

South Yemen Will Regain Independence If It Follows These Six Steps

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Independence is once again attainable for South Yemen so long as prospective peace talks result in a coalition-enforced “buffer zone” with North Yemen and a “federal” transitional period that precedes an internationally recognized (re-)independence vote, and the restored country could avoid becoming a UAE satellite if it grants a third-party such as Pakistan a naval base in Aden as a friendly means of “balancing” out its patron’s potentially overbearing influence, which in this case could also serve the dual purpose of facilitating the south Arabian state’s integration into the New Silk Road.

[Saleh’s slaying](#) opens up both symbolic and substantial opportunities for South Yemen to resurface on the world map, taking into account that it was this former Yemeni President who presided over the 1990 unification and the North’s victory in the 1994 civil war. The author recently wrote about this in one of his latest analyses for [The Duran](#), with the main takeaway being that the best outcome that the Cold War-era country could hope for in the short term is the institutionalization of a “federal” system that would give South Yemen de-facto independence from the North through what would essentially amount to an internal partition.

For as positive of a development as that would be, many South Yemenis are understandably yearning for more, seeing as how their patriotic sentiment has surged in the past couple of years due to the twists and turns of the ongoing War on Yemen inadvertently, though excitingly, giving them their most realistic shot at independence since it was regrettably surrendered in 1990. Furthermore, South Yemenis don’t want to survive as a satellite state of the UAE, but as a full-fledged independent member of the international community, which would therefore entail devising a creative political solution for “balancing” the influence of its patron and ensuring that the country’s sovereignty wouldn’t be superficial.

1. Hold An Unofficial Independence Referendum



Taking it one step at a time, however, South Yemen first has to get to the point where “federalization” is even an option, which is why it plans on holding an [independence referendum](#) in the near future so as to show the allied coalition that the majority of people truly want to break away from North Yemen. Presuming that this is indeed the case and that the [Southern Movement](#) (also known as Al-Hirak) is as popular among the masses as it visibly seems to be, then the next step would be in getting South Yemen’s monarchic partners to recognize the democratic will of the population, which is in principle a paradoxical challenge but one that could be surmounted by appealing to their geostrategic interests.

2. Convince The Coalition To Recognize The People's Democratic Will

It's at this point where South Yemen's representatives in the governmental, military, and media fields need to successfully convince their coalition counterparts that the restoration of independence to their region would allow their allies to benefit much more than if they continued to waste their personal and financial resources trying to keep the Republic of Yemen together in vain. The main argument in favor of the South Yemenis is that their revived statehood would enable the coalition to craft the conditions for downscaling their expensive commitment to this disastrous conflict and therefore have a tangible basis for claiming a "face-saving" victory in the War on Yemen.

None of this can happen unless they're made to believe that the threats that they perceive to be emanating from North Yemen could cost-effectively be contained as a result, which is why it's necessary to explain to the coalition the importance of a "federal" transitional period for the country's two halves. "Federalization" would permit Yemen's two functionally independent parts to nominally remain united under President Hadi's internationally recognized authority, which would thus grant him the right to request that the coalition enforce an internal "buffer zone" between North & South as well as sustain its naval operation along the Red Sea coast.

The point here is to put pressure on North Yemen for as long as possible until a governing bloc "acceptable" to the coalition is formed, such as one led by Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) and involving "moderate" elements of the Houthi rebels, because this would make Saudi Arabia and its allies "comfortable" enough with devolving "federal" powers to it in the run-up to independence without losing too much face. That being said, the coalition must ensure that the humanitarian needs of the North Yemeni population are met during this crucial time, since doing otherwise would totally delegitimize this entire process and make it look like an excuse for "justifying" their collective punishment.

3. Incorporate "Federalization" Into A Third-Party-Brokered "Political Solution"

Once the coalition is convinced of the wisdom in moving forward with this plan, concrete proposals must then be offered by the Southern Movement in order to make it a reality. The peace talks that would logically lead to the "federal" transitional process would gain a strong degree of international legitimacy if they were brokered by a neutral third party such as Russia, possibly following the Syrian model that it spearheaded and is [reportedly about to replicate](#) in Libya. While it might be impossible to implement this process across the whole of formally unified Yemen right now due to the ongoing unrest in the North, that doesn't mean that it can't begin in the more peaceful Southern region first, just as how the Syrian reconciliation process first began in the liberated areas under Damascus' control.

Remembering that President Hadi's permission to initiate "federalization" talks is a legal prerequisite to this procedure, the native Southerner should be pressured by his people to allow this to proceed as the only way for him to ever hope for the possibility of partial redemption for his complicity in squashing their secessionist hopes during the 1994 civil war. So long as Hadi's Saudi and Emirati patrons agree with the Southern Movement's logic for "federalization", then it shouldn't be too hard for them to encourage their surrogate to permit it, which would accordingly extend the President's support to a second independence referendum that would be internationally recognized. Once the vote takes place, and if it expectedly results in a positive outcome, then the coalition could assist with swapping out

Saleh's Northern-imposed "deep state" elite with the South's democratically elected ones.

It's important to emphasize that the "federal" transition could conceivably occur at an asymmetrical pace by proceeding much faster in the liberated south than in the war-torn north, and that there's nothing irregular in this happening because similar post-conflict peacemaking developments have already occurred in Syria with international recognition. In fact, the application of the Syrian model modified for Yemeni conditions has a faster chance of succeeding in the Arabian country than the Levantine one because the entire international community (except possibly Iran) still recognizes Hadi as the official President, thus making his word the final authority on the matter. If he can be convinced to initiate third-party-brokered peace talks that begin in the South and lead to the asymmetrically paced implementation of a "federal" transitional solution, then there's no legal reason why the world would oppose it.

4. Build A "Buffer Zone" And Request Peacekeeping Assistance

The coalition would only agree to South Yemeni "federalization" and subsequent independence if they were sure that the threats that they believe to be coming from North Yemen wouldn't ever seep South once again, so they have self-interested military reasons for building a "buffer zone" roughly along the line of contact and as close to the pre-1990 borders as possible in setting the stage for the international re-division of the country. Because of the challenge inherent with this task, battle-hardened troops led by the UAE should take the lead in carrying this out, with the security vacuum that they leave in South Yemen prospectively being filled by a Pakistani-led peacekeeping mission there under the aegis of former General Raheel Sharif, the leader of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC).

Pakistan refused to become a party to the conflict in 2015, unlike the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and this pairs with the South Asian state's extensive UN peacekeeping experience in the "Global South" in making it the most logical country to preside over South Yemen's "federal" transition into an independent state. South Yemen needs to rebuild its military capacity after it was suppressed by the North for the past 24 years since the civil war, and seeing as how Pakistan used to train the UAE right after its own independence, it's only fitting that Islamabad teams up with its long-term partners in Abu Dhabi to cooperate in doing the same with Aden. But there's another reason why it's to South Yemen's supreme advantage to request that Pakistan fulfill these two important roles, and that's geopolitics.

5. "Balance" With Bases

South Yemen, whether as a de-facto independent "federal" unit or a legally sovereign state-level one, doesn't want to be the UAE's satellite, so it needs to "balance" the influence of its patron through the skillful employment of "military diplomacy", preferably with Pakistan. The South Asian country has a grand strategic interest in the Arabian Sea-Gulf of Aden (ASGA) region and further afield in the Red Sea, as explained in the author's two prior analyses about "[Pakistan's ASGA Strategy For The Afro-Pacific](#)" and how "[Sudan Is Indispensable To China's Silk Road Vision For Africa](#)". This means that Pakistan could soon be looking for a naval base in the area in order to secure its Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC), and there's no better place for it to deploy than Aden.

A handful of countries, including coalition leader [Saudi Arabia](#) and even China, already have military facilities in Djibouti, while the UAE has bases in [Eritrea](#), "[Somaliland](#)", and

reportedly in the South Yemeni archipelago of [Socotra](#). About the latter, it would be unrealistic to expect South Yemen to expel the UAE from these islands even if its forces were indeed deployed there, so this would essentially become a fait accompli that the country would have to inherit. Therefore, the focus should instead be on preventing the UAE from setting up a permanent base in the South Yemeni mainland so as to preserve the country's sovereignty and prevent it from being smothered by its patron.

The coalition doesn't need a permanent naval presence in Aden anyhow since the UAE and Saudi Arabia's bases in the Red Sea (in Eritrea and Djibouti, respectively) are more than sufficient for controlling the North Yemeni coast. Instead of either of those two, South Yemen should court Pakistan as the ultimate "balancing" party capable of diversifying the country's strategic dependency on the GCC. Per the aforementioned proposal, former General Raheel Sharif could lead the coalition's peacekeeping efforts in South Yemen during the "federal" transition to independence, and his home state could build up the country's military capacities during the interim. Pakistan is close with all the coalition members and understands through its own history the importance of partition, so it's an ideal and inoffensive "balancing" partner for South Yemen to have.



6. Experience A Silk Road Renaissance

Most significantly, however, the deployment of the Pakistani Navy to Aden would turn the city into a crucial node along the New Silk Road, pairing it with nearby Djibouti as one of two 'gatekeepers' for the Bab el Mandeb and centrally positioning it along the ASGA-Red Sea SLOC between the CPEC mainland-maritime interface of Gwadar and its projected African counterpart in Port Sudan. The strategic twinning of the Pakistani base in Aden with China's one in Djibouti would naturally lead to more robust Sino-Pakistani cooperation in South Yemen, which could eventually produce trilateral development projects that would accelerate the country's post-war reconstruction and stabilization. The positive economic outcome that this might predictably engender would prove that the Southern Movement is indeed delivering on its promises to the population after independence.

The cordial competition in South Yemen between Saudi-Emirati GCC investment and Sino-Pakistani Silk Road initiatives would be to the advantage of all parties, and the four foreign powers could even prospectively cooperate with one another on the country's territory in pioneering a new quadrilateral partnership framework between them. This could see South Yemen become the geopolitical bridge linking together both economic blocs and serving as the center of strategic gravity between them in the emerging [Multipolar World Order](#). The end result of this plan would be a win-win for all and especially South Yemen, as the newly re-independent state could experience its long-awaited renaissance in having its capital of Aden become the "West Arabian Dubai" along the New Silk Road and ultimately compensating for the nearly three decades of neglect and pillage that it suffered at the hands of its North Yemeni occupiers.

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