



SSRC

Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum

**The UN Role in Yemen's Political Transition**  
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**Introduction**

Yemen's established power structures are currently under great strain, as the country's political elite struggles to adapt to a vibrant nationwide grassroots movement demanding a more legitimate, responsive and inclusive government. The prospect of dramatic political change in Yemen contains the potential for violent upheaval and renewed humanitarian crisis, against the backdrop of the country's deteriorating economic and security conditions. However, it also contains the potential for a new, more legitimate political configuration to emerge over time, and this 'open moment' presents a fertile opportunity for external actors to support demands for social, economic and political reform.

As a result, the United Nations now has an opportunity to take a more active and strategic role in Yemen. The UN has already taken a number of significant steps in recent months. In April, the Security Council discussed Yemen's internal political conditions, calling for "restraint and political dialogue." A senior UN official visited Yemen on "listening missions" in April and May under the Good Offices of the UN Secretary General. UN officials are also considering proposals for a special session on human rights, a policy committee meeting and team retreat to review the current country strategy.

Inevitably, officials' attentions are focused on the immediate operational challenges of the current political transition. However, this paper argues that the United Nations now confronts an opportunity not just to support the imminent transfer of power, but also to play a longer-term role in supporting a progressive reconfiguration of the current political settlement.

This paper outlines the current relationship between the Yemeni regime and the state, and argues that elite competition has been – and will continue to be – a key driver of fragility. It also highlights the urgency of Yemen's dire economic conditions. It makes the case for revived UN engagement in Yemen based on robust political economy analysis, and suggests a political economy approach as the basis for a new country strategy, as well as specific sector-level interventions. Finally, this paper explores the potential role for the UN in ongoing mediation, in the context of extended cycles of transition.

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## **Elite competition**

Politics in Yemen are highly personalized. Decades of patronage-based politics, designed to appease the military and tribes, have created elaborate networks of patronage and corruption that bypass or overlay government institutions. As head of state, President Ali Abdullah Saleh straddles both formal and informal power structures, and has attempted to balance a range of competing interests according to a “divide-and-rule” formula. Key decisions have been confined to a tight-knit group, dominated by corruption, self-interest and rivalry.

Because power is not fully structured through institutions, analyzing the current political transition in Yemen through the interests of “government” and “opposition” actors does not explain the current political dynamics. Neither the ruling party nor the opposition coalition represents the real distribution of political power. The ruling party (the General People’s Congress) has long harbored outspoken critics of the regime, while President Saleh has cultivated loyal factions in the opposition coalition (the Joint Meeting Parties). In recent years, rival factions have also split the government ministries, as well as the military.

In order to understand the real distribution of power in Yemen, it is crucial to make an initial distinction between the government and the regime, and secondly, to distinguish between different regime factions. Each faction cultivates clients and proxies across the political spectrum and the institutions of state, as well as among traditional community leaders. Competition within the regime has intensified in the last few years, as President Saleh has attempted to concentrate power around his family.

This structure has posed a significant obstacle to effective international engagement, as UN officials and Western diplomats have largely been restricted to dealing with Yemeni political actors to the extent that they perform functions associated with the formal state. UN officials and Western diplomats have had (or created) fewer opportunities to interact directly with regime players in their role as brokers of power transmitted through informal networks. Political actors within the international community have also misunderstood (or overlooked) evidence to suggest that private regime interests have captured formal state institutions in Yemen.

Meanwhile, competing factions within the power nexus have proved themselves “capable of playing with the donors’ stated interests to advance their own agendas.”<sup>i</sup> Until US officials began to distance themselves from the status quo in spring 2011, many Yemeni observers viewed the provision of US military aid to elite security and intelligence units under the command of President Saleh’s relatives as artificially sustaining his family’s ability to maintain control. This played a part in driving elite competition as well as frustrating popular demands to improve governance and political inclusion, despite statements by US officials that they supported these same goals.<sup>ii</sup>

Public resentment towards elite corruption and regime politics found sustained non-violent expression in early months of 2011 in a nationwide pro-democracy movement inspired by the wave of revolutionary change sweeping across the region during the “Arab spring”. Protestors took to the streets of the

capital, Sana'a, and a number of provincial cities in January and have maintained a presence on the streets since February. The protestors called for President Saleh to step down immediately, after three decades in power. They rejected all proposals for a phased transfer of power that would defer Saleh's departure until the end of an interim period, during which parties would agree upon constitutional changes.

As popular support for the revolution gathered rapid momentum, long-standing competition within the ruling elite finally came into open view. The gap between regime and state was exposed in March 2011, when senior army commander General Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar defected from within the regime, following a sniper attack on a protest camp in Sana'a. The tension between General Mohsin and President Saleh's family had gradually become apparent during an erratic war that began in Sa'dah province in 2004 and was playing an increasingly significant role in Yemeni politics prior to the 'Arab spring'.

General Mohsin, a close kinsman of President Saleh, commands the 1st armored tank division and heads the north-west region, one of four military divisions in Yemen. He conducted the initial military campaign in Sa'dah, against followers of the charismatic Houthi family. Prior to his defection, he was often described as the second most powerful man in the country (after President Saleh) and was said to be opposed to the increasing prominence of President Saleh's eldest son, Ahmed Ali, whose Republican Guard division was also stationed in the conflict zone.<sup>iii</sup> By 2008, Yemen's political elite was buzzing with rumors of clashes between General Mohsin and Ahmed Ali, and Yemeni newspapers began reporting on a "proxy war between the two men's forces, under the cover of quashing the Houthis."<sup>iv</sup>

In 2008, Saleh allegedly made arrangements to supply the Houthis with US anti-tank missiles, which "they dutifully used to annihilate Ali Mohsin's tanks."<sup>v</sup> General Mohsin was forced to capitulate before his tank division was completely destroyed, which brought the fighting to a sudden close in summer 2008. President Saleh then used the opportunity created by General Mohsin's military humiliation to demote his allies in "a series of carefully co-ordinated moves" that attempted to improve allegiance to his son, Ahmed Ali.<sup>vi</sup> General Mohsin was weakened, but he still had the power "to play a powerful role as kingmaker during a future succession."<sup>vii</sup> A year later, during the next bout of fighting in Sa'dah, Saudi Arabia deployed air and ground forces to quash the Houthis' cross-border incursion. President Saleh's military planners presented Saudi pilots with coordinates for a possible air strike, which the Saudis realised was the location of General Mohsin's headquarters.<sup>viii</sup>

Since General Mohsin's defection in March 2011, tank battalions under his command have been deployed at strategic locations throughout Sana'a.<sup>ix</sup> Attempts to reach an agreement between General Mohsin and President Saleh are complicated by the influence of a third regime player: business tycoon and opposition politician Hameed al-Ahmar.<sup>x</sup> Hameed is the son of the late Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, who died from cancer in 2007. Sheikh Abdullah was the paramount chief of Yemen's most powerful tribal confederation, Hashid. He was also head of the *Islah* opposition party, speaker of parliament and Saudi Arabia's chosen broker of transnational patronage payments to Yemen's tribes.

Following Sheikh Abdullah's death, his eldest son, Sadeq, inherited the title of paramount chief of Hashid, while another son, Himyar, was appointed deputy speaker of parliament, and a third son, Hussein, organized the Saudi-backed Hashid tribal militia during the Sa'dah war. Hameed, who had played a prominent role in the last presidential election campaign in 2006 while his father was still alive, continued to pursue his political ambitions within the *Islah* party, but his progress to the party leadership was blocked.

Nevertheless, Hameed's ambitions contributed to the deadlock over Yemen's parliamentary elections that paralyzed the political class in the two years leading up to the revolution. The last round of parliamentary elections – initially scheduled for April 2009 – was delayed for two years by mutual agreement between the ruling party and the opposition coalition. The postponement deal included a commitment to hold bipartisan dialogue that would seek to break the deadlock over the electoral framework. When there was no progress on this front, the opposition coalition went ahead with an independent national consultation exercise to canvass grassroots opinions and determine an alternative vision for the future of the country, allegedly bankrolled by Hameed.<sup>xi</sup>

The failure to reach an agreement between the ruling party and the opposition coalition over the election framework lay – in part – in the factionalized proxy-client nature of the parties' structure, and the growing intensity of elite competition. This was well understood by many Yemeni observers, who repeatedly voiced their frustration during 2010 that parliamentary politics were being "held hostage to elite self-interest" and that "key protagonists in both parties" were "bringing the system to its knees by pushing for their own advantage."<sup>xii</sup>

Around this time, Hameed met a US official in Sana'a and revealed a secret plan to overthrow President Saleh. He "vowed to trigger the revolt if Saleh did not guarantee the fairness of parliamentary elections" (re-scheduled for April 27 2011) and "said he would organize massive demonstrations modeled on protests that toppled Indonesia's President Suharto a decade earlier. We cannot copy the Indonesians exactly, but the idea is controlled chaos," Ahmar told the unnamed embassy official.<sup>xiii</sup> Hameed also revealed that his scheme would hinge on persuading General Mohsin "to abandon the president and join the opposition."<sup>xiv</sup>

Although the details of Hameed's conversation at the US embassy were not revealed at the time, Yemen's political class was fully aware of Hameed's ambition. They knew that he was building links with the exiled leaders who claimed to represent the grassroots southern movement, and they also speculated that he was testing other potential political alliances.<sup>xv</sup> General Mohsin's allegiance was assumed to be crucial to Hameed's growing leadership ambitions, given the al-Ahmar brothers' lack of military experience or military patronage networks.<sup>xvi</sup>

Both influential Yemenis and U.S. allies were warning US diplomats of Saleh's growing weakness, but the embassy concluded that Hameed's challenge posed nothing more than "a mild irritation" for Saleh.<sup>xvii</sup> In the months that followed, the US military moved closer and closer to President Saleh and his

relatives, increasing military aid and counter-terrorism cooperation, confident that his family would retain control. One of the unintended consequences was intensified elite competition.

When the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia toppled President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January, Hameed responded to an obvious political opportunity. The early wave of anti-government street protests in Sana'a were largely coordinated by the established opposition coalition, and Hameed's Sabafon mobile network was sending out messages to organize the protest times and locations. But the momentum behind the revolution quickly grew beyond top-down control. Inside the rapidly expanding protest camp in Sana'a, independent youth activists mingled with *Islah* members and Hashid tribesmen.

As Yemen's political crisis intensified during February and March, the al-Ahmar brothers began to stake out a more aggressive leadership position. Himyar resigned from his post in March 2011 in the wave of defections that followed the sniper attack on the protestors and General Mohsin's defection, and Sadek signaled his support for the revolution. In a BBC interview on March 31, Hameed called for President Saleh to step down from power and leave the country. He claimed that he would be able to handle the militant issue better than Saleh, saying: "The chaos in Yemen is now... We are already talking to [the Americans], assuring them that any satisfactory plan to fight terror in Yemen will be respected by the new leadership of Yemen."<sup>xviii</sup>

### **A new political settlement?**

In contemporary development theory, the term "political settlement" applies to "rolling agreements" between powerful actors who hold control in countries, such as Yemen, where "state institutions are seen as malleable, even highly malleable."<sup>xix</sup> The British Department for International Development defines a political settlement as "the relationship between formal and informal institutions and the distribution of power in society."<sup>xx</sup> In such societies, struggles between competing political and economic elites, or elite factions, "involve informal processes of conflict, negotiation, and compromise."<sup>xxi</sup> The outcome of these struggles is believed to determine the overall direction and pace of development and change in a country.

While Yemen's competing elite factions may view the revolution as a game of musical chairs, where key players within the existing regime simply swap positions, grassroots' goals are much more ambitious.<sup>xxii</sup> Yemen's protestors have repeatedly used two key phrases at their regular Friday demonstrations. Firstly, they have been calling for President Saleh "to go" (*irhal*), but they have also been chanting: "The people want the regime to fall" (*al-shaab yureed isqat al-nizam*). Their vision goes beyond a simple transfer of power. Independent youth activists want a "peaceful end to the current regime and all its symbols". They see the revolution as a precious chance to create a "modern, civil state" by redefining the relationship between the regime and state, and redistributing power between the state and society.<sup>xxiii</sup>

As a precondition for transition talks, independent youth activists have been insisting on Saleh's immediate dismissal, as well as the dismissal of all his close affiliates and relatives from leadership and senior positions in military and

civil institutions. They have rejected all suggestions of an impunity deal for Saleh and continue to insist on efforts to prosecute individuals from Saleh's government who were symbols of corruption. They are also pressing for measures to freeze Saleh's assets and recover stolen money from public and private sectors, as well as safeguards for freedom of expression.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In the eyes of independent youth activists, the proposal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council, which would see Saleh stand down after thirty days, followed by elections after sixty days, is seen as highly flawed, because of a promised immunity deal for Saleh, as well as the sequencing and timing of the transition. Instead, independent youth activists want a six-month transitional period to repeal the constitution and dissolve the current institutions of state, under the leadership of an interim presidential council composed of five members, "well-known for their expertise, honesty, and experience."<sup>xxv</sup> During this period, an interim national council representing "youth and all national and political forces" would draft a constitution for a "modern democratic civil state based on equal citizenship, and an electoral system, with proportional representation... subject to public referendum."

Independent youth activists are promising to hold out for a peaceful transfer of power to a civilian authority and a new constitution that boosts the role of parliament. Under this model, the new president's power would be dramatically curtailed and any new head of government would need to build an inclusive coalition that attempts to balance a range of conflicting interests within the parliamentary framework. Independent youth activists are beginning to organize themselves into coalitions, and form coordination and decision-making mechanisms. The longer the current political deadlock prevails, the more time is available for these youth groups and affiliated progressive political configurations – such as Mohammed Abulahoum's Justice and Building party – to organize, consolidate and articulate their agendas.

In a speech to the Club de Madrid in April 2011, Yemen's former prime minister and long-time presidential adviser Abdul Kareem Al-Eryani said: "I believe that the youth revolution has already produced a tremendous change in the political and perhaps social system in Yemen... I think the youth revolution has now succeeded in making change imperative. The change is coming. The regime will change... [and] the political system will change from the overall paramount power of a president to a parliamentary system... let's hope that we will reach that final stage in a safe way."<sup>xxvi</sup>

Protestors have already derailed President Saleh's bid for reelection in 2013 and irrevocably altered Ahmed Ali's prospects for succeeding his father. Their ability to influence the future trajectory of Yemen's political settlement depends, in part, on the degree of political space that they can carve out for themselves in the post-transition landscape. It also depends on the extent to which they can resist the pressure to be co-opted within the system of political patronage, if they eventually join the post-transition government. The "Arab spring" has created a testing ground for new leaders, who are becoming increasingly organized in setting out their vision for an alternative political structure. It will only require the presence of a small number of activists to take their place at the negotiating table to influence the nature and parameters of the discussions.

The OECD has warned that “Lack of legitimacy is a major contributor to state fragility, because it undermines the processes of state-society bargaining that are central to building state capacity.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Yemen’s pro-democracy protestors have championed this narrative and put their lives on the line to demand a more progressive political configuration that can meet the needs of the people. They are seeking international allies as stakeholders for a progressive governance agenda, which can translate into improved livelihoods over the longer term.

### **A political economy approach**

The current political transition opens up an opportunity for a new approach to framing UN engagement in Yemen, which affords a greater role for the Department for Political Affairs and falls in line with emerging conceptual and operational expertise within the global community of development practitioners. UNDP already recognizes the need to work politically to achieve development goals in fragile and conflict affected states, such as Yemen. The latest annual report from UNDP’s Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) points to “the limitations of what technical assistance can provide in spite of sophisticated tools and methodologies.”<sup>xxviii</sup> A recent UNDP-World Bank initiative on State Building in Fragile and Post Conflict Contexts highlighted the “importance of understanding the political processes that enable states to be responsive, capable and inclusive, and to be in a position to promote human development and enforce human rights.”

Donors have long understood that governance reform is inherently political but all too often there is still a “disconnect between the rhetoric about politics and the mainstream operational agenda.”<sup>xxix</sup> As Sue Unsworth, a prominent exponent of political economy analysis, argues: “Donors are confronted in most developing countries with public institutions that look like Weberian models: this encourages ‘gap analysis’, or a preoccupation with why these formal institutions are not working as they do in OECD countries, and how to make them work better.”<sup>xxx</sup>

This “gap analysis” affected the Friends of Yemen, a high-level diplomatic coordination mechanism that was established in January 2010 in London to tackle development, state building and counter-terrorism. Under the Friends of Yemen umbrella, global donors agreed to support coordinated measures to encourage better service delivery, good governance and more sustainable economic management. During 2010, the activities of the Friends of Yemen contributed to renewed IMF activity, structural economic reforms (including diesel subsidy reductions), renewed dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition parties, and ongoing counter-terrorism training and logistical support. However, the group’s impact was limited because it failed to address the “disconnect between technocrats and elite decision-makers.”<sup>xxxi</sup> Strengthening governance in this way required the “consent of Yemen’s power elite, while simultaneously threatening their current operating model by devolving their collective advantage to the benefit of state institutions.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

In fragile and conflict-affected states, established relationships often carry much more weight than formal political structures, and none more so than Yemen. To apply a successful political economy approach requires an intimate

understanding of the dynamics of patronage and the dynamics of the political marketplace.<sup>xxxiii</sup> However, donors often ‘find it unsettling to be faced with demands to think about "governance" in terms of informal relations... Political leaders of agencies face their own intellectual barriers. They often think they understand the politics of development, because they understand how their own political systems work. This can be profoundly misleading, and encourages superficial thinking about how to secure political "commitment" from development partners as a quid pro quo for assistance (DFID, 2006).’<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Instead, if “donors are to see and seize the opportunities offered by a better understanding of politics, they need a different mental model of how development happens. It happens when political systems create incentives for the productive use of resources. Such systems cannot be built just by transferring institutional models from rich to poor countries. Historically they have resulted from processes of interaction, bargaining and often violent competition between holders of state power and organized groups in society (IDS, 2005). For donors politics is not an optional extra, or something that gets in the way of development. It is central to the whole endeavor.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

The OGC is currently developing a framework for political economy analysis, as well as implementation guidelines to help UNDP officials “navigate the ‘enabling environment’ within which interventions take place, locate room for manoeuvre and achieve ‘maximum effectiveness in programming.’”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Yemen is not currently among the group of pilot countries where UNDP has conducted political economy studies. The Australian-funded Developmental Leadership Programme recently commissioned an extensive political economy analysis, looking at the nature of patronage and internal politics in Yemen.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Several other Western donors have incorporated elements of political economy analysis within their broader approach but none has adequately grappled with the full implications, and none has adopted a political economy approach as the basis for a country strategy in Yemen.

By framing future engagement in Yemen around political economy analysis for the UN system as a whole, the UN would be adopting a leadership position within the global community of donors and practitioners. In the short-term, a successful political economy approach would directly enhance the country team’s operational capacity across the current country portfolio, including conflict prevention, peace building, election preparations, mediation and humanitarian activities. Accurate political economy analysis would also enable the UN family to build resilience in the short term and over the medium term, helping to forecast political shocks and contributing to emergency planning.

Over the longer term, a political economy approach would support UNDP’s development focus and contribute to other UN agencies’ efforts to explore resilience and build capacity at the sector level. “The potential impact of political analysis is most apparent at a sector level where it is starting to challenge conventional models of how development happens, and to demonstrate that politics is not just an obstacle to be overcome, but an integral part of the search for a way forward,” argues Unsworth.<sup>xxxviii</sup> This could include commissioning a series of sector-level political economy studies, looking at food security, water and regional organized crime etc, within the context of an integrated country approach.<sup>xxxix</sup> These are likely to require amendments and



revisions over time to respond to shifting power relations, and re-calibrate ongoing interventions.

### **Leadership & visibility**

As convener of the Chatham House Yemen Forum, I have called for external mediation and the appointment of an international envoy for more than a year. In January 2010, I wrote: “Without effective external mediation, the political temperature in Yemen will continue to rise. Direct Western mediation would be inappropriate and counter-productive but the Arab states – working in partnership with key international actors – may have a role to play in this respect.”<sup>xl</sup> In the same month, I argued that the appointment of a special envoy “would help raise Yemen's profile in global diplomatic institutions.”<sup>xli</sup>

The appointment of a UN special envoy to support the current transition would answer the need for increased international leadership and the visibility of Yemen's problems. The Good Offices' “listening missions” have already raised the UN's in-country profile, positioned the UN as a possible mediator, established valuable momentum and laid foundations to build on relationships across the political spectrum. The failure of the GCC foreign ministers to secure Saleh's consent to their proposed deal in April and the subsequent withdrawal of Qatar have only increased the need for an effective external interlocutor.

However, a direct mediation role for the Department for Political Affairs (supported by related UN agencies) requires an explicit operational mandate. The challenge remains to design an inclusive mediation process that reaches out beyond the ruling party and the established opposition coalition, to address the grievances of the so-called “non-parties” (the Houthis and the southern separatists) as well as independent youth activists and key players within Yemen's extensive informal networks. Operating successfully within these networks requires an acute understanding of the interplay between local actors, including the roles of their regional and international stakeholders. Within Yemen, there are several tiers of domestic political actors, connected by complex intersecting networks of patronage and other (e.g. marriage) relations. At the elite level, there are at least two factions, if not three or more groups to consider: President Saleh, his family, General Mohsin and the al-Ahmar brothers. The exact degree of alignment – or opposition – between these players is not yet clear.

At the next level down, the parliamentary parties include clients for various elite factions, as well as dominant political personalities in their own right. In addition, various local power brokers – including, but not restricted to prominent tribal leaders – also maintain varying degrees of allegiance with rival elite factions and, in some cases, have a voice within the parliamentary framework. These sub-national grievances and expectations will need to be addressed in the context of transition talks, if mediators intend to help manage the recent trend towards fragmentation of power, and the de facto redefinition of center-periphery relations. Many of these grievances are rooted in contested narratives relating to local and national histories, in which regional and international actors have played a part.

Significantly, any international mediator(s) would require high-level access to regional and international stakeholders, including the Gulf States and Yemen's Western donors. The Gulf elites have extensive contacts and partnerships with elite players inside the informal power network in Yemen. They also interact more readily with key players in secondary political settlements between local elites at the sub-national level, such as tribal sheikhs.<sup>xlii</sup> Precisely because of these extensive transnational patronage relationships and the widespread perception among Yemenis that Saudi Arabia intends to influence the current political transition, there are vocal demands for an international player to counter-balance these regional influences. Speaking in a personal capacity during April, one Yemeni official commented: "I trust international mediators more than regional ones."<sup>xliii</sup>

Crucially, any international mediator(s) will also require an effective strategy to reach out to Yemeni youth groups and civil society organizations in a two-way process of dialogue that informs UN interventions throughout the transition (for example, feedback could influence UN decisions regarding scheduling and preparations for future elections). This could include capacity-building activities to support youth groups and civil society organizations to find a voice at the international level.<sup>xliv</sup> Almost certainly, it will involve finding a way to give their leaders a seat (and parity status) at the negotiating table.

Finally, international mediator(s) – and the UN family as a whole – need to consider that the current political crisis is running in parallel with a rapidly deteriorating economy. Oil production (already on a downward trend) has plummeted since January, commodity prices are rising, commodity supply chains have been disrupted and the currency is depreciating. The regime's short-term capacity to manage these interlocking challenges diminished considerably during the first quarter of 2011 as established power structures fragmented and the machinery of government was paralyzed, but the country's weak economic baseline reflects the "state capture" model that has characterized Saleh's regime. Yemen's transition leadership will need substantial help to deal with this mounting socioeconomic crisis, as well as support in identifying immediate priorities.

Regardless of the immediate outcome of the current political crisis, Yemen is likely to confront not one single power shift, but several cycles of transition. A stable new political settlement will not be forged in a matter of weeks and months. Instead, it will take years – or even decades – to achieve lasting change. In recognition of the incremental nature of progressive change in fragile and conflict-affected states, the latest World Development Report calls for a "mode of planning that accepts as a starting point that states and sub-national areas with weak institutions continually risk being overwhelmed by a range of stresses." This requires "lighter and more flexible" planning and assessment processes that are able to "to provide regular, repeated assessments of risks and opportunities. The assessments would benefit from more realism in priorities and timelines" including stronger political economy analysis.<sup>xlv</sup>

This gradualist approach also recognizes the need to support "national and local capacities for mediation and coalition building. Countries facing rapid transitions and cycles of violence will need to negotiate new internal pacts, and build consensus, around effective policies to address their many challenges.

These negotiations will in turn require that the parties have access to internal mediators, and to their own skills and autonomous platforms, for dialogue and for the resolution of conflicts. Further development of national and local capacities for managing cyclical conflict, cascading change, and rapid transitions is therefore not only essential, but also feasible.”<sup>xlvi</sup> UNDP has a wealth of experience to contribute in this regard.

These are timely principles to guide UN interventions in Yemen, casting both current enhanced engagement, as well as future post-transition interventions, as forms of preventive diplomacy. An externally facilitated country retreat held in the coming weeks would provide a timely opportunity for UN officials from Sana’a and agency headquarters to consider their immediate short-term operational priorities and conduct some medium-term contingency planning. At the same time, participants would be able to consider a range of possible modalities within which a strategic long-term role could be shaped, based on robust political economy analysis (and the appointment of a special envoy may be just one option).

Ultimately, if a managed transfer of power cannot be agreed between Yemen’s rival parties within the coming weeks, it seems increasingly likely that the UN Security Council will, once again, be called upon to turn its attention to this issue.<sup>xlvii</sup>

17 May, 2011

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<sup>i</sup> Ginny Hill, ‘What is Happening in Yemen?’, in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 52, no. 2, April–May 2010, pp. 83–104

<sup>ii</sup> Sally Healy & Ginny Hill, ‘Yemen and Somalia: Terrorism, Shadow Networks and the Limitations of State-building’, Chatham House Briefing Paper, October 2010

<sup>iii</sup> Ginny Hill, ‘Yemen: Fear of Failure’, Chatham House Briefing Paper, November 2008

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ginny Hill, ‘Yemen and the Coming Chaos’, I. B. Tauris (forthcoming)

<sup>vi</sup> ‘Salih and the Yemeni succession’, Jane’s Intelligence Digest, 18 August 2008

<sup>vii</sup> Ginny Hill, ‘Yemen: Fear of Failure’, Chatham House Briefing Paper, November 2008

<sup>viii</sup> Wikileaks 10RIYADH159, released 07.12.2010, subject: (S) SAUDI ARABIA: RENEWED ASSURANCES ON SATELLITE IMAGERY.

<sup>ix</sup> See Jeb Boone’s map of protests and troop positions in Sana’a <http://bit.ly/dW0cny>

<sup>x</sup> ‘Ahmar’ means red (Ar.). General Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar is not related to Hameed al-Ahmar.

<sup>xi</sup> See Yemen’s Vision for National Salvation, Summary: Vision for National Salvation March 21, 2010 <http://yemenvision.wordpress.com/>

<sup>xii</sup> Ginny Hill, ‘Democracy on Hold in Yemen’, in Arab Reform Bulletin, July 2010

<sup>xiii</sup> U.S. was told of Yemen leader’s vulnerability – Washington Post – April 8 2001

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> Various author interviews in Sana’a, 2010. See also Ginny Hill, ‘What next in Yemen?’, BBC News January 29 2011.

<sup>xvi</sup> Various author interviews in Sana’a, 2010.

<sup>xvii</sup> U.S. was told of Yemen leader’s vulnerability – Washington Post – April 8 2001

<sup>xviii</sup> Yemen’s Hamid al-Ahmar urges President Saleh to leave, BBC News, 31 March 2011

<sup>xix</sup> Political Settlements: Implications for International Development Policy and Practice - The Asia Foundation - Occasional Paper, NO. 2, July 2010

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- xx The Politics of Poverty: Elites, Citizens and States - A Synthesis Paper – Department for International Development
- xxi Political Settlements: Implications for International Development Policy and Practice - The Asia Foundation - Occasional Paper, NO. 2, July 2010
- xxii Ginny Hill, 'Riyadh will decide the fate of Ali Abdullah Saleh – and of Yemen', *Guardian* March 23 2011
- xxiii Wasim Alqershi, 'The youth will win in Yemen', *Guardian*, 12 May 2011
- xxiv See Draft Document: Demands of the Youth Revolution, April 2011 <http://bit.ly/iffiRj>
- xxv Ibid.
- xxvi <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpkN-hPTeg0&feature=share>
- xxvii Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 'The State's Legitimacy in Fragile Situations – Unpacking Complexity' (Paris: OECD, 2010)
- xxviii Oslo Governance Centre, 'Annual Report 2010: Developing The UNDP Approach To Political Economy Analysis'
- xxix Sue Unsworth, 'What's Politics Got to Do with It?: Why donors find it so hard to come to terms with politics, and why this matters', in *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 21 (2009), Issue 6, pp883-894
- xxx Ibid.
- xxxi Ginny Hill, 'What is Happening in Yemen?', in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 52, no. 2, April–May 2010, pp. 83–104
- xxxii Sally Healy & Ginny Hill, 'Yemen and Somalia: Terrorism, Shadow Networks and the Limitations of State-building', Chatham House Briefing Paper, October 2010
- xxxiii Christen Michelsen Institute, 'Fixing The Political Marketplace: How Can We Make Peace Without Functioning State Institutions?', Alex de Waal, 15 October 2009
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