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## Analysis: Patronage stalls Yemen's transition



Photo: Adel Yahya/IRIN

Members of the army protest its divided leadership

SANA'A, 8 August 2012 (IRIN) - There is a common saying on the streets of the Yemeni capital Sana'a these days:

"Those who ruled us in the past still rule us at present."

After a year of nation-wide protests and often violent clashes in the capital, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi was declared Yemen's new president in February, replacing Ali Abdullah Saleh, who stepped down after ruling for 33 years.

But nearly six months after his departure, Saleh continues to hold significant influence and control over military forces, leading to several clashes between factions vying for power, including one last week in Sana'a, which killed at least 15 people.

"No positive change has been realized under the new president," Sana'a resident Ali Amin told IRIN. "There is just insecurity and an increase in the number of tribal sheikhs who come to Sana'a with their armed escorts to get their monthly stipends [in exchange for loyalty]."

Five months after officially taking the job, Hadi is widely reported to have been unable to enter the Presidential Palace in Sana'a, which is overlooked by hills teeming with the Republican Guard, a force that remains largely loyal to Saleh. Instead, Hadi is stuck in his own private residence, which occasionally comes under fire.

"[Hadi] doesn't trust these forces whose commanders are mostly from Saleh's Sanhan tribe and are strongly loyal to the former president. Until now, he hasn't been able to replace them either," Mohammed Rajab, a military analyst from Hadi's home governorate of Abyan, told IRIN.

In April, Hadi issued presidential decrees for military rotations, which affected more than 15, senior officers, including Saleh's half-brother and air force commander Mohammed Saleh al-Ahmar, and his nephew Tariq Saleh, commander the Third Division (one of the estimated 31 Republican Guard divisions under the overall command of Saleh's son Ahmad). The decrees were challenged by the two commanders for nearly a month until the UN Security Council threatened military sanctions.

### **An existential fight**

For Saleh's family members and loyalists, the youth-driven uprising that ousted him from power was a coup masterminded by Hamid al-Ahmar, a powerful wealthy sheikh and politician, and Gen. Ali Mohsen,

a powerful military commander who defected from Saleh's regime in March 2011.

"They believe that removing Saleh's son Ahmad from his post means uprooting Saleh's family and supporters," said Abdullah al-Najjar, a political analyst at Amran University. As such, they are continuing to fight.

"What political elites [Saleh and his opponents] could not win on the battlefield, they are now trying to gain through politics," said Abd-al-Ghani al-Iryani, an independent political analyst and president of the Democratic Awakening Movement, which advocates for democracy and pluralism. "If they continue to do this, the country will be paralysed."

In February, Hadi was nominated to run for president as a consensus candidate by the two major conflicting powers in Yemen: Saleh's party, the General People's Congress (GPC), which includes powerful military commanders and dignitaries loyal to the ex-president; and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), which includes al-Ahmar, Mohsen and their loyalists. Both powers have strong influence over the new president and the decision-making process at the highest level in the government.

For many analysts, the prognosis is bleak.

"Securing Saleh's peaceful exit from the presidency was hard enough; implementing the remainder of the agreement [on transfer of power] will be harder still," the International Crisis Group (ICG) said in a 3 July report.

The agreement sets out a number of steps to be taken before 2014: restructuring the divided army; holding a national dialogue for all political forces – the GPC, JMP, Houthi rebels controlling parts of northern Yemen, the Southern Movement calling for secession, youth, women, and other political factions – to agree on a suitable system of governance; and drafting a new constitution, which will determine a new electoral system.

### **Persistent insecurity**

Since Hadi became president, dozens of people have been killed or injured in violence, which analysts view as being politically motivated, most notably in Sana'a and Taiz, a flashpoint of anti-Saleh protests.

"Taiz has never rested since Hadi took office. It has become a scene of political assassinations. Saleh's loyalists want to stay in power to protect their interests," Mohammed Khasroof, a military analyst, told IRIN.

On 30 July, at least 15 people were killed and more than 40 others wounded in a firefight between Yemeni policemen guarding the Interior Ministry in Sana'a and gunmen dressed in police uniforms. The gunmen had been unofficially recruited back in May 2011 to back Saleh in clashes with al-Ahmar's forces, which took place amid mass anti-government protests, two of the gunmen told IRIN. They resorted to violence at the Interior Ministry last week after promises of positions and salaries went unfulfilled, they said.

While Saleh's office denied that the ex-president had connections to the incident, Interior Minister Gen. Abdulqader Qahtan described the event as being "not spontaneous", hinting that figures loyal to the former president were behind the violence.

"What happened is just an attempt to overthrow the new president and the national reconciliation cabinet," said Judge Hamoud al-Hitar, a former endowment and religious guidance minister. "They don't want any success for Yemen post their rule."

For these interest groups, a state of law and order will not be in their favour, which is why they intend to foment insecurity, said Hafez al-Bukari, president of Yemen Polling Center, a local think tank.

"If Hadi doesn't demonstrate dominance over the army, the state will collapse. Interference of the ex-president and mutiny by his relatives [who are holding sensitive posts in the army] against presidential decrees made the public pessimistic about the future of Yemen," al-Bukari told IRIN.  
The way forward

Saleh and Mohsen, who still control rival army factions, also have significant networks of influence within

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the state and society. According to the ICG report, a civil servant reported being tasked simultaneously by Hadi, Mohsen and – through his son Ahmed Ali Saleh – the former president as well.

In May, the cabinet failed to cut unapproved monthly stipends given to several hundred tribal sheikhs under Saleh's tenure to maintain their loyalty, which cost the state's budget YR 13 billion [US\$62 million] a year, according to local and international media reports.

Those sheikhs collaborate with the government in keeping security and stability in their areas, said Mohamed Hussein Taher, an officer at the Sana'a-based Tribal Sheikh Affairs Authority. "If the cabinet cuts their stipends, they will let their fellow tribesmen attack oil pipelines, power grids and other vital installations that contribute much to the state's budget," Taher told IRIN.

According to Hamoud al-Sofi, former Taiz governor and a senior member of Saleh's party, the country has been ruled by individuals loyal to the president rather than by institutions.

"If we want to transit into a modern state of institutions, all the military and security units must be under Hadi's control. I don't want know when such will be possible," Sofi said.

Mohammed al-Sabri, a senior leader of JMP, said the only solution to reduce Saleh's influence is to change the capital of Yemen to another city, given his family's strength and support in Sana'a.

"Unlike Sana'a, which is mostly controlled by Saleh-aligned Republican Guard forces, if Aden or Taiz becomes the capital of Yemen, Saleh or his relatives will not have such remarkable influence on the political life," al-Sabri said.

Hadi should also reach out to the international community and Gulf States who are overseeing the implementation of the power-transfer deal for help removing Saleh and Mohsen's loyalists from sensitive posts in the army and security institutions by, for example, providing a list of people impeding its implementation to the UN Security Council, said Othman al-Yafie, a military analyst from Aden.

Hadi's latest attempt to centralize control of the armed forces came on 6 August, when he issued a number of presidential decrees bringing command of some divisions and brigades of the rival Republican Guard and First Armored Division under his authority.

"Issuing such type of decrees is easy for Hadi," al-Yafie said. "The more difficult is their execution on the ground."

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**Theme (s):** Conflict, Governance, Security,

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