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## **After Saleh's Killing: The Old Yemen's System of Power Resurfaces**

The shocking death of former Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh, killed by Houthis' militants in the outskirts of Sana'a on December 4, has been quickly reshaping inter-elite alliances.

On December 2, Saleh had publicly broken with the insurgent front, announcing his willingness to dialogue with Saudi Arabia. Saleh's killing seems to have accelerated the realignments wished by the former president, even though the reaction of the most powerful tribal confederation of the Sana'a province, the Hashid (to which belonged Saleh) has still to be framed.

From a regional level, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates welcomed Saleh's shifting alliance and, after his death, the Emirati crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan met with Saleh's oldest son, Ahmed Ali, former chief of the Republican Guard and Yemen's ambassador to the UAE, who lives in Abu Dhabi under house arrest since the golpe in Sana'a (January 2015). In two statements, Ahmed Ali Saleh incited tribes to revenge against Ansarullah [Sami Aboudi-Noah Browning, "Exiled son of Yemen's Saleh takes up anti-Houthi cause", Reuters, 6 December 2017].

From a domestic level, the system of power which ruled Yemen, under Saleh's presidency, for more than thirty years has been informally reconfiguring: the recognized president Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi offered an amnesty for those Saleh-aligned fighters who decide to re-join the regular forces camp. As a matter of fact, the General People's Congress (GPC) rallies today a coalition of power made by president Hadi (former Saleh's vice president), the vice president and deputy chief of the armed forces Ali Mohsin Al-Ahmar (who headed the powerful First Regional Division of the army under Saleh) and what remains of the waned Islah party tied to the Al-Ahmar family (with no linkages with Ali Mohsin), which encompasses Yemeni Salafis and Muslim Brothers.

Moreover, Southern elites might have decided to temporarily stop infighting with Hadi. Hani bin Breik, the vice president of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC), based in Aden, declared that he recognizes Hadi as the legitimate president. Bin Breik also said that Saleh's family is welcomed in Aden: Southerners use to define the Saleh-led reunification of Yemen, in 1990, as a Northern occupation of the South.

What's really surprising about recent events in Yemen is the Emirati shifting attitude vis-à-vis the local Muslim Brotherhood: this represents a real game-changer in the conflict. On December 13, Mohammed bin Zayed met in Riyadh with leaders of the Islah party, alongside the Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud. The Emirati Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, stated that Islah has cut ties with the Muslim Brotherhood" [Critical Threats, Gulf of Aden Security Review, 15 December 2017]. Such a step could be followed by UAE's financial support for Islah-related militias, denied so far, altering balances of power on the ground, especially in stalled, contested areas as Taiz

and Al-Bayda. With still great leverage on Yemeni tribes and Islah's supporters, General Ali Mohsin Al-Ahmar is likely to play a key role in this strategy.

After Saleh's death, something has changed at a military level: the Saudi-led coalition resumed military operations in the Western coast, with the purpose to regain Hodeida. Hadi-aligned forces, with the support of the Republican Guard still loyal to Saleh and the Emirati-backed Southern militias, advanced along the Tihama coast, seizing al-Khukha port.

The reconfiguration of the inter-élite alliances is likely to shake the military stalemate in Yemen.

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