Earlier this September media outlets close to Saudi Arabia announced with much fanfare that Yemen’s intelligence services had scored a massive victory in arresting the man they dubbed the ‘Khomeini of Yemen’, and that thanks to such efforts the Houthis had had the wind taken off their sail.

"Houthi leader Hassan Ali Al Emad was arrested while entering the land port of Shahn heading from abroad two weeks ago," Colonel Ahmed Arfeet, the director of the Criminal Investigative Unit, Al Mahrah police, told the press late September.

Born into a prominent family of North Yemen, Hassan Al Emad’s name once commanded much authority - not only
for the friendships he kept but for the ties his family held to some of Yemen’s most powerful tribal leaders, clerics, politicians and state officials. Once a close friend to late President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Hassan Al Emad is now being accused of plotting his assassination so that his master, aka Iran, could have its revolution.

Held incommunicado since September the fate of Hassan Al Emad lies solely within the hands of Saudi Arabia, the very power that called for his arrest on the basis of a political grudge that bears little ties to the allegations leveled against him. As it happens I know Hassan. I’ve known him for about 20 years actually, and though I cannot bear witness to his personal ambitions, what his accusers are claiming reads too much like the plot of a bad spy movie.

Knowing how Yemen settles a tribal or political score I am strongly inclined to believe that Hassan is but a pawn in someone’s chess game. Actually not just someone but Yemen’s very own ‘transitional’ president, Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Grant you the man deserves some praise. How many heads of state have managed to outlive their mandate by several years while in self-imposed exile?

Made a scapegoat so that someone could claim a made-up victory against a movement no party is getting closer to get a handle on, nevermind actually understands, Hassan Al Emad had to be turned into the reason why Riyadh could not bring North Yemen to kneel. History teaches us that no one man can ever claim to have such power and affluence. Revolutions, if inspired by strong figures, are never the product of just one will and one mind - rather the product of a great conversion.

A report published in one of Hadi’s media outlets read on the matter:

“Al-Emad is classified as one of the most dangerous ideological leaders of the Houthis, and the most prominent Twelver authority. He is married to an Iranian woman and has a house in Tehran. His father, Yahya Al-Emad, is one of the most important religious authorities that originated in Iran, and is considered one of the most important founders of the Houthi movement and the Iranian project in Yemen.”

The plot appears simple: Al Emad, sold to Iran’s religious school of thought some decades ago and following in the family tradition he became the architect of Yemen’s Houthi Movement and thus posed an inherent threat to Yemen’s future.

If most people may accept such propositions at first glance, the implications made by the above summary do not hold.

To start with the Houthi Movement does not abide by Twelver Islam - and though Zaidis identify as Shia Muslims it does not mean they understand themselves as an extension of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. Any experts on Yemen will actually tell you that ideologically the Houthis and Iran often do not see eye to eye. If they are on friendly terms today it is more over their respective rejection of Saudi Arabia than a common vision of the future, religious or otherwise.

Iran and North Yemen’s alliance is only skin deep. It is with Iraq that the Houthis entertain a greater friendship with... Tehran I’m afraid long lost that battle.

More to the point, to imagine that the Houthis leadership would entertain losing religious ground to any one element on the pretext that such an individual carried Iran’s trust is preposterous.

Again, if the Houthis happily claim themselves to be Shiites, their Shia Islam is not that practiced in Iran... or even that of the Shia Islamic World. Zaidis are but a minority within a greater whole, very much like the Alawites in Syria.

To automatically assume feudality to Iran on the basis that North Yemen’s religious traditions somewhat echo with that of the Twelvers would be sheer ignorance of the region’s history.

Yemen’s Houthi Movement is very much home-grown. And though evidently the Houthis found friends throughout the region, they remain the architects of their political fate... to much of Iran’s disappointment I would argue.

Hassan Al Emad was likely targeted and taken out of the chess game on account of his support for those communities in Yemen most affected by war and poverty. His efforts to grant the most vulnerable a voice annoyed more than a few of his countrymen. And so he had to be vilified and his ambitions criminalized.

The Founder of the Future of Justice Party, Hassan Al Emad has been critical of the Houthis at times, something his
detractors have been keen to ignore in their desire to present him as the grand mastermind of all things Houthis.

Today his freedom is at the core of a prisoners-exchange bargain. So that he could walk free, Saudi Arabia, via President Hadi, is calling on the Houthis to liberate several high profile war prisoners - among whom Hadi’s relatives.

Sana’a answer was a resounding NO!

So much for the man who allegedly did it all!

If Hassan Al Emad has been instrumental in Yemen’s defection from its former patron, Saudi Arabia, he is not a grand revolutionary figure and his work in no way, shape or form aligns with that of figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini.

A rather reserved man, Al Emad is not in the business of tape recording, he’d rather build schools and offer children free meals so that they could carry on their education.

The fact that his arrest made such little waves in western media speaks volumes to the threat he poses. I would like to think Washington or at least London would have loved to claim some ownership in such a catch ... especially after Afghanistan’s debacle.

A little Veni, Vedi, Vici I’m sure would have been much welcomed.

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