



Policy Paper on Inclusivity in Yemen

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A. Introduction



Revolution in Yemen showed early signs of success with the relatively peaceful removal of ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh. However, although Saleh stepped aside he has not stepped away. His regime and supporters continue to be important power brokers. In theory, the presence of representatives from all Yemeni stakeholder groups, including the Saleh camp, should be positive. In practice, however, it has led to an extended period of public suspicion of the current government's motives and dedication to revolutionary values. For example, slow reform within the security sector has caused several years of tense sporadic confrontations between the security apparatus and a public that perceives the ongoing presence of Saleh supporters and regime figures in the new government as a barrier to change.

Much in Yemen's transitional period and beyond remains uncertain. Despite their participation in the National Dialogue Conference, important Yemeni stakeholders such as the northern Huthis and the Southern Hiraak Movement, continue to view the transition agreement with scepticism while non-state actors such as AQAP and other armed groups have taken advantage of the security vacuum that followed the 2011 uprising. Furthermore, deepened international involvement in domestic politics has prompted increased resentment of outside interference while diminishing the new government's sense of independence in the eye of the Yemeni population. Similarly, the enduring influence of powerful, internationally-funded political parties and interest groups threatens the inclusivity of the ongoing transitional process.

Structurally, Yemen continues to face deep-rooted socio-economic challenges related to fast population growth, increasing poverty and unemployment rates – particularly in rural areas – as well as chronic under-development with a general lack of basic services and adequate infrastructure across the country. Furthermore, while the Yemeni state continues to rely heavily on the revenues of its dwindling oil and gas resources, the country's ground water reserves are rapidly depleting due to mismanagement. The 2011 revolution further negatively affected the defective social service delivery across Yemen, including health and education, thus increasing hardship for an already vulnerable population, particularly among youth and women.

In this context, gender development continues to suffer. Although the Republic of Yemen is signatory to many human and women's rights conventions, women remain highly underrepresented in Yemen's political and economic life, despite accounting for half of the country's population. Women's rights violations still are common, partly because existing laws designed to protect women are inconsistently applied. While the experience of the revolution increased the visibility of women activists such as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Tawakkol Karman in Sana'a and Bushra Al Maqari in Taiz, as well as opened new opportunities for advancement. The long-lasting problems confronting Yemeni women remain unresolved. Furthermore, new challenges have arisen such as ensuring that women's acquired gains during the Yemeni uprising will not be undermined during the remaining process of the national dialogue. It is essential within this context, that the international community demonstrate visible, targeted commitment and assistance to the Yemeni government in containing divisive forces within and outside Yemen and showing tangible security, economic and political progress for an inclusive national dialogue.

Problem Description

International policy makers must address and answer four important questions:

1. How can the international community credibly call for national inclusivity when many Yemenis believe that several foreign nations are taking unilateral or bilateral decisions on Yemeni soil?
2. How can real unity be achieved while important Yemeni stakeholders feel under-represented and marginalized by central government?
3. How can the state provide stability and security when the general perception is that elements of the former regime remain intact within security and other state institutions?
4. How can the international community leverage off the early successes of women groups during the revolution in Yemen to ensure that these remain forces for change during transition?

Recommendations

1. How can the international community credibly call for national inclusivity when many Yemenis believe that several foreign nations are taking unilateral or bilateral decisions on Yemeni soil?

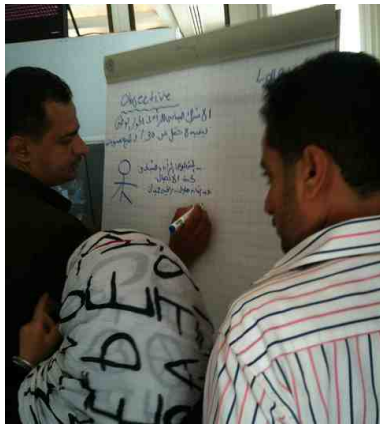
Reduce the disproportionate importance given to US foreign policy

The majority of Yemenis are frustrated and angered at both US drone strikes on their soil, perceived as an infringement on their sovereignty, and the apparent complicity of the current Yemeni government. There is a danger that US counter-terrorist operations, through their lethality and failure to win public support, alienate the local population. This may lead to longer-term challenges

– both within and outside the security domain. It is thus essential that the US clarify what an acceptable victory over AQAP looks like and how it proposes to move away from a strategy that prioritizes punishments rather than rewards. The international community should continue to provide political, financial, and technical support to the national reconciliation process while also respecting Yemen’s independence.

Lessen KSA’s actual and perceived involvement in domestic politics

KSA remains heavily involved in Yemen domestic politics – for example, through the financing of several political parties such as Al Islah and the GPC. Supporters justify such actions as measures necessary to counter the influence of other more nefarious regional stakeholders, such as Iran. However, a common complaint is that in KSA’s long and ongoing struggle to promote Sunni groups and so outdo Iran in its bid for regional domination, its actions have promoted and aggravated sectarian strife in Yemen. It is thus paramount that members of and international actors supportive of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative continue to support the Yemeni government’s efforts to implement the agreement without actually taking sides in local political (and religious) disputes or appearing to do so.



Curb Iran’s actual or perceived support to non-state Yemeni actors

As the US, KSA, and other international actors have expanded their influence in Yemen, so too has Iran. Important constituencies—such as the Huthis, members of the Southern Movement and activists in Sana’a and Taiz, who feel excluded from, dissatisfied with, or prejudiced against by the NDC and the GCC—seem to increasingly align themselves with Iran, both to counterbalance the influence of KSA/US in the country and as a means of confronting domestic political adversaries. The government of Iran should publicly show support for the NDC, highlight its commitment to help resolve long-standing political and religious issues in the province of Sa’dah while encouraging non-state actors such as the Huthis or the Hiraak Southern Movement to fully integrate in the national political process.

2. How can real unity be achieved while important Yemeni stakeholders feel under-represented and marginalized by central government?

Increase focus on regional grievances

Important stakeholders in the transitional process continue to believe that they are under-represented and marginalized by the central government. The international community must encourage the Yemeni government to focus on greater political, social and economic development outside of Sana’a. In particular, reconciling with Yemen’s South requires acknowledgment of Southerners’ legitimate social, political, and economic grievances and commitment by the central government to address them effectively. It is thus very important for Southerners themselves to agree over the type of relationship they want to build with the central government (unity, federalism, secession) so that a unified message may be conveyed during the NDC. One critical

factor for enabling such internal dialogue and change is the greater empowerment of grassroots civil society organizations operating outside of the capital.

Provide assistance in transforming non-state movements into legitimate political entities

Groups such as the Huthis and those supportive of the Southern Movement have legitimate grievances that must be recognised but lack the vision, will and opportunity to transform away from being insurgent/armed non-state groups into ones that operate within legitimate political spheres. This process of integration requires the Yemeni state, along with national political parties, to become more inclusive, tolerant and open-minded in helping non-state groups transform into political parties that exercise their full and equal political rights. It also requires the provision of specific expertise and assistance to non-state groups in order to promote the necessary appetite for such change, i.e. in the case of the Huthis, encourage the realisation that they cannot be a political party while maintaining arms and effective control of northern territories within Yemen.

Encourage the disengagement of former regime figures from politics

Many Yemenis believe that the GCC-brokered settlement signed in November 2011 induced the exit of ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh in such a way as to ensure that he retained significant control over Yemen. As such, many Yemenis feel that the transition agreement failed to resolve the highly personalised, enduring conflict between the Saleh camp and the family of General Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, both of which seek to protect their interests and undermine their adversaries to the expense of other regional stakeholders. It is important that the international community encourage the current Yemeni government to maintain distance during the transition period from divisive political figures such as former President Saleh or Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar.



3. How can the state provide stability and security when the general perception is that rival elements of the former regime remain intact within security and other state institutions?

Communicate international support to a clear, gradual military restructuring process

Although the government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi has taken important first steps in the restructuring of the country's military-security apparatus, the army remains divided, with warring commanders loyal to rival factions of the old regime escaping the president's full authority. As such, weakening the old elite's grip over the security sector has become essential to unifying the Yemeni armed forces and introducing a coherent and unified command structure. Without overreaching, it is essential that the international community provide technical support to a gradual process of institutional change within the Yemeni military-security apparatus so as to progressively weaken loyalties to individual commanders without provoking a backlash. International actors should also provide training to relevant Yemeni stakeholders on the process of military-security reform.

Integrate tribes into the reformed military-security apparatus

Another major obstacle to successful military-security reform is the existence of military divisions along tribal and regional lines as well as party affiliations. In many regions of Yemen such as the northern governorates, the state security forces are not the primary security providers. Instead, powerful tribal leaders often hold significant security positions while attendant benefits (subsidies, supplies, etc.) have led some to resist military reforms. It is thus essential that the international community communicate support to reforms that will allow for the incorporation of tribal elements into the military-security apparatus (as local security providers) without encouraging further divisions.

Incorporate the views of regional stakeholders into the restructuring process

Two influential constituencies, the northern Huthi movement and southern separatists, who retain significant territorial control in their areas of influence, are unlikely to support a restructuring process (that would demand that they relinquish their weapons) in the absence of a broader political settlement for the post-transition period. It is thus important that the international community help the transitional government of President Hadi to present a strategic vision of the military restructuring process that is clearly linked to decisions made during the national dialogue conference.

4. How can the international community leverage off the early successes of women groups during the revolution in Yemen to ensure that these remain forces for change during transition and beyond?

Strengthen the coordination of the women's movement within the NDC



The women's movement in Yemen remains fragmented, with no real strategic vision of what can and should be achieved during the transition period. The international community must therefore provide support to women in leading positions in transitional institutions, and help increase their level of organisation. As such, the international community should encourage the creation of a coordination mechanism within the NDC to allow women activists to support each other in the nine working committees of the conference and thus make sure that the national dialogue addresses wholesale changes to the status of women's rights in Yemen.

Ensure women's participation during the remaining process of the transition

Commitments by the Yemeni leadership and main political players to accept and uphold women's engagement in the political process remain dubious. It is therefore essential that the international community encourage coordination and consensus between various Yemeni stakeholders, including political leaders, government agencies and women's organizations themselves, so as to adequately defend women's interests and rights during the drafting of a new constitution and the organisation of general elections. As such, women's participation in the constitution drafting committee as well as all bodies related to the preparations for general elections should be guaranteed.

Support the humanitarian response to women's issues

Political divisions within the NDC may be used to challenge solutions proposed to promote women's rights while ideological differences among women activists are likely to cause disagreements. As such, it is paramount that the international community, in coordination with women organizations and local NGOs, also help improve women's conditions outside politics by ensuring protection from conflict and gender based violence, increasing female participation in educational and health programs while providing them with increased economic opportunities. Feeling safe and secure and knowing that they can feed their families and earn an income, Yemeni women will likely feel empowered to participate equally in public life.

For more information on Karama's work in Yemen, please contact Avni Shah at avni@el-karama.org.