

South Yemen Is Already Functionally Independent Even if It's Not Recognized as Such

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The Southern Transitional Council's liberation of the former South Yemeni capital of Aden from the Saudi-backed Islah Islamists has restored the independence of the Old Cold War-era country.

STC vs. Islah

It was bound to happen sooner than later, but the Southern Transitional Council (STC) once again liberated the former South Yemeni capital of Aden from the Saudi-backed Islah Islamists and Hadi's forces for the second time [since January 2018](#), though this time they're not willing to return to the status quo ante bellum but are bargaining hard for the coalition's recognition of their functional independence. The group's UK-based spokesman Saleh Alnoud told [Reuters](#) that "giving up control of Aden is not on the table at the moment" and that it "would be a very good start if Islah was removed from the whole of the south and allow southerners to govern themselves." The UAE-backed STC [blame](#) the Saudi-backed Islah Islamists for complicity in the Ansar Allah's recent missile strike in Aden that further fractured the [already divided coalition](#) and provoked the separatists to forcefully evict their "frenemies" from the seaside city.

Secularism vs. Islamism

It should be noted that the STC is a secular organization that has an entirely different worldview than Islah, which explains the never-ending tension between them since the GCC-organized coalition unnaturally brought these ideologically contradictory groups together in the shared short-term interest of stopping the Ansar Allah's rapid advance southward and pushing them as far back north as possible. The war has since crawled to a stalemate and become the [world's worst humanitarian crisis](#) as the majority of the country's population risks starvation and disease in the mostly blockaded northern part of the state under the control of the Ansar Allah, which explains why these "uneasy allies" began scheming and ultimately turning their guns on one another. The UAE's [large-scale military drawdown](#) last month created fears of a power vacuum that in turn triggered a security dilemma between the STC and Islah, after which the latter allegedly conspired with the Ansar Allah during this month's missile strike in Aden and thus caused the STC to react as they did out of self-defense.

Iranian Intrigue

Being once again in control of Aden but with the STC this time unwilling to cede power except potentially to the allied Security Belt Forces (SBF) or Aden Police (according to Alnoud in the previously cited interview), the tipping point might have finally been passed

whereby the coalition is forced by necessity to recognize South Yemen's functional independence if it hopes to continue the war. The UAE has already begun its "face-saving" withdrawal from the conflict, but Saudi Arabia is left in a situation that's increasingly [gone from bad to worse](#) seemingly without any real exit strategy in mind, so it might at the very least seriously consider the STC's suggestion that Islah be removed from all of South Yemen. The STC doesn't just oppose Islah's worldview, but is extremely suspicious of their connections to the Muslim Brotherhood, which some observers believe that it's actually an offshoot of. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that Iran interestingly [was opposed](#) to the US' designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization despite many of its affiliates fighting against the Islamic Republic's forces in Syria over nearly the past decade of that proxy conflict.

Time To Act

With the Ansar Allah being politically supported by Iran and Islah being suspected of indirect connections to it, the STC might have felt like a conspiracy was brewing that could end its separatist plans one way or another in the future, hence the pressing need to remove this threat from the territory of their formerly independent state as soon as possible before the situation got out of control. Coalition leader Saudi Arabia evidently doesn't see things that way since it's sponsoring the Islah Islamists, but those two parties might one day split from one another if either of them comes to think that the strategic utility of their partnership has eventually expired, which wouldn't be all too surprising in a dirty war that's already seen so many [dramatic twists and turns](#) since it first began. Sensing that its narrow window of opportunity might soon be shut, the STC made their move after being backstabbed by Islah, though they're thus far [resisting the pressure](#) of so-called "hardliners" within their ranks to immediately declare independence in order to proverbially "go by the book" and try to get as much international support as possible first.

The Six Steps Towards Independence

In practical terms, this means being recognized by the UN as a legitimate party to the conflict and thus being assured a role in the ongoing negotiations to end it, after which they can then proceed according to the phased plan that the author suggested in his December 2017 policy proposal about how "[South Yemen Will Regain Independence If It Follows These Six Steps](#)", beginning with an unofficial independence referendum and ending with becoming a crucial node along the [New Silk Road](#). A "federal" transitional period of an undetermined length might be required beforehand, however, whereby the formerly independent countries of North and South Yemen consolidate their state institutions with assistance from the international community as they prepare for the formal restoration of their former sovereignty. The main problem, however, is that the Ansar Allah — despite [previously favoring](#) a "federal" solution as recently as last December — might not go along with it since they were [advised by the Ayatollah](#) earlier this week to "strongly resist" what he called the "plot" to divide Yemen and should instead endorse "a unified, coherent Yemen with sovereign integrity".

Concluding Thoughts

Saudi Arabia, the Ansar Allah, and Iran all share one goal in common and that's to prevent the restoration of South Yemen's statehood, but none of them are in a position to stop the seemingly inevitable and can only realistically slow it down if anything after all that just recently transpired. If all armed parties and their supporters abroad (both military and

political) truly want to end the war, then the only pragmatic solution available is to recognize the STC as a legitimate party to the conflict and begin the process of “federalizing” the country into its two former constituent parts prior to officially “re-partitioning” it following referenda in each region. The strategic dynamics are such that South Yemen’s impending independence appears to be inevitable, especially if the UN incorporates them into the fledgling peace talks as an equal member. That still has yet to happen, however, and might not occur right away, so expectations should be tempered when talking about how long this entire process might take. Even so, the STC remains committed to using the interim period to consolidate its state institutions and prepare for the day when it finally declares outright independence.

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