



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
ALJAZEERA CENTER FOR STUDIES

## Position Paper

# The Challenges of Restructuring the Military Institution in Yemen

**Al Jazeera Centre for Studies**



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Restructuring the military and security institution has caused a huge controversy in Yemen. It became a political crisis after former President Ali Abdallah Saleh refused to dismiss his relatives from the military and security institutions and threatened to withdraw his ministers from the government. In response, current President Abd Rabbo Mansour declared that he will form a new government, easing tension and enabling the government to overcome the crisis. Moreover, many revolutionary forces declared their boycott of the upcoming Comprehensive National Dialogue conference (scheduled for April 2012) until the restructuring of the military institution.

According to the Gulf Initiative, the restructuring process should be part of the second phase of the settlement and one of the new president's priorities but the complexities are huge because of the importance of the military in the power balance between revolutionary forces and remnants of the former regime as well as the ambiguity of the texts and execution mechanisms of the Gulf Initiative, which have been interpreted differently by each party and interfered with by foreign parties that seek their own interests.

### **The Importance of Restructuring**

Part of the actual controversy over the reconstruction process is attributed to its aims and content. There is great confusion between restructuring by means of reconstructing the military institution on national and professional bases, and remaking its military doctrine and identifying its function without political interaction in order to make it subject only to institutional command hierarchy up to elected civil authority. The process undoubtedly requires quite some time and a sequence of rigorous and complex procedures. This entails the removal of the former president's relatives from critical ranks in military and security bodies which is seen by many revolutionary forces as an important and vital step that cannot be delayed. The move is also crucial for maintaining the success that has been achieved so far in the course of peaceful change, the implantation of the remaining parts of the Gulf Initiative and its executive mechanism, and ensuring stability in the future.

### **The Positions of the Different Parties**

The executive mechanism of the Gulf Initiative in Article 16 states that one of the functions of the military committee is to end division in the armed forces, resolve its causes, end all military conflicts, and take any possible measures that can prevent military confrontation during the restructuring of the military and security institutions. This is indicated in Article 17 which places on the military committee the responsibility of attaining security and stability during the two transitional periods, and taking the measures necessary for the integration of the armed forces under unified national and professional leadership.

This vague and unspecified reference to restructuring has led to discordant positions on and interpretations of it even if the aim of the restructuring process was to end division within the military institution and keep it from becoming a gateway for political influence for any party by making it a neutral and professional military institution that works only for the country's vital national interests, and that detaches itself from political and partisan conflicts – a move central to ending the tension, insecurity, and instability resulting from months of conflict.

A controversy emerged in the past few days over the necessity and requirements of restructuring. The revolutionary youth and the Joint Meeting Parties see the restructuring process as a decisive and necessary step that cannot be postponed and should precede the upcoming Comprehensive National Dialogue conference. Its implementation is supposed to remove Saleh's relatives from their positions; his son, Ahmed Ali Abdallah Saleh, will be removed from his post as the Commander of the Presidential Guard, and his two nephews, Yahya and Ammar Saleh, from their posts in the Central Security and the National Security Agency. Activist argue that if Saleh's close circle remains in the critical military positions that allowed Saleh to stay in power despite

the huge revolution that erupted against him, he can easily continue to exert influence in the background. There is also fear that if its members stay in their posts, they can be the spearhead in the "counter-revolution" that Saleh seems determined to launch as can be understood from his last speech in which he played down the importance of the Arab revolutions and threatened to expose their alleged secrets. He and his relatives still have many links and relations that allow them to impede development efforts and disrupt the current consensus government.

The Joint Meeting Parties refuse to participate in any dialogue before the restructuring of the army. Their leaders emphasised the futility of dialogue in light of continuous division in the army and the fact that security forces are still not under the control of the Ministers of Defence and Interior and President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. They refuse to initiate dialogue as long as political settlements, the Gulf Initiative and its mechanisms, the new president, and the national consensus government are still at the mercy of the family that controls all critical military and security institutions from which they derived their political power. This may be an implicit indication that if Saleh's relatives want to become a political force in the country, they should do so through political means not by controlling the country's points of power.

It is only natural, however, that Saleh's relatives refuse to abandon their positions and press in different ways – including the use of the Al Qaeda card – to hold on to their posts until the end of the second transitional period in 2014. They may entice foreign parties or warn that army units might be dismantled if they are removed from their positions; and their claims will be supported by leaders of the ruling party that are close to Saleh and totally refuse any change that may affect affiliates of the former regime. They exercise various pressures on President Abd Rabbo Mansour (who is considered a member of their party), and create obstacles by refusing to start the restructuring process before the unification of the army and ending the insurgency. Leaders of the People's General Congress (the former ruling party) confirmed that there will be no dialogue or restructuring unless the armed militias are taken out of the capital and other cities, and the military rebellion within the armed forces ends, which entails the resignation of the military commanders that supported the revolution. These leaders have openly expressed the desire to push the former president's son, Ahmed Ali Abdallah Saleh, to run for the next presidential election in two years, as portrayed by a statement made by Abdo al-Janadi, the spokesperson for the People's General Congress in an interview with the Saudi newspaper Okaz.

President Hadi is certainly the main actor in the restructuring. While he is the elected president – and possesses all the powers of a president – and the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, he is also the president of the military committee that has been assigned the restructuring process according to the Gulf Initiative. Moreover, he is under huge pressure from different parties, including the revolutionary forces that insist that he take quick and effective measures to remove Saleh's remaining relatives from the army in addition to other demands from Saleh and party leaders close to him that he exclude dissident members of the party and keep Saleh's relatives or reassign them to leading positions in the institution. Meanwhile, President Hadi is trying to take a neutral stance towards all parties as he does not want to be classified as a supporter of revolutionary forces or as a subject of the former president or his party leaders. It is apparent that the complexity of this issue and foreign intervention in it have made him very careful in dealing with it. He needs maximum internal and external support before he can make any crucial decisions. As for foreign positions, the American position is considered most important since the United States – according to diplomatic sources – is concerned with the restructuring process in accordance with what seems to be role distribution between external parties that sponsored the Gulf Initiative.

Some analysts attribute the contradicting American statements concerning the dismissal of Saleh's relatives to the fact Saleh's relatives manage the security agencies that are directly responsible for combating "terrorism" and that Washington fears that the removal of these figures will affect the level of cooperation between the United States and Yemen while Yemeni armed forces wage a war on Al Qaeda in different regions of the country. Analysts assume the United States is using Saleh's remaining family

members as temporary cards to guarantee the implementation of its policies and agendas in Yemen or as a scarecrow to Yemeni national forces. Nonetheless, this is not a strategic choice for United States because it is not likely that Washington will bet on the continuation of Saleh's relatives in their posts for a long period of time, and American strategists know that the political chances for these persons are very limited in Saleh's absence. Washington seems to want them removed gradually in order to avoid affecting the war on Al Qaeda especially because they still have the means to disrupt the whole scene. The U.S. administration wants to more time to establish relations with the new leaderships and perhaps support those it favours to maintain its interests in the struggle against "terrorism" in the long run.

## Possible Scenarios for Restructuring

Because of the ambiguity of the concept of restructuring in the Gulf Initiative and its executive mechanisms and the interference of different internal and external forces, there are various scenarios. The three major ones, however, are as follows:

- Meandering Restructuring

This scenario provides the possibility that all the military commanders who supported the revolution will be dismissed under the pretext of ending division within the military forces and referred to retirement or advisory jobs while Saleh's relatives are promoted to higher positions in the military. This scenario is supported by many of Saleh's affiliates and there is some unconfirmed information that there is external pressure on President Hadi to make such a move.

However, what renders this scenario unlikely is that it counters the terms of the Gulf Initiative arranging the transition of power even though it is part of the constitutional powers of the new president. More importantly, from a practical perspective, it will promote the interests of the former regime's remnants at the expense of the revolutionary forces and jeopardise all the revolution's achievements. This imbalance is not in the new president's best interest because it will put him at the mercy of the powerful forces of the former regime and deny him the ability to make independent decisions that they do not approve.

It is unlikely that the Joint Meeting Parties will accept this scenario as they see the departure of Saleh and his relatives as an necessary condition for the political stability of the country and reject that the military be a source for political influence for any party. It will also not be welcomed by the revolutionary youth who definitely reject the continuation of people accused of killing revolutionary youth and then pardoned in their positions because of immunity. Such a scenario will probably lead to the eruption of another youth revolution because of the general feeling that although the revolution has achieved the goal of toppling Saleh, the succession project has not been completed – and this was a major cause of the revolution.

- Total Change

The second scenario provides the removal of military leaders loyal to the revolution and those loyal to Saleh and replacing them with independent figures selected by consensus, so that Saleh's son, General Ahmed Ali Abdallah Saleh will be removed from his position as Commander of the Presidential Guard and Special Forces in accordance with the removal and transferal of Major Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, Commander of the Northwestern Zone and Commander of the First Armored Division, as well as senior military leaders affiliated with the two sides.

This is very probable because there are influential external parties said to be supporting it. However, it seems to be more complex and requires consensus that may be more difficult to achieve. Saleh and his affiliates are expected to

disapprove strongly unless they face substantial pressures that deprive them of the only source of power they have and pave the way for the collapse of the remains of the former regime. There are regional and international parties who are not in favor of dramatic change in the military body because it can affect stability at a time where the military institution has become the only guarantor of stability and cohesion in the country, and Al Qaeda's threats continue to rise.

In order for President Hadi to be able to issue such a decision, he needs the consensus of all political forces because he does not have unilateral power and must refer to the country's ruling political spectrums. His current position as an executor of the Gulf Initiative and a consensus president force him to make a series of negotiations with political parties to gain the support of the international community before undertaking the restructuring process and making crucial decisions in that direction.

- Gradual Reform Maintaining Temporary Balances

This scenario entails the adoption of ongoing and comprehensive reform in the military institution and the gradual removal of corrupt and unqualified commanders while maintaining a kind of temporary balance between the two parties. It is possible that some of Saleh's relatives will be removed from their military and security positions and military commanders affiliated with the revolution will be replaced with consented independent figures while senior army commanders remain in their places. Most people focus on the removal of Saleh's relatives from security and intelligence agencies to reduce the risk of a counter-revolution on the pretext that these bodies can work secretly to cause unrest or create problems that cannot be carried out openly by military units. This gradual scenario may not be accepted by revolutionary forces that seek quick and decisive change.

There are other scenarios that are less probable like the possibility that the two parties will revert back to violence if the compromise solutions fail or internal uprisings erupt in military institutions. This should then lead to the removal of corrupt leaders affiliated with the former regime because the institutions suffer chaos, corruption, and the violation of regulations governing their work especially with the general feeling of the decline of the security grip that made state, civil, and military workers believe that the police state has come to an end and that there is no reason for fear, and realise that the ruling family is no longer the decision maker of the country as it was before the signature of the Gulf Initiative and that its influence is becoming more limited with time.

The situation that seems most likely is the gradual reparation security and military forces because it takes into account the type of power the current president possesses: consensus power that demands the support of deposed President Saleh and his affiliates, and allows for the interests of neighbouring and Western countries in maintaining the cohesion of Yemen and prevent it from becoming a stronghold for Al Qaeda. This cannot be achieved unless the restructuring process accords with the cohesion of the military institution so it remains the major guarantor of the current political transition process.

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