The main dispute and the potential fighting fronts between the two parties of the “Riyadh Agreement”

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Many challenges are facing the implementation of the agreement, the chances of success are very low, and the skyline of continuing the war is wide open. What can be done?

Study:

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Cover Photo:
The moment the parties participating and sponsoring the Riyadh Agreement entered the hall where the agreement was signed.
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“Riyadh Agreement and Peace Process in Yemen: The Risks of Failure and The Chances of Success”, is a research project implemented by Arabia Felix Center (AFC) for Studies, with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). It aims to understand the reasons that prevented the implementation of this agreement, and to provide realistic recommendations that can guide the concerned parties in order to implement the agreement.
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Executive Summary

This paper is part of the “Riyadh Agreement Project,” implemented by the Arabia Felix Center for Studies (AFC), with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). The aim is to understand the factors that prevent the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and provide realistic recommendations to the concerned parties. This project will include studies and other policy papers that will be published successively.

This study examines the potential points of tension and conflict between Government of Yemen forces and the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and the consequences and risks that emerge from the failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement. The Riyadh Agreement was signed on November 5, 2019, by the Yemeni government and the STC, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, under the auspices of King Salman bin Abdulaziz, to stop the fighting between the forces of the Yemeni government and those of the STC, to unite against the Houthis.

The Houthis invaded the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, on September 21, 2014, and then took control of many Yemeni regions and governorates. After the forces of the STC took control of Aden, the temporary capital of Yemen, and expelled the government from it in August 2019, the Yemeni government lost an independent administrative center from which it was operating from the ground.

Despite Saudi Arabia’s efforts, it has failed so far to successfully implement the Riyadh Agreement, which has led to prolonging the war in Yemen and weakening the Government of Yemen and its local allies. This has strengthened the Houthi group and made it the only coherent and dominant force in Yemen.

This study provides a brief overview of the Riyadh Agreement, the challenges facing its implementation, the risks of not implementing it, and sheds light on the latest developments in the field between the two parties of the conflict. These challenges and risks are analyzed, and the paper ends with practical recommendations that can be used to address the crisis.

The study also addresses the most important military, security, economic, and political developments that followed the signing of the agreement and which affected its implementation. The study also addresses the roles of local, regional, and international actors who influence the agreement both negatively and positively.
The Importance of This Study

The importance of this study comes from the continuation of the conflict and the military build-up between the two parties, and the expansion of the area of confrontations between them in Abyan governorate, with the possibility of a new front erupting between them within the areas of the Al-Sabaiha tribes (1), affiliated to Lahj governorate (2), close to the city of Aden. This will have many negative effects that will add more weakness to the Yemeni government and the local anti-Houthi forces.

The importance of this paper also comes from the continued economic deterioration of Yemen, which is reflected in the collapse of the national currency and in the increase of hunger rates, where 70% of the population – about 30 million people – are facing the threat of starvation(3). The United Nations has previously stated that Yemen witnesses the worst humanitarian crisis in the world due to the war (4). Reports confirm the increase in tensions in southern Yemen, with an almost complete absence of services, continuous power cuts, and the spread of fear in the city of Aden (5).

Preface

More than a year has passed since the signing of the Riyadh Agreement between the Government of Yemen and the STC, but the agreement has not been implemented. Military, political, and media tension between the two parties can be seen in the statements of politicians, in the performance of their media outlets, and through the positions of their activists on social media.

Clashes erupted between the two sides on August 7, 2019, inside the city of Aden, and ended, with the STC taking control of the temporary capital of Yemen, and the presidential palace located in Ma’asheq, four days later. After that, STC forces easily entered the city of Zinjibar (60 km east of Aden) and took control of Abyan governorate(6). At that time, the STC reached the peak of its expansion and controlled five out of the seven southern governorates it claims to represent (7).

However, on August 21, confrontations erupted between the two parties in Ataq, the capital of Shabwa Governorate (8), ending with government forces taking control of the city and the rest of the districts affiliated with this important oil province. After that, government forces advanced toward Abyan governorate and were able, easily, to regain control of its center. They then headed toward Aden intending to regain control of it. When these forces reached the Al-Alam area, the western gateway of Aden on August 29, they were bombed by Emirati aircraft, which forced them to withdraw to the coastal city of Shuqra in Abyan governorate, located east of Zinjibar, about 20 km away from Shabwa.

Since that time, there have been combat lines between the two sides, in the areas between Shuqra and the village of Al-Sheikh Salem, which is about 7 km east of Zinjibar. Since then, this front has witnessed bloody confrontations that led to hundreds of deaths and injuries on both sides (9). The confrontations continued even after the two sides signed the Riyadh Agreement. The presence of Saudi military mediation on the ground has failed to separate the forces and implement the military part of the agreement, which provides for the redeployment of forces from areas of confrontation (10), and the expulsion of STC
forces from Aden (11).

Although the confrontations have now halted in Abyan, military tensions in the governorate are still high between the two sides, and have increased since the outbreak of confrontations between them in the city of Lawdar, the third-largest city in the governorate (12). After the government forces took control of this city, the STC said that its forces “will not stand idly by.” (13)

New fronts are looming on the horizon that may erupt between the two sides at any time, particularly in the areas of the Al-Sabaiha tribes, located in the Taiz Governorate on the former borders between north and south Yemen (14). Large parts of this are controlled by forces affiliated with and loyal to the Yemeni Congregation for Reform Party (Al-Islah), the political and military arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen (15), whose forces play a major role in fighting the STC in Abyan.
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On August 22, 2020, Al-Islah and the forces loyal to it seized the headquarters of the 35th Armored Brigade (18) and the theater of its operations which the forces of this brigade were deployed: most of the areas of the Al-Hujariya districts (19) and the western countryside of Taiz Governorate. After Al-Islah deployed its forces on the mountains overlooking the south and the western coast (20), there are potential lines of conflict between Al-Islah forces and their main opponents: the forces of the STC, backed by the UAE: the forces of the STC, and the forces of Tariq Saleh the nephew of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

After Al-Islah party took control of the southern countryside of Taiz, it “formed a military force affiliated with it in the Tor al-Baha district”, and “started to recruit Al-Sabaiha tribesmen” to join those forces, according to what Al-Islah opponents said and confirmed by its movements on the ground (21).

On the practical level, there was a military presence of Al-Islah in Al-Sabaiha areas under an official government cover, represented by the 4th Mountain Infantry Brigade, which appeared suddenly in the Al-Maqaterah district, the center of Al-Sabaiha areas adjacent to the Tor al-Baha district, in 2017. This brigade was established without a republican decree to do so, and its leadership was assigned to Abu Bakr al-Jabouli, a well-known Al-Sabaiha Muslim Brotherhood member, who worked as a teacher and a reporter for the Sahwa newspaper, which spoke for the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen.

At the end of October 2020, Al-Islah media started to talk about the “Tor al-Baha Military Axis” led by Al-Jabouli, without any republican decision to form it (22). Nevertheless, in early February 2021, the official website of the Yemeni Ministry of Defense published a news item in which it said that “Major General Abu Bakr al-Jabouli, commander of the Tor al-Baha axis, inaugurated the new training year at ‘Al-Camp’ in Tor al-Baha district (23).” Al-Islah’s opponents consider this statement as evidence that confirms the control of Al-Islah over the Yemeni government’s decisions. Muhammad al-Naqib, the official spokesman for the forces of the STC, said that the formation of the Tor al-Baha military axis is “illegitimate,” and stressed that “no military decision has been issued to establish the Tor al-Baha axis affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and the same is true of the Fourth Infantry Brigade,” and considered that the goal is to thwart the Riyadh Agreement (24).

As a result of the military build-up in Tor al-Baha, and on the former borders between north and south Yemen, the STC’s interest in Al-Sabaiha increased. Its leaders held several meetings, sometimes to “strengthen the unity of the southern ranks (25),” other times to “discuss the military situation in the areas of contact” with Taiz and “the developments of the military situation in the Al-Hujariya areas (26).” On August 25, 2020, Sheikh Ali Al-Tatwi, the commander of the southern resistance in the border areas in Al-Sabaiha, said in his meeting with the head of the Lahj STC leadership that “the popular crowd, affiliated with Al-Islah (Muslim Brotherhood), is trying to explode the situation and target the southern resistance militarily in Al-Sabaiha (27).”

On May 13, Al-Zubaidi visited the camp of the 9th Brigade Saeqa (Commandos), affiliated with his forces and stationed in Al-Sabaiha, and “a number of military sites along the Al-Sabaiha line and Ras Amran,” on the western coast (28). On May 31, Al-Zubaidi met with notables of Al-Sabaiha and said that “Sabaiha, in its entire geographical extent, will remain an impenetrable fence against all conspiracies and ambitions targeting the security and stability of the south.” (29) During the last period, the STC worked to strengthen its forces allegiance to the party.
deployed in the areas adjacent to Taiz (30) to confront any possible “Muslim Brotherhood” attack, according to a statement by one of its military commanders (31).

On June 26, 2021, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, head of the STC, chaired a military and security meeting of the STC in Aden “to stand against the Brotherhood’s mobilization in Abyan and to confront the Houthi militias in Al-Dhalea.” The official website of the “STC” said that “the meeting discussed the military mobilization process carried out by the Brotherhood militia in both Shuqra and Al-Sabaiha, and also discussed the extent of the southern armed forces’ readiness to confront these crowds, Brotherhood military formations, and terrorist organizations (32).”

The opposing side has not remained quiet concerning these developments. On February 7, 2021, the Emirati Al-Ain News website published a report entitled “The Brotherhood of Yemen is massing at the gates of Aden” and called on the government to “force Al-Islah party to abide by the terms of the Riyadh Agreement, stop the threats, and prevent crowds on the outskirts of Lahj and Al-Sabaiha governorates, near Bab al-Mandab and Tor al-Baha district, and Abyan al-Sharqeya from Qarn al-Classi and Shuqra (33).”

The News Yemen website, affiliated with Tariq Saleh’s forces, said that the formation of the Tor al-Baha military axis is a prelude to the Muslim Brotherhood’s incursion into Al-Sabaiha, and then to Bab al-Mandab (34). The Emirati Sky News Arabia also published a report, citing an unnamed Yemeni military source who said that “Qatar is attracting mercenaries and extremists with huge amounts of money, in order to form parallel military forces in Yemen, in an effort to achieve its malicious agenda and Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy with Turkey, in the south and Bab al-Mandab (35).”

The Main Dispute over the Riyadh Agreement

Immediately after the signing of the Riyadh Agreement (36), a dispute arose over which part to start implementing first. President Hadi and Al-Islah demanded the implementation of the military and security arrangements first, while the STC demanded the implementation of the agreement sequentially, i.e., starting with the implementation of the political part. So far, the disagreement is still ongoing, preventing the implementation of most of the terms of the agreement.

After months of negotiations, it was agreed that the agreement would be implemented simultaneously by both parties. But this did not happen. Saudi Arabia formed a military committee that arrived in Aden and Abyan to redeploy forces in the areas of confrontation and remove STC forces from the temporary capital. Nevertheless, the committee failed in its mission, despite the December 11-2020 announcement of transferring a number of military brigades from the same areas, under Saudi supervision (37).

The crisis reached its climax on the evening of April 25, 2020, with the STC declaring a state of emergency in Aden and the rest of the areas it controls, assuming the task of “autonomous administration for the south” (38). The government considered this “a clear rebellion against the legitimate government, a clear coup against the Riyadh Agreement, and a continuation of the armed rebellion against the state.”

The STC’s decision was met with local, regional, and international rejection (39), and on July 28, 2020, it was forced to retract it. After Saudi Arabia presented a mechanism to speed up the implementation of the agreement, the STC announced its abandonment
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A map showing areas of potential confrontations between the forces of Al-Islah party and the forces of the STC, between the governorates of Lahj and Taiz

The situation deteriorated with the storming of the presidential palace in Aden (Ma’ashiq), on March 16, 2021, by protesters who were said to have been pushed by the STC (43). As a result, Saudi Arabia called on the two parties to “respond urgently to what has been agreed upon, discard differences, and work with the mechanism agreed upon (44).”

The agreement stipulated the need to form a government of political competencies, “equally between the southern and northern governorates, within a period not exceeding thirty days from the signing of this agreement” (November 5, 2019). But the announcement of the formation of the government took place on December 18, 2020, that is, after about 13 and half months of negotiations. The main reason for delaying the formation of the government was a dispute over the distribution of ministerial seats.

The second clause of Annex I of the agreement states that “the prime minister of the current government will begin working in the interim capital, Aden, within a period not exceeding 7 days from the date of signing the agreement,” but that has not happened, and to this day the government is still working from Riyadh. Only the prime minister and a few officials have returned to Aden. Neither a governor of Aden nor a security director was appointed during the period specified in the agreement (45). To this day, no governors have been appointed for the rest of the southern governorates (46).
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The two sides are still exchanging accusations about obstructing the implementation of the agreement, in conjunction with the continued military build-up and the deterioration of the economic, security, and political situation. On the one hand, Al-Islah politicians and activists accuse the United Arab Emirates of obstructing the implementation of the agreement and preventing the government from returning to Aden. This was denied by Abu Dhabi, which has called more than once for the implementation of the agreement.

On the other hand, the STC says that Al-Islah controls the Yemeni government, supports terrorist groups, and works to continue “the north’s occupation of the south.” The STC also attacked President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and considered him a mere “puppet” in the “hands of terrorists,” referring to Al-Islah (47). In this, the STC reduces the conflict to its territorial dimension, ignoring the overlapping factors causing the conflict that include a cumulative legacy of south-south and north-north conflicts.

The conflicts in the south, and Yemen in general, have do not merely belong to the past and still play an active role in Yemen’s political and social present(48). This is shown by the alignment of Abyan and Shabwa in the current conflict against Al-Dhalea, Radfan and Yafa’. This same alignment was seen in January 1986 (49), with some differences: the political orientations belonging to Taiz and the central regions were with Al-Dhalea and Radfan in 1986, while many of them now stand with Abyan and Shabwa as they are in favor of Yemeni unity. It is noticeable that what remains of the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime (military, tribal, and religious leaders such as Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Al-Islah party) are standing today in the same trench with their old allies: Abyan and Shabwa.

The conflict currently has a two-level regional dimension: the first is between Abyan and Shabwa on the one hand, and Al-Dhalea, Radfan and Yafa’ on the other, and the second is between the north and the south. It is a political conflict, and in part an economic one. The STC uses the “south” as a slogan through which it seeks to mobilize the southerners on its side, and President Hadi, and his military, political, and tribal allies belonging to the north, use “unity” as a slogan to mobilize the north on their side.

The opponents of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar’s wing and Al-Islah party accuse it of “evading” and not implementing the Riyadh Agreement (50). On the other hand, there are many suggestions of the STC’s lack of commitment to implementing the agreement. While the STC has committed itself to ensuring the “full citizenship rights for all Yemeni people and rejecting regional and sectarian discrimination,” it continues to engage in discriminatory behavior against those belonging to the northern governorates, especially those belonging to Taiz.

On May 29, 2021, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi issued a decision assigning Shallal Ali Shaye as a commander of what he called “anti-terrorism units (51).” On June 25, Al-Zubaidi issued a decision regarding the appointment of leadership for the Security Belt Forces and their work within the Ministry of Interior (52). On the same day, Al-Zubaidi issued a second decision regarding the appointment of a leadership for the support brigades and to include them in the southern ground forces (53).”

Due to the escalation of the crisis again in June, Saudi Arabia summoned the representatives of the two parties of the agreement to the Kingdom “to resolve the differences that hinder
the implementation of the power-sharing deal.” On July 2, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the military and security appointments issued by the STC, stating that these decisions “are not consistent with what was agreed upon between the two parties (54).” In response to the Saudi statement, the head of the Foreign Relations Department of the STC in Europe, Ahmed bin Farid, said on Twitter: “The recent appointments made by the STC are an internal matter and do not contradict with the Riyadh Agreement.” The STC further issued an official statement defending the appointments (55), saying that the it “is striving hard to implement the Riyadh Agreement despite the obstacles,” which it accused the government of creating them “to thwart the efforts and endeavors of the brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (56).” Despite this, Al-Zubaidi issued other military and security decisions on July 5 (57).

Another crisis relates to decisions that were made by the two parties. On January 15, President Hadi made appointments that angered the STC, including appointing Dr. Ahmed Al-Mousay as the Attorney-General of the Republic (58), Dr. Ahmed Obaid bin Daghr as the Head of the Shura Council, Abdullah Muhammad Abu Al-Ghaith as the Deputy Head of the Shura Council, the Engineer Wahi Jaafar Aman also as the Deputy of the Head of the Shura Council, and Mutee Dammaj as Secretary-General of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (59). The STC condemned these decisions, saying that they were issued unilaterally with the aim of “disrupting the completion of the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and thwarting the work of the government between the south and the north that emanated from the agreement (60).”

Alongside this, military mobilizations continue by both parties in the governorates of Abyan and Shabwa, as well as in Al-Sabaiha areas, Lahj governorate, and in the adjacent areas of the Taiz (61). Security crackdowns are still ongoing between the two parties in the governorates of Aden and Shabwa. Likewise, both sides use media campaigns to attack each other, despite their commitment to stop them.

Yemeni Concerns

The Riyadh Agreement raised both hopes and fears among most Yemenis. The hopes were focused on the possibility that the agreement would “stop separatist tendencies” in the south, end the state of division and fragmentation, and unify efforts to confront the Houthis. The fears were that the agreement would “legitimize” the STC, grant it regional and international recognition, and establish it as the sole representative of the south. The failure to implement the agreement increased these fears and destroyed public hope in overcoming the crisis. It also led to Yemenis’ lack of confidence in the agreement and in the effectiveness of Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

In general, Yemenis do not trust Saudi Arabia, based on a long legacy of disputes. Saudi Arabia has repeatedly stressed that it does not have a clear vision and effective tools to deal with problems and resolve the war in Yemen, despite its intentions. This has led to calls by Al-Islah activists, and some officials associated with it, for a Turkish-Qatari role in Yemen to replace the Saudi-Emirati intervention.

Saudi Arabia is not solely responsible for the failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement, as well as the failure in the war against the Houthis. The bulk of this failure, multi-directional and multi-level, lies with the Yemeni government. It did not specify the
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Successfully implementing the Riyadh Agreement could enable the Yemeni government to “overcome the obstacle of multiplicity of crises,” enhance its influence, “end the state of the diaspora government,” and “contain separatist calls,” as well as providing a framework generalizable to other regions (62).

If the agreement is implemented successfully, it should regulate the security, political, and economic conditions that have deteriorated during the conflict between the government and the STC, controlling security, paying employee salaries, and stopping the economic deterioration in Aden, in the southern governorates, and areas controlled by the legitimate government. It should also lead to controlling the relationship between the Yemeni government and the STC, creating the appropriate conditions for the STC to integrate into the government’s structure and postponing its demands for the secession of the south. The implementation of the agreement by the two parties would also strengthen the government front, unify the forces opposing the Houthi group, and potentially lead to an end to the war in Yemen.

The dominance of Ali Mohsen and Al-Islah Party over the government and its decisions is the most important challenge facing Yemenis in general, and the implementation of the agreement in particular. The Riyadh Agreement was supposed to lead to the liberation of the government, but what happened was only the consolidation of this hegemony (63). There is no real partnership in the “government of the diaspora,” not only between the current center of domination and the STC, but also between this center represented by President Hadi, Ali Mohsen, Al-Islah, and the rest of the political components that support the government.

Many challenges face the implementation of the agreement, the chances of its success are low, and the prospect of continuing the war is wide open. There are great difficulties that make “political normalization” a complex and almost impossible process. In particular, the “legacy of revenge” between the parties is still influential and recalled at the first sign of dispute, as the roots of their conflict extend back to the time of the civil war. The interests of these forces, which vary ideologically and politically, are largely what prevent the implementation of the agreement (64).

“The inherited historical hostility and ideological conflict reduce the possibilities of agreement between the two parties, besides other hostilities that have formed during the political practice in the last three years since the political establishment of the STC in 2017, which enjoys popular support and is essentially a separatist force (65).”

There is also an important issue that lies in the “problem of the model,” meaning the quotas that were adopted in the agreement to balance the distribution of power. This model has failed elsewhere, including in the Middle East such as in Iraq and Lebanon, and such practices have led to political polarization, gridlock, and crisis, rather than balance and compromise (66).

The agreement calls for peace and to put an end to the conflict, to support the needs
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Reasons for the Failure of the Agreement

Several factors and challenges still prevent the implementation of the agreement, the most important of which are:

- The ideological differences between the two parties of the agreement, the desire for revenge, and the regional dimension of their dispute.
- The weakness, corruption, and failure of the legitimate Yemeni government and the dominance of Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Al-Islah.
- Building the army on neither national nor professional bases, and allowing political and military parties to dominate it.
- The intransigence of the government and the STC and their lack of seriousness in implementing the agreement.
- Lack of trust between the two parties.
- The multiplicity of crises and the continuation of the military mobilization from both sides on the lines of contact in Abyan and Shabwa, and in a possible new battlefront between them in Al-Sabaiha territories in Lahj governorate.
- Expansion of the area of confrontations between the two sides, and the transfer of confrontations from the “Shuqra-Sheikh Salem front” to the Lawder district in Abyan governorate.
- Corruption and the inability of the Saudi political and military officials who are supervising the implementation of the agreement, and the Yemeni file in general.
- Saudi Arabia’s inability to play its role as a guarantor of the implementation of the agreement, and the inefficiency of the process of monitoring its implementation.
- The agreement included elastic clauses, the interpretation of which was tampered with to evade the implementation process.

Conclusion

There are several risks as a result of the failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement, which appear today in the security imbalance and economic deterioration in Yemen as a whole, and in the areas controlled by the legitimate government in particular. This requires the concerned parties to work for the implementation of the agreement.

Saudi Arabia is unable to persuade the two parties to seriously embark on implementing the agreement. Given this inability, Saudi Arabia should allow a regional and international role (especially the UN Security Council) to help it put pressure on the parties to implement the agreement.

The implementation of this agreement is a necessary prelude to stopping the war and establishing peace in Yemen, and the United Nations, represented by the UN Security Council, should make a greater effort, and work directly, to assist in the implementation of this agreement, and use international sanctions against people who obstruct its implementation.
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Recommendations

- Ending the tension in Abyan and Shabwa, and in the former split borders between Taiz and the Al-Sabiha.
- Stopping the military build-up on the front lines, removing weaponry from the field, restoring military discipline in the army’s structure, and rebuilding it depending on patriotism, competence, and merit in assuming tasks and responsibilities.
- Liberating the Yemeni government and the army from the domination of General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Al-Islah, and stopping President Hadi from issuing decisions that strengthened the domination of this party over the government and the army.
- Appointing a new Vice President to stop the influence of General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.
- Conducting quick political and military reviews and changes by Saudi Arabia to prove its seriousness in implementing the agreement and resolving the war in Yemen.
- Forcing the government and the STC to deal seriously with the agreement, withdrawing the forces of the STC from Aden, and stopping its discriminatory measures against the people of the northern governorates.
- Implementing the terms of the agreement, simultaneously by both sides, and return the government to Aden to carry out its tasks and face the economic crisis.
- Stopping the corruption that dominates the Yemeni government, and dismissing all the failed and incompetent leaders involved in corruption and looting public money.
- Regulating the security, political, and economic conditions and achieving security and stability in the south and all the governorates and areas controlled by the government.
- Controlling the relationship between the government and the STC, and integrating the STC into the structure of the government, provided that it commits to work under its roof and postpones its demands for the secession of the south.
- Achieving an effective and real partnership in the government for all Yemeni components that support legitimacy, and appointing personalities who enjoy competence and independence, are not polluted by corruption, and are free from regionalism, sectarianism, and the traditional powers.
- Stopping the economic deterioration, and achieving security and stability in the southern governorates, and the rest of the governorates and areas under government control.
- Replacing the army commanders in Taiz with competent and independent military leaders, to end the tensions with the STC in Al-Sabiha territories and the western coast, and focus the battle against the Houthi group.
- Stopping the mobilization in the so-called “Tor al-Baha military axis,” and handing over its leadership to competent and independent military leaders.
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1- Al-Sabaiha is one of the most well-renowned tribes in Yemen, who “were ruling Aden in the period between 410 to 440 AH” (about 1019-1048 AD). Their tribal lands extend from Bab al-Mandab (Al Mudhareba and Ras al-Ara District), through the District of Tor al-Baha, and parts of Tuban District, to Karesh. Well-known national figures belonging to these tribes include the late Qahtan al-Shaabi, the first president of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen; his deputy and prime minister Faisal Abdul Latif; Dr. Yassin Saeed Noman, the former Secretary-General of the Yemeni Socialist Party; and Mahmoud al-Subaihi, the former Minister of Defense, currently detained by the Houthi group.

2- Lahj is located in the southwest of Yemen, about 27 km northwest of the city of Aden.

3- In a report published on its website on August 3, 2021, the World Bank said that “the conflict that has been going on in Yemen for more than 6 years has left at least 24.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including 12.3 million children and 3.7 million displaced people internally”. The bank said that 80% of the population of Yemen lives below the poverty line. See: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/03/09/cash-for-work-changing-yemeni-womens-lives.

4- https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1m/k1mpdx26j

5-https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/reuters/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7-

6- Abyan is located in southern Yemen, on the coastal strip of the Arabian Sea, about 20 km east-west of the city of Aden.

7- The STC controlled the following governorates: Al-Dhalea, Lahj, Aden, Abyan, and Shabwa, while Hadramout and Al-Mahra governorates remained outside its control. See: https://yemen-nic.info/gover/apyan/brife/

8- Shabwa is located in the center of southern Yemen, on the coastal strip of the Arabian Sea, about 385 km east of the city of Aden. It is an oil governorate, with an area of about 42,584 km2, and it has a coastline that extends for about 300 km. It includes the Balhaf port, which hosts a strategic project for the export of liquefied natural gas.

9- See for example: https://alshareanews.com/2020/11/20/40075/.

10- On November 10, 2020, a Saudi military committee arrived in Abyan Governorate to contain the confrontations between the two sides on the Al-Tarya and Al-Sheikh Salem fronts, between Zinjibar and Shuqra. Although the committee extracted a signed commitment from both sides to stop the fighting, confrontations erupted between them more than once after that. Despite the long pause in the confrontations, the Saudi Military
Committee has not yet been able to implement the military part of the agreement, and the Saudi leadership has not been able to complete the implementation of the political part of the agreement, especially the return of the Yemeni government to Aden. See for example:

https://alsharaeanews.com/2020/11/10/38654/
https://alsharaeanews.com/2020/06/27/20987/
https://alsharaeanews.com/2021/01/04/46661/

11-The Saudi Military Committee visited a number of STC forces’ camps in Aden, and other sites in Lahj Governorate, with the aim of determining the places to which these forces could be expelled. However, the operation has not been completed and the STC forces are still stationed in Aden. See for example:

http://albaud4.net/news/10013
https://almasdaronline.com/articles/201421

12-On June 2, 2021, confrontations took place in the city and district of Lawdar, which ended with the government forces taking control of the city as well as the camp of the Security Belt Forces of the STC, which led to deaths and injuries on both sides. The reason for the outbreak of these confrontations was the government’s appointment of a new security director for the directorate, which was rejected by the former director loyal to the STC. See https://alsharaeanews.com/2021/07/01/65111/.


14-Northwest of the city of Aden, about 158 km.

15-Taiz consists of 23 districts (excluding the districts of Al-Maqaterah and Al-Qabaita, which were annexed in 2000 to the Lahj governorate). The government forces took control of Al-Mudhafar, Alqahera, and part of the Sala district, while the rest of the city of Taiz, and other parts of the governorate, are still under the control of the Houthis. The popular resistance also regained the district of Mashra’a and Hadnan (overlooking the city of Taiz) from Houthi militants, and the forces of the 35th Armored Brigade, led by Brigadier General Adnan Al-Hammadi, regained control of most of the districts of Al-Hujariya (including large parts of Al-Maqaterah and continued to protect it until the assassination of Al-Hammadi on December 2, 2019, inside his house located in the Al-Ain area, Al-Mawasit District (Al-Hujariya), south of Taiz Governorate.

16-See: https://alsharaeanews.com/2019/11/18/1867/. After the Houthis took control of the headquarters of the 35th Armored Brigade located in the old airport, at the western entrance to the city of Taiz on April 22, 2015, Adnan Al-Hammadi attempted to re-form the brigade in Al-Hujariya. Subsequently, they were able to expel Houthi militants from more than six districts of Al-Hujariya, and secure and protect most of its remaining districts.

17-The Islah Party controls the government forces in Taiz, with the exception of the 35th Armored Brigade. Al-Islah also controls Public Security, Central Security, and the Military Police Forces in the governorate, and it has thousands of fighters who have been assembled and trained under what is known as the “Popular Mobilization,” with the support of Qatar and Turkey. Since 2016, Al-Hammadi prevented Al-Islah from taking control of Al-Hujariya.

See: https://alsharaeanews.com/2019/12/24/7213/.
Regarding Qatari-Turkish support for the “Popular Mobilization”, See:
https://www.taiztoday.net/2020/08/24/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D(A%D8%D8%A93%D8%BD3%D8%B9%D... %D8%AF%D8%A98%D8%A%D8%AA%D8%87%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8% %D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%8D%B0%D8%8A%D8%B7%D8%B7

19- Al-Hujariya enjoys an important geographical location and a large area. It is a high mountain range that overviews parts of the lands of the southern governorates of Lahj and Al Dhalea, and parts of the western coast areas of Yemen. Although accurate data is difficult to acquire, it likely has a population of approximately 1.5 million people.

21- https://alsharaeanews.com/2020/10/19/35372/.

22- On October 25, 2020, Al-Islah media started talking about the military axis (https://alsharaeanews.com/2020/10/27/36453), although no government news was published regarding its formation. Likewise, the military brigades affiliated with this military axis were formed without a republican decision to do so. The information said that the Tur al-Baha military axis will consist of nine military brigades. See: https://alsharaeanews.com/2020/10/19/35372/.

23-https://www.26sepnews.net/2021/02/01/%d8%a8%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8 %b6-%d8%b9%d8%b3%d9%83%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%ad%d9%88%d8%b1- %d8%b7%d9%88%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%ad%d8%a9- %d8%a8%d9%84%d8%ac-%d9%8a%d8%af%d8%b4%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84/.


30- https://alsharaeanews.com/2021/02/05/50652/.

31- Wafi Al-Ghabs, the commander of the Fourth Brigade Hazm, affiliated with the “(STC)”, which is deployed in “Al-Sabaiha”, said in a press statement published by the media center of the brigade, on February 21, 2021, that “the southern armed forces stationed on the Al-Sabaiha borders, are prepared, with full readiness, to repel any movements or attempts to attack its positions by the Houthi militias or by the Muslim Brotherhood’s Popular Mobilization Forces. Al-Ghabs stated, “The brigade’s command received intelligence information that revealed the arrival of military reinforcements for the Houthi militia and the Popular Mobilization to the Haifan District, southeast of Taiz, which is located on the borders of the Al-Sabaiha areas.” See: https://alsharaeanews.com/2021/02/21/52555/.
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35-https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1403527-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85
5 % D 9 % 8 6 .

36- To read the text of the agreement, see: https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_publicaffairs/details/2019/11/5/1665480/-%D9%86%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%B5-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A.

37-https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/202001141044060078-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8-%D9%8A-%D8%A3-%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%84. //

40- https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/yemen/2020/07/29/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8.
42- Regional (Saudi Arabia - UAE) and international actors played a positive role in implementing the agreement, and many statements were issued by these actors in this regard.
43- https://www.sabanew.net/story/ar/73635. In separate interviews with the author of this paper (on condition of anonymity), two government sources said that the protesters were even able to take the personal weapons of Saudi soldiers who were inside the Ma’ashiq Palace and who were charged of protecting it. One of the officials stated that the government had not yet returned to Aden because Saudi Arabia had failed to protect the palace. The source pointed out that the Saudi soldiers did nothing to protect it when it was stormed by STC protesters, but rather handed over their personal weapons to the
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44- https://www.sabanew.net/story/ar/77011.

45- The second clause of Annex I of the agreement states that “the Yemeni president, after consultations and based on the competence and integrity, shall appoint a governor and a director of Aden security within fifteen days,” but the appointment decision was issued on July 29, 2020.

46- The second clause of the first annex of the agreement stipulates that “a governor will be appointed for Abyan and another for Al-Dhalea within thirty days.” And the fourth clause of the same annex states that “governors and security directors will be appointed for the rest of the southern governorates, within sixty days....”


48- This phrase was said by Dr. Abdul Rahman Omar, Secretary General of the Socialist Party, in an interview with the researcher a few years ago.

49- The war that erupted between the two sides on January 13, 1986, led to killings based on personal identity cards, in which more than ten thousand people from both sides were killed.

50- A report published by Al-Ain News stated that “the Brotherhood is still evading the implementation of the terms of the agreement, and has not completely withdrawn from Shaqra, Al-Kalasi and Al-Arqoub, but rather sent reinforcements with more than one military brigade from Ma’rib, Shabwa and Seiyun.” See: https://al-ain.com/article/muslim-brotherhood-yemen-turkey.


52- The decision appointed Mohsen al-Wali as commander of the Security Belt Forces, Mukhtar al-Nubi as his deputy, and Obaid Muthanna Qassem Laram, as an operations pillar for these forces. The fourth article of the resolution stipulates: “The Security Belt Forces carry out security and police tasks and work within the strength of the Ministry of Interior,” while the fifth article stipulates: “The work of the Security Belt forces is regulated in accordance with the regulations and laws of the Ministry of Interior. See: https://stcaden.com/news/15077

53- The decision appointed Saleh Al-Sayed as the commander of the brigades of support, Ali Nasser Muthanna Al-Mukar as the staff of war, and Abdul Salam Zain Ali Al-Bayhani as the operations pillar of these forces. The fourth article of the resolution stipulated: “The headquarters and support brigades shall be transferred outside Aden governorate and shall be included within the land brigades of the Southern Armed Forces,” while the fifth article states: “The support brigades are subject to the command of the ground forces that are subject to the Ministry of Defense.” See: https://stcaden.com/news/15076.

54- In the days that followed, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France issued similar statements regarding the actions of the STC.

55- https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-all/the-yemen-review-en/14872. In a statement issued on July 3, the Yemeni government called on the STC to “stop all abuses that affect state institutions, stop escalation,” and “stop constantly aggravating the situation and creating crises.” The government welcomed “all the contents contained in the statement of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” and renewed “its adherence to the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement in all its aspects and details” (see: https://
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57- Through these decisions, he appointed a new command of the Security Belt Forces in Abyan Governorate, affiliated with the STC. See: https://www.aden-tm.net/NDetails.aspx?contid=176937.

58- Al-Moussai is affiliated with Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Al-Islah and, although he is not qualified, was appointed to this position as he is “a security official with the rank of major general, and he held the position of Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for the Security and Police Sector.”


60- The STC issued a statement on January 17, saying that “those decisions are a blatant violation and a dangerous coup against the contents of the Riyadh Agreement, and the process of consensus and partnership between the two parties,” stressing that “it is not possible to deal” with those decisions. The STC renewed “its adherence to completing the implementation of all the provisions of the Riyadh Agreement,” and called on “the sponsors of the agreement to complete the implementation process,” saying that it “will take appropriate steps if the decisions taken without prior agreement are not processed” (see: https://stcaden.com/news/13702).


65- ibid

66- ibid
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