

Next Steps in Yemen's Transition International Foundation for Electoral Systems 6 March 2012

In the wake of uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in early 2011, protests in Yemen against the rule of then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh began in early February and continued through the end of the year. Political crisis escalated into an armed conflict, with many protestors and members of the security forces killed or injured. There was fighting between government forces and tribal fighters in several governorates, some involving the powerful Hashed tribal federation that sided with protestors. Clashes between rival factions within the military increased speculation that Yemen's fragile state could collapse into civil war.

Although Yemen's uprising followed those within the region, it has taken its own path in response to its unique, complex social and political environment. The following are likely influences on the way Yemen's future will unfold:

Prior to the 2011 uprising, the Yemeni government was trying to deal with a number of major security issues. A rebellion by followers of dissident cleric Hussein al-Houthi in the northern governorate of Sadaah began in 2004. (...) There is international concern about the presence of Al Qaeda in Yemen, particularly in some southern governorates, given Yemen's strategic position at the entrance to the Red Sea.

Yemen is a very poor country with high unemployment, widespread illiteracy, high malnutrition (...) Yemen's economic survival will increasingly depend on international aid.

On paper, Yemen appears to have all the elements of a functioning democracy. (...) In practice, however, adherence to rule of law and support for an independent judiciary have not been strong. (...) In some areas of Yemen, strong tribalism means the authority of the central government is weak. There is widespread corruption and the 2011 uprising exposed serious divisions within the military.

The 2011 uprising was mainly led by young people frustrated at the lack of jobs and economic development and the heavy hand of what amounted to one-party rule. Although removing President Saleh has taken time and has come with a considerable loss of life, expectations remain high about what can be achieved. However, different groups have competing interests and agendas. Finding ways to reach consensus on these issues will be one of recently-elected President Hadi's most challenging tasks.

This briefing paper outlines the agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), discuss the early presidential election held in February 2012 and analyze the transitional process after the election.

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