

THE UNITED STATES'S POSITION ON THE POLITICAL CHANGE IN YEMEN AFTER 2001 AND UNTIL 2015

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Abstract

This study addresses the position of the United States of America on political change in Yemen, specifically during the period (2001-2015), during which Yemen witnessed a number of political transformations that had a direct effect on the interests of the United States in the region. Therefore, the study dealt with the US foreign policy towards Yemen since the establishment of Yemeni unity, and the extent of the repercussions of the occurrences of 2001 on the relations between the two countries, up to 2015, the year in which the so-called "Operation Decisive Storm" began to mark the beginning of a new study.

INTRODUCTION

The study aims to highlight and analyze the position of the United States of America on the political changes in Yemen, and to identify the most important political trends taken by the United States towards Yemen during a specific period starting in 2001 until 2015, in addition to analyzing and clarifying American interests and objectives in Yemen, given the latter's geostrategic position in the region.

As for the problem of the study, it is that Yemen has occupied a marginal place in the concerns of US foreign policy since the arrival of the first US diplomatic mission in 1959, as US foreign policy did not view Yemen as occupying a place among its priorities, and direct dealings between Sana 'a and Washington began only in the second half of the eighties of the twentieth century, following the discovery of oil in Yemen and the efforts made by the Yemeni leadership to independence the Yemeni decision and convince Washington of the need to deal with Yemen directly without the need for any party.

This contributed to the support of the United States for the establishment of unity between the two parts of Yemen in 1990, in addition to its positive position in the survival of unity and its lack of support for the secessionist attempts in 1994. Hence, the problem of the study is to clarify the change in the orientations of US foreign policy towards Yemen, during the period 2001 to 2015, which represented an increasing American interest in Yemen, which gave the researcher a strong incentive to delve into this study, as an attempt to reveal its dimensions and contents.

As for the methodology of the study, it was relied on the phenomenon of systematic integration, based on the inductive and deductive approach with the aim of strengthening the research, and extracting its intended results.

The study was divided into the following:

The first subject: US foreign policy towards Yemen until 2001.

The second subject: The position of the United States on developments in Yemen during the period (2001-2013).

The third subject: The US policy towards Yemen from the National Dialogue Conference until 2015.

Subject 1: US foreign policy towards Yemen until 2001:

Yemeni-American relations have been characterized by varying stages of attraction and disharmony for more than half a century as a result of international, regional and local developments, and the view of the United States of America of occurrences in the region and the degree of its interaction with the vital interests of it and its allies and within the international equation during the Cold War and to counter the communist tide coming from southern Yemen until the fall of the Soviet Union.

With the establishment of Yemeni unity on May 22, 1990 and the American support, despite the fears of the neighboring countries of the establishment of Yemeni unity due to the outstanding border problems, Yemen's position on the Second Gulf War and Yemen's rejection of the United Nations Resolution No. (678) on the use of force against Iraq, which opposes the vital American interests in the region, and despite the visit of the United States Secretary of State to the United Nations, the delegate to the right of the serious consequences of rejecting the resolution, which aroused the ire of the American administration and then cut off American aid, followed by cutting off Gulf aid⁽¹⁾.

With the Yemeni war of secession in 1994, the United States of America supported Yemeni unity based on the strategic dimension and vital interests of the United States of America, in order to preserve the stability of the region and also fear of Yemen's entry into a long-term civil war. And pressing quickly to resolve the situation. The Yemeni-US relations emerged through the visit of a US security delegation to Yemen in 1997, which was briefed on the nature of the work of the security institutions, as the US delegation asked Yemeni officials to make structural changes in some security services, such as the creation of special departments to combat terrorism⁽²⁾.

Cooperation between the two parties continued within the framework of the international campaign to fight terrorism, but the attack on the USS Cole destroyer in the port of Aden in 2000 led to a crisis in the relationship between Yemen and the United States of America again, which had negative effects on American interests³ in Yemen. This did not last long, as relations returned to their previous state and were even closer than before.

The second Subject: The position of the United States of America on developments in Yemen until 2013:

The occurrences of September 11, 2001 led to a change in US policy towards Yemen due to the increasing indicators of US intervention in the internal affairs of Yemen, with the increasing awareness of the United States of what it considers a threat to its national security, due to considerations stemming from the nature of the political, economic and social conditions in Yemen in general, and those related to the security aspect in particular, which affected the drawing of a stereotypical image among American institutions, and that image had a significant effect on determining US foreign policy towards Yemen after the occurrences of September 11, 2001. This is under the influence of the US administrations' vision of the war on terrorism and the reflection of this vision on the directions, issues and tools of US policy towards Yemen in order to achieve US strategic interests in the region. President Ali Abdullah Saleh visited the United States in 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007, and many locals believe

that Yemen, in cooperation with the United States, has avoided a possible US military strike because of al-Qaeda. More than a senior US official and more than an expert also visited Yemen. The last visit of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in April 2007 received the attention of the US administration, and bilateral talks were held with the Vice President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of State, and a number of members of Congress. Relations between the two countries have developed as Yemen is considered one of the important and prominent countries in the fight against terrorism ⁽⁴⁾.

With the outbreak of the right-wing protest movement against President Ali Abdullah Saleh in February 2011, the US position was hesitant to take a position towards the right-wing protests. The US leadership called for calm and non-use of violence against the demonstrators. As a result of the increasing movement of protests in the right-wing governorates, the Yemeni president announced that he would not run for the presidential elections and that he would not bequeath power to his son. As a result of this initiative, US President Obama contacted the Yemeni President and expressed his thanks for the initiative launched by President Saleh, stressing the support of the US administration for all steps of political, economic, administrative and judicial reform, stressing his confidence in the Yemeni President, and that the US President asked the Yemeni President to fulfill his promises, and that the Yemeni forces abide by restraint, and refrain from using violence against demonstrators who exercise their right to assembly and freedom of expression. As for the US ambassador to Yemen, James Clapper, he warned that the deterioration of the political situation in Yemen will strengthen terrorist groups, and will pose a major threat to US interests, which makes al-Qaeda better positioned to carry out its aggression and create tension in the region⁵.

On February 18, 2011, White House spokesman Jay Carnran confirmed that President Obama is concerned about reports of violence in Bahrain, Libya and Yemen, and that restraint must be exercised in the three countries against the protesters, while the US embassy in Sana 'a called for protecting the property, lives and interests of Yemenis and safeguarding their basic human⁶ and civil rights. Accordingly, the regional state, specifically the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, began seeking to find a solution to the Yemeni crisis. It submitted an initiative called the "Gulf Initiative" on 13 April 2011 to President Saleh, which stipulates a set of items, the most important of which is that Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh relinquishes power to his deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, and holds a national dialogue conference in order to agree on a new constitution for the country and submit it to the people for a referendum. However, this initiative was not initially approved by President Saleh, which prompted the United States of America to work significantly in pushing forward the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, and they worked continuously to complete the steps stipulated in the initiative, despite the gap between it and Yemeni politics, in light of the dissonance of the parties, the questioning of each other, and the fact that the interests of the homeland do not prevail over their personal and partisan interests ⁽⁷⁾.

This prompted the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Abdullatif Al-Zayani, to try to persuade President Saleh to approve and sign the initiative, which led to Saleh's acceptance in early May 2011 to sign the initiative, but he refused to sign it personally, and his deputy, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, was sent to sign it in Riyadh, but the Yemeni opposition rejected this, and stressed the need for Saleh to sign it himself, which led to an escalation of violence between pro-regime forces and anti-

regime forces, which prompted international parties to stress the need for the initiative to be signed by all Yemeni parties ⁽⁸⁾.

Three weeks later, Saleh agreed to sign the initiative again, and on May 21, 2011, the opposition signed it, with Saleh signing it the next day, but he did not fulfill his promise. On the same day, an armed crowd of Saleh supporters besieged the UAE embassy in Sana'a, where the ambassadors of the European Union, the United States of America and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries were meeting, and they were besieged for several hours before they were eventually evacuated by a right-hand military helicopter, and on the same day Saleh refused to sign the initiative ⁽⁹⁾.

Following the recent developments, armed clashes erupted in Sana'a on 23 May 2011 between the opposition and government forces. On 3 June 2011, an explosion at the presidential mosque killed a number of leaders of the General People's Congress and seriously injured Saleh, who was taken to Riyadh for treatment. The media spokesman for President Ali Abdullah Saleh accused the US administration of trying to assassinate the president and plotting a coup. However, as a result of this incident, the United States of America began to play a major role in Yemeni affairs and conducted a dialogue with the representatives of the popular revolution in their various political, youth, military and tribal formations. The Americans continued their statements on the need to transfer power in Yemen to Vice President Ali Abdullah Saleh, as confirmed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on October 13, 2011, on the need for a new leader for Yemen, but the Americans wanted a successful alternative in order to preserve their interests after Saleh left power, as they sought to pressure the forces of the revolution privately to keep Ali Abdullah Saleh's relatives in command of the security and military services, and they expanded many secret bases to launch strikes against al-Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia, as well as working to obtain guarantees from the next Yemeni president to work under the Gulf initiative and stay on the structure of the Yemeni political system and involve Ali Abdullah Saleh's party in power⁽¹⁰⁾.

After the latter returned to his country in September, and international pressure increased on him from the United Nations, the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the initiative was signed in Riyadh on November 23, 2011, and Saleh ceded his powers to his deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, in the presence of the US Ambassador to Yemen, Gerald Feierstein⁽¹¹⁾.

With the signing of the Gulf Initiative, the United States of America welcomed this step, which is an important step towards the right path of political change in Yemen and in a way that serves American interests. This was reinforced by the welcome given by US President Barack Obama to the decision of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to transfer executive powers to the Vice President. At the same time, the so-called transitional phase in Yemen began under the auspices of the ten countries (Friends of Yemen), which are the five permanent members of the Council of Nations, and four Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and the European Union ⁽¹²⁾, whose function was to help Yemen's transition to establish a new consensual political system, or to move to good democratic governance under the Gulf initiative, as a compromise that combines the demands of the former regime, and the aspirations of the February 2011 revolution demanding change⁽¹³⁾. By January 2012, power was transferred from Saleh to Hadi, and Saleh remained the head of the General People's Congress and received immunity ⁽¹⁴⁾. That shift was in the interest of the United States of America as it sought to preserve its interests in the region.

The third subject: US policy towards Yemen from the National Dialogue Conference until 2015:

The process of political transition in Yemen began with the holding of the National Dialogue Conference in Sana'a as of March 18, 2013, to lay the foundations for the development of a new constitution, in which 565 delegates participated, organized into 11 political groups, as well as 20 small political parties⁽¹⁵⁾. Despite the international efforts to make the process a success, specifically from the United Nations, the World Bank, the United States and the Gulf countries⁽¹⁶⁾. However, the conference was unable to solve the main issues in a real and final way. The positions of the political parties differed, specifically with regard to the southern and federal issue and the division into regions. Due to international pressure towards the completion of any agreement, the recent outcomes of the conference did not have clear texts aimed at solving the most complex problems of Yemen, such as the southern and federal issues and transitional justice. Although the outcomes of the dialogue in general received some kind of acceptance, there remained very deep reservations and wide criticism regarding the details they contain. So the conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference in January 2014 quickly led the country into a new political crisis, and instead of becoming a tool for resolving Yemen's pressing issues, the conference actually widened the gap between the different parties more than ever before. With the inability of dialogue to resolve their differences, the political parties in Yemen have returned to their path. The political parties in Yemen have returned to their traditional way of achieving their political goals through the use of weapons⁽¹⁷⁾.

The United States of America praised the steps achieved in the political transition process in Yemen as a translation of the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative signed during the past year. The US administration has played a major role in seeking to calm the situation in Yemen in order to preserve its interests, whether in the Arabian Gulf or the Red Sea, specifically since the Americans are keen to arrange the military force to ensure the achievement of their goals in tightening the noose on al-Qaeda and fighting it and not allowing it to strike American interests from Yemen or harm its allied regimes in the region. The United States of America voted to approve United Nations Security Council Resolution 2140 issued in February 2014, which imposed sanctions on persons who interfered in the political transition process in Yemen, or worked in one way or another to destabilize the country, and the committee of experts formed by this resolution eventually imposed sanctions on former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and two Houthi leaders, Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim and Abdul Khaliq al-Houthi⁽¹⁸⁾.

Among the important transformations in the Yemeni political process was the assumption by President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi of the presidency of the sessions of the National Dialogue Conference, which was welcomed by the United States. However, the economic and social conditions of the country deteriorated during the years 2012-2014. The increase in fuel prices came to increase the intensity of violence against the state, and the Houthi group moved in the armed sit-in, and they were able to control the capital Sana'a on September 21, 2014⁽¹⁹⁾, and the group rejected the peace and partnership agreement, under the Gulf initiative, and succeeded in escalating the intensity of armed confrontations, and besieged the presidential palace on January 20, 2015, and two days later Hadi submitted his resignation, and the Houthis proceeded on February 6, 2015 to form a revolutionary council, a tight security committee, and a parliamentary body charged with electing a presidential council. The International Council strongly condemned what the Houthis did, and the embassies of

several of their work suspended and evacuated their employees, including the United States of America, Britain, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the European Union. President Hadi remained under house arrest until he fled to Aden on February 21, 2015 and declared that the city of Aden is the temporary capital from which the affairs of the country are managed, and accused the Houthis of carrying out a military coup against him⁽²⁰⁾.

These developments exacerbated the Yemeni crisis, but the United States had no direct role in this, as when Saudi Arabia announced Operation Decisive Storm on March 25, 2015 and a coalition of ten countries, in support of the legitimate government in Yemen, the United States was not a direct party to that coalition, and this was an unprecedented step as it came out without American leadership, as the United States retreated to the back seat, and its fingerprints in that process were limited to information and logistical support for the participating Arab forces, and the United States was the ally that provides the security umbrella in the face of Iranian threats⁽²¹⁾. The crisis is still ongoing, and urgent solutions are needed, but the parties to the crisis have not sought hard to do so, specifically since their supreme goal is to preserve their interests.

CONCLUSION

Considering the problem of the study, the study reached a set of conclusions and recommendations, the most prominent of which can be summarized as follows:

First: Results:

1. American foreign policy is identified by a global trend of changing or approving the status quo in an interventionist manner commensurate with its national interests.
2. Realism is the biggest reason for the continuous approach to formulating the American foreign policy. This approach is not based on taking into account the interests of parties outside America, but mainly on trying to mix the lethal tool with the military tool in defense of the strategic interests of the United States.
3. American foreign policy has focused specifically on the war on terrorism, and the importance of dealing proactively with the terrorist phenomenon, which has led to the militarization of foreign policy.
4. The geographical location of Yemen gives strategic importance not only to the foreign policy of the United States of America, but also to other major powers because of its open strategic spaces towards the Arab region, which is full of vital interests of the United States of America and others.
5. The security aspect of US foreign policy towards Yemen has the largest role in escalating US interest in Yemen and raising military, security and economic assistance. This interest represents a recognition by the United States that the continuation of chaos in Yemen may lead to the collapse of the state, which negatively affects its interests and the interests of its allies in the region.
6. The nature of US foreign policy orientations in Yemen cannot be understood in isolation from an understanding of the higher traditional interests of the United States in the Arab region.

Second: Recommendations:

1. The United States should seek to rationalize its foreign policy with greater transparency to non-security headquarters in the first place and not rely on pre-emptive wars, and look at the overall causes behind the phenomenon of terrorism - economic, social and political.
2. The United States' interest in Yemen is mainly in the service of American interests in Yemen and the Gulf region, but it is natural for interests to be balanced, and if there is American superiority, this does not justify that American interests outweigh Yemeni interests, because it is the successful policy that balances the interests of the parties, even if the criteria for power differ.
3. Yemen has security pressure cards, specifically since the United States suffers from an increasing shortage after the occurrences of September 11, 2001, and a geostrategic location gives it economic and political importance by the major countries, which must improve their investment.
4. If the United States of America is serious about seeking to help failed states and lift them out of chaos, it must provide assistance within the framework of supporting democratic institutions that make governments more stable, specifically supporting the judicial system, a free press, civil society institutions, the legislative system, financing education, economic development, and supporting human rights. These institutions are more effective in preventing conflicts and stopping these countries from failing, not focusing their foreign aid on military and security aspects in a way that serves their interests only.
5. The Yemeni decision-maker must be aware that the US security umbrella, despite the short-term advantages that Yemen has achieved, will double its risks in the long term. Therefore, towards Yemen, improving its own capabilities has become inevitable. Otherwise, the role may come to it in the future, specifically if its interests conflict with the interests of the US ally, which will not hesitate to sacrifice Yemen and its problems.
6. The Yemeni political decision-maker must take into account the need to build a security strategy according to the perception that the security of the Yemeni state is an integral part of the security of the regional and then global environment, and this is one of the agreed international concepts, as well as the search for real economic alternatives that make the Yemeni state in particular rich in foreign aid and loans in order to achieve development independently and not dependent, which enables the decision-maker to take his policies with a kind of independence.

Footnotes

- 1) For more details see: "Yemen and America after Kohl and September," Yemen News Agency Saba report, "Yemeni Government Report on Terrorism," submitted to the House of Representatives 2020.
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Ibid
- 4) Ibid
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- 8) Rene Rieger, Saudi Arabian Foreign Relations: Diplomacy and Mediation in Conflict Resolution, New York, 2017, p.202.
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- 14) Júlia Palik , The European Union's civil war mediation practices in Yemen: The case of competitive mediator market, Grotius : tudományos folyóirat, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, 2018, p.6.
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- 19) Eric Robinson and Other, What Factors Cause Individuals to Reject Violent Extremism in Yemen? Library of Congress, 2017 , p.7.
- 20) Alia Eshaq and Suad Al-Marani, Op.Cit., pp.26 – 27.
- 21) Ezzat Abdel Wahed Sayed, the engines of building a "Sunni alliance" and its obstacles.. Conflict of Thought and Dominance, Journal of International Politics, Al-Ahram Foundation, Cairo, Issue(202), October 2015, pp. 97-98.

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- 3) Gregory Johnson, How did the United States of America, based on a Saudi vision, contribute to America's misunderstanding of Yemen and its stumbling there?, Sana 'a Center for Strategic Studies, Sana 'a, October 2019.
- 4) "Yemen and America after Kohl and September," Yemen News Agency Saba report, "Yemeni Government Report on Terrorism," submitted to the House of Representatives 2020.
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