

Yemen

In February 2012, former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down after more than thirty years in power, following sustained mass street protests that began in early 2011. The transition has been difficult, however, as internal conflict along regional, tribal, and religious lines, a strong al-Qaeda presence, and severe socioeconomic and humanitarian crises, aggravated by internal displacement due to conflict,¹ have severely affected the new government's ability to guarantee stability and security.

Allies of the old regime have resisted the authority of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who took office through an election in February in which he was the only name on the ballot. Some military commanders have refused to comply with his decrees. Remnants of the old regime persist in government, and former president Saleh continues to reside in Yemen and act as chairman of the General People's Congress (GPC) party.

The environment in Yemen remains highly unstable. Some areas of the country lack state control, and armed conflicts have persisted. In May the government launched a large-scale campaign to drive al-Qaeda-linked militants out of several southern cities they had gained control of in 2011. Suicide attacks have killed members of Yemeni security forces and in November gunmen killed a Saudi army officer who worked for the Saudi Arabian embassy in Sana'a.

The February political transition was facilitated by a November 2011 Gulf Cooperation Council power-sharing agreement that was brokered by the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General

UN Office in Yemen

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- SASG Jamal Benomar (Morocco)
- Strength as of 31 October 2012 International Civilian Staff: 5
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For detailed mission information see p. 295

(SASG) on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, who had been engaged with political stakeholders in Yemen since April 2011. Benomar's position was upgraded to the level of Assistant Secretary-General in August 2012. The SASG now heads a mission based in Sana'a with a small team of professional staff. The mission is tasked with supporting the transition process and implementation of the transition agreement through engagement with Yemeni and regional actors.

Following the elections, the SASG focused on the holding of a national dialogue as stipulated in the agreement, urging participation of opposition parties, civil society, and other nonofficial actors. The main issue to be addressed by this dialogue is the north-south tension that has traditionally divided Yemen. Benomar met with political leaders from southern Yemen throughout 2012 to seek their participation, but a southern boycott, announced in October, delayed the dialogue, which was scheduled to begin on 15 November. There was disagreement among several factions over the allocation of seats in the dialogue, but on 28 November stakeholders accepted an

apportionment proposal put forward by Benomar. It was hoped that this would ensure the full participation of southern actors and the GPC, and that the conference would soon be able to convene.

The SASG will remain involved in implementing the transition agreement throughout the coming year, with a particular focus on the national dialogue. He will also assist in initiating the subsequent constitution-making process, which is expected to result in a new constitution in late 2013.

Jamal Benomar played a key role in mediating Yemen's November 2011 political transition. His efforts have created both legitimacy and political space for the UN in the country and enabled the establishment of the small Country Office in 2012. Serious obstacles remain in completing the transition process, however, and it remains to be seen whether the Special Adviser can continue to use his leverage to move the process forward, particularly in the face of the precarious security situation and the reluctance of key actors to engage in dialogue.

Note: 1. Ten million Yemenis, or 44 percent of the population, suffer from a serious food shortage. See Eva Sohlman, "In Yemen, Little Relief for Hunger," *New York Times*, 11 July 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/12/world/middleeast/12iht-m12-yemen-hunger.html>.