Yemen is on Verge of a New Crisis

In a situation when the Houthis are delaying the official announcement of their position on the settlement plan that was put forward by the Crisis Regulation Committee appointed by Yemen's President, Yemeni Prime Minister Mohammed Basindawa accused the President of usurping power. According to the Prime Minister Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's proposal to create a technocrat government contradicts Yemen's GCC Initiative, therefore he refused to participate in its implementation. The situation in the country remains difficult due to the actions of the Houthis that have blocked the road from Sana's Airport to the city with tents and been ever since picketing the Interior Ministry and the Department of Energy. In some areas the local police was forced to use water cannons and tear gas to disperse demonstrators, a total of one hundred of civilians suffered injuries, two protesters were killed.

The better part of the Yemeni political forces believes that the blame for the current crisis should be pushed to the sitting President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who, according to their statements, wasn't harsh enough with the Houthis. The Prime Minister believes that the head of the state fails to take a stand while the Houthis continue their expansion. In fact, they have recently managed to occupy the entire northern part of the country and now they are surrounding the capital.

It's a common belief in Yemen now that the President had made a mistake when he "in agreement" with the Houthis' demands decided to drop the prices of petroleum products and replace the transitional government of "national consensus" with a technocrat cabinet. In this case the creation of a Crisis Regulation Committee is widely considered as a violation of both the GCC initiative to resolve the Yemeni crisis and the consensus that was reached at a national dialogue conference which clearly stated that there can be no option of a government change before the presidential and parliamentary elections in Yemen. Although this consensus implied that there can be a possibility of expanding the government with the representatives of the Houthis and the southerners. It is clear that Mohammed Basindawa one of the leaders of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform that had forced the former president Ali Abdullah Salih to step down and also known as Al-Islah is ambitious enough to dislike the idea of a technocrat government that would be a mere body of speechless functionaries rather than a real political force. The Prime Minister is clearly hoping that Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi made a serious mistake with making proposals to the Houthis and that the latter wouldn't accept them. Apparently, Mohammed Basindawa is waiting for the arrival of the UN Special Adviser on Yemen Jamal Benomar that should be able to convince Yemen's President to abandon the idea of creating a technocrat government.

In these circumstances, the leadership of a Houthi party Ansar Allah denies the statements that they had cut a deal with the President, in turn Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi over the last few days refrained from contacting them. He keeps on demanding an unconditional withdrawal of the Houthis from the central streets of the capital. Ansar Allah's members refuse to support the president's initiatives on the petroleum products price reduction, since they consider them insufficient. Additionally they have rejected the proposed mechanism of the appointment of ministers that should be implemented in the technocrat government, since they are assured that it doesn't guarantee their participation in the management of the state. Moreover, the Houthis are angry with the use of force against demonstrators. It is quite possible that the restraint they have been showing has reached its limit and they are a step away from resorting to violence. In the meantime, the Houthis are formally ready
for negotiations with the President and "top ten" representatives of the sponsors of the Yemeni political process, except for the American ones. The are not willing to engage in any discussions with the US representatives, just like with the British ones. French are in a slightly better position, but they can be a cause of frustrations when they go over the top with advising.

The situation in Yemen remains potentially explosive and there's no easy way of diffusing it. In recent days the northern governorate of Al Jawf saw an increasing number of bloody skirmishes between the Houtis and the supporters of Al-Islah, 80 people were killed. On top of all the regular army is carrying out air strikes on the Houthis. So the rumours about a “secret deal” between the President and Ansar Allah must be false. In these circumstances foreign citizens will be leaving Yemen in droves, according to some reports the Saudi embassy has already been evacuated from Sana.

A number of Houthi demonstrators attempted to breach the defence of the Ministerial Council and the Central Broadcasting buildings on September 9. Armed guards opened fire on them, which resulted in 7 people killed and more than 70 wounded. The government has put all responsibility for the incident on the Houthis. The conflict is entering a new, more dangerous phase, when violence is carried out in the capital and both sides are using small arms against each other.

If the President and the Prime Minister do not rally their efforts, then the Houthis will get an easy victory without massive use of force or even efforts. This will result in a creation of a pro-Iran Shia Islamic state in the north, which in turn would force southerners to separate and create their own independent country, and that’s is nothing less than a total rebalance of powers. Saudi Arabia would find itself in danger and will not be able to take part in the US plans of collapsing oil prices in order to weaken Russia. And Iran, which is now a natural ally of the Russian Federation, will strengthen its positions against Riyadh.

It is possible that the collapse of Yemen will be the beginning of a new round of "color" democratic revolutions in the Arabian Peninsula. So the United States will get what they themselves have kindled: the fall of pro-American regimes in the most important part of the Persian Gulf, the world's richest area in terms of oil and gas reserves. And it won't take long...

**Viktor Titov, Ph.D in Historical Sciences and political commentator on the Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine New Eastern Outlook**