Following recent formation of a Cabinet in Yemen, consisting of professionals and technocrats, the situation in the country has calmed down to some extent, but it remains tense and is on the verge of shifting into armed conflict at any moment. The Houthis have gained control of the capital and most of the major cities in the north and central sections of the country, including the chief Red Sea port city, Al Hudaydah, and also Ta‘izz located at the junction of North and South Yemen. In addition, the Houthis control the capital’s airport, TV and radio stations, and all strategic sites, ministries and government departments. Their "commissars" have positions in all state institutions, control all the cash flows and act as a constraint of the corruption schemes al-Islah officials (local Muslim Brotherhood and representatives of the President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi’s circle as well as his relatives) used to employ.

Only South Yemen and its central hub, Aden, lay outside the reach of the Houthis who are forbidden to be in Yemen's southern provinces while armed. They do carry on contacts with the southerners, though. Judging from the circumstances, the Shiite rebels will not go into the South for fear that they would sustain heavy losses and also because doing so could cause South Yemen to revert to being an independent country. As it stands now, the separatists are a hodgepodge of inhabitants of the South. They lack uniformity and do not have a single leader to unite them. Some of them support the Southern Yemen Socialist Party which at the time of People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen used to be the ruling party. Others support the General People's Congress, the party led by Hadi. And still others prefer to preserve Yemen’s unity, even if that means living under the Houthi government. The problem for the South, especially in Hadramaut and the country's eastern provinces, is the massive presence of Islamic militants who have banded together with Ansar al Shari'a (formerly Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) and several other Sunni Islamist groups. They are waging war on the Houthis and the remnants of the Yemeni army. Their positions are being bombarded by American drones based in Djibouti and at various Yemeni air bases not controlled by the Houthi political organization Ansar Allah. Ansar al Shari'a is the primary enemy of the United States and Saudi Arabia. However, it poses a threat to Ansar Allah as well. On December 3, the Islamist terrorists tried to assassinate the Iranian ambassador by detonating a car bomb near his residence in Sana'a, but the Iranian ambassador was not there at the time. The reason for the assassination attempt is plain: everyone is well-aware that the Houthis are propped up by Iran which wants to form a Shiite government in Yemen to put the country in Iran's orbit.

Part of the al-Islah and General People's Congress contingents are entrenched in the Ma'rib area, where there are oil and gas deposits and related infrastructure. All of the Houthis' attempts to capture them or to come to an agreement on control of oil and gas revenues have so far failed. Thus, income from oil and gas remains in the hands of supporters of the former government.

It is difficult to predict where Yemen will go next. In any event, many people have been struck by the decline in corruption in the country, and the Houthis are trying to make the administration more equitable and inclusive for people of all religious affiliations and tribes. But they are experiencing an acute shortage of trained professional personnel, especially in the system of public administration, the military command and the police force. Even the personal protective detail of the leader of Ansar Allah consists of officers from Iran's Revolutionary Guard. A portion of the army and police have joined the Houthis' side, in particular a number of supporters of former President Ali
Abdullah Saleh who was overthrown in a color revolution orchestrated by the United States, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia in 2012. Now it seems as if Saleh or his son retains a good chance of regaining the presidency through the efforts of a coalition made up of Ansar Allah and pro-Saleh tribes as well as his supporters from the General People’s Congress. On the flip side, al-Islah and its allies in the Hadi wing of the GPC are not going to give up, even though Hadi, who is still the president, has no power to speak of. But they will not be able to accomplish anything without any support of external forces that have major economic and political interests in Yemen, especially in Saudi Arabia and the United States. Those two countries are striving not to get openly involved in Yemen’s domestic affairs for fear of a commensurate response from Iran which is ratcheting up aid to the Shiite Houthis.

Hence the situation in the capital is tense. Although the Houthis have installed checkpoints all over the place and control all movement in the capital, acts of terrorism and armed clashes do occur from time to time. Ansar al Shari’a militants are the main party engaged in terrorism, which includes evening and nighttime mortar fire on the Houthi positions, prompting the Houthis to return fire in residential areas. There are reports that the militants are being joined of late by a growing number of al-Islah members, who for the sake of power are willing to go so far as to enter into an alliance with extremists. If that happens, the radical Islamists would suddenly be in much better shape, and Saudi Arabia could then be expected to intervene on their behalf. Saudi Arabia won't undertake a military invasion in Yemen. Things are not going the Saudis' way at home, and from a military standpoint, the Saudi army is not all that formidable. In addition, the areas along the border of Yemen and Saudi Arabia are inhabited by Shiite Yemeni and Saudi tribes, such as the Ismailites in Najran. Furthermore, an alliance is unlikely to be formed between the Islamists and the secular and semi-secular forces of the GPC, and it’s even less likely that Saleh's supporters would join forces with the Islamists. That's because Saleh's people have a strong chance of coming back to power. He is an acceptable politician for most Yemenis, including the Houthis. And to the best of our knowledge, folks in the White House are in frenzy, kicking themselves now because of their stupidity in staging a color revolution against Saleh.

However, many are predicting that a different scenario will develop: a “Somalization” of Yemen’s internal conflict in which the country loses its statehood and disintegrates into enclaves of various allegiance: a Shiite section in the North and in Sana’a, where the Zaidiyyah imamate is reborn along the lines of what existed in 1962; a Sunni section in the center, with its capital in Ta’izz; a semi-secular "socialist" portion carved out in the South, with its capital in Aden; and an Islamist-terrorist realm in the eastern part of the South (similar to the Islamic State group’s dominions in Iraq and Syria) with its capital in Mukalla. Which is all the more plausible given that the Islamic State has declared an opening of hostilities in Yemen. Or there is the Iraq option: years of civil war based on Sunni-Shiite conflict in which numerous terrorist organizations take part.

Whatever the case, tough times are in store for Yemen in the coming years.

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