reasons. The UN mismanaged it. It had nine working groups to deal with various issues, such as the Houthis, the question of the south and the new form that the state was going to take. They failed to agree on any of the key issues.

As the conference unfolded, which lasted at least eleven months between 2013 and 2014, the Houthis increased their control of their home area and expanded into other surrounding areas. They also began to establish an alliance with Saleh, who had previously been their main enemy, but both the Houthis and Saleh opposed federalism, which was one of the main proposals of the transitional regime, and also opposed the existence of such a regime. They had a common enemy, so they came together and in early 2015 overthrew the government. They worked together in an alliance in which there were growing tensions until the Houthis killed Saleh in December 2017.

The real war began in 2015. This war is first and foremost an internal Yemeni conflict between a whole series of different factions, with different social groups and in which different regional aspects are involved. The international factor is additional, a factor that worsens the situation. The direct intervention of Saudi Arabia and the ten-state coalition it led (of which only two were really significant, Saudi Arabia itself and the United Arab Emirates) only increased the number of killings and worsened the appalling humanitarian situation.

**DF: Do you see any reason for slight optimism about the possibility that the conflict will be resolved and that the country can return to a more peaceful and stable situation?**

HL: It is possible to reach an agreement between the Houthis and their opponents, as long as there is a major change in UN Security Council Resolution 2216 of April 14, 2015, which has been the determining element of the UN intervention in Yemen. In fact, it demands the complete surrender of the Houthis.

Between 2015, when the resolution was passed, and today the Houthis have been gaining ground and now control 70% of the country's population and have an effective government in the area they control. It may be a horrible, extremely oppressive and fundamentalist government, but it works. On the other hand, those who oppose the Houthis and, above all, the government that has international recognition are increasingly weak. It is a government that barely has a presence in the country, only representing a small group of people who oppose the Houthis.

It is possible to reach an agreement between the Houthis and the Saudis, whom the former consider the main interlocutor to negotiate, because after seven years the Saudis have lost this war in essence. It costs them a lot of money, plus along with other factors, such as the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, it has greatly damaged their reputation. I think [Saudi Arabia's crown prince] Mohammed bin Salman is willing to make a deal.

The question is whether a deal can be reached with the Houthis. They are somewhat stagnant with their current offensive, but have been progressing slowly. No doubt there are factions among them that want to continue the offensive, while other factions might want to reach an agreement. However, such an agreement is possible.

Even if an agreement is reached, all other problems will persist, from the separatist movement in the south to the divisions between the separatists themselves in the south and the different political factions in the north. Those conflicts will continue as long as there is no entirely new politics in Yemen, starting with grassroots movements, which could help create a new political class other than a gang of thieves driven by their own self-interest.

It should also be remembered that Yemen is in the Arabian Peninsula and that the Saudis will continue to have a lot of influence. The Emiratis have also been increasing their influence, which is by no means positive. Iran has influence over the Houthis, though it is not decisive in the sense in which many people tend to claim it is. In one way or another there will continue to be external involvement, even if it is a formal way to end the fighting.

Coupled with this, the country's economy has completely collapsed, so that strong financial support will be needed for reconstruction. I fear the possibility of neoliberal policies being pursued, of Western consulting firms using Saudi and Emirati funds in their own interest and to create development programmes that turn Yemen into an imitation, into a low-quality version of the worst of the Emirates (I mean the poor Emirates, not Dubai and Abu Dhabi). It is not a rosy prospect.

**DF: On April 1, the new UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, announced that a two-month truce had been agreed, how was this agreement reached and what long-term implications does it have for Yemen?**

HL: Given that it is the first attempt in six years to stop the fighting in Yemen, the truce is clearly important in itself. It also involves some important measures that will improve the living conditions of the Yemeni people. Probably one of the reasons for this truce is that the leaders of all sides belatedly recognized that the military impasse that had been reached in the Marib region, which is particularly important because it is the last real bastion of the government that has international recognition, could not be overcome. Two years of offensives by the Houthis have failed to dislodge the forces of this government despite the enormous loss of human life. In late 2021, when it looked like the Houthis were about to win, the coalition demonstrated its determination to defend Marib by bringing reinforcements from across Yemen there.

A second factor has been the growing frustration of international actors, particularly the Saudis and Emiratis, at the inability of their Yemeni partners to function together and seriously seek a solution. The response to the UN Humanitarian Response Plan's appeal in early March was very poor, with less than a third of the desired amount raised. Third, Grundberg demonstrated his skill and determination in his duties as Envoy after being appointed in August 2021 as he began a process of talks with the different parties. It is to be hoped that these talks will bear fruit in the next stage.

On the other hand, the Gulf Cooperation Council organized what was presented as a ten-day inter-Yemeni dialogue in Riyadh. Unsurprisingly, the Houthis refused to participate in a meeting that had been organized in the state capital responsible for waging the air war in Yemen. The meeting became a gathering of anti-Houthi forces, whose different factions are hostile to each other, when they are not involved in a military conflict between them.

Although some changes were expected to occur in the direction of the internationally recognized government, the result was a surprise that had little to do with the meeting itself. On April 7, Hadi announced his own retirement and that of his vice president, who would be replaced by a Presidential Leadership Council (CLP) made up of eight men (and



no women). He read a script prepared in a way reminiscent of the forced resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in 2017, also under Saudi pressure.

The Presidential Leadership Council has, among other things, the task of negotiating peace with the Houthis. This body, imposed by the Saudi and Emirati regimes without having consulted the Yemenis themselves, is composed of people whose enmity is evident. He has now met in Aden, but it remains to be seen whether he will be able to function effectively and fulfill his responsibilities.

Grundberg is conducting extensive talks with relevant Yemeni parties. The UN Envoy is likely to seek to broaden participation in these talks to improve gender balance and include influential figures from civil society, which is critical to achieving a truly lasting peace that responds to the needs of the Yemeni people in terms of rights, opportunities and an acceptable standard of living. It remains to be seen whether the newly created Presidential Leadership Council will make Grundberg's task easier or more complicated.

It now seems more likely to reach an agreement to end the fighting as most leaders recognize that it is unlikely to break the current impasse. However, it will take much more than negotiations between the current factions to achieve lasting peace and a government that focuses on addressing the problems of the general population, problems that are enormous, given that more than 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and seven years of destruction of infrastructure, both physical and social, from Yemen.

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#### **Translator's notes:**

(1) According to the *Dictionary of Islam and Islamism*, by Luz Gómez García (Editorial Trotta, 2019), the imamate is the "institution that deals with the political-spiritual direction of the *umma* (community and par excellence, Muslim community)".

(2) Baathism is, according to the *Dictionary of Islam and Islamism*, a "twentieth-century Arab political current that takes its name from the al-Baath al-Arabi (Arab Revival) party, which was constituted in Damascus in 1945. The three principles of the original Baathist ideology are: unity, freedom and socialism."

Source: <https://catalyst-journal.com/2022/06/yemen-in-purgatory>

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**Rebellion 10.09.2022**