

How can

the policies of Western countries contribute
to enhance stability and security in
Hadhramout and the eastern governorates?

Analytical paper

Field Studies Unit

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M i d a d H a d h r a m o u t
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An independent research center, specializing in Yemeni affairs in general, Hadhramout and neighboring governorates in particular, and the impact of local, regional, and international variables on them

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Introduction

Hadhramout and eastern governorates in general receive a great deal of attention from the United States, Britain, and European Union countries. Visits to Hadhramout, Shabwa, and Mahrah by Western countries ambassadors as well as civil and military officials have followed in recent years, officials of these countries have met several times with representatives of the local authority of these governorates and their community components, and the most recent was the expanded meeting held on Saturday on 1st of June 2023 between representatives of the Hadhrami forces currently present in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh and ambassadors of European Union countries, in a statement issued after the meeting, the European Union affirmed that its ambassadors to Yemen had a good discussion with Hadhramout's Governor and several representatives of the governorate in Riyadh, during the discussion, Hadhramout's representatives have confirmed the identity and strong voice of Hadhramout in Yemen¹. This attention requires a pause to understand its motivation, and more to see how the policies of these countries can contribute to avoiding Hadhramout and the rest of the eastern governorates the risks of disturbance and instability caused by the behaviour of the Southern Transitional Council supported by the United Arab Emirates, which seeks to impose its control over these governorates despite the rejection and refusal of some of its political and social forces, which may push them into chaos.

1- A meeting brings together the delegation and Hadramout's governor with the ambassadors of the European Union in Riyadh, on the following link: <https://belqees.net/politics/.D9/84>

General Background

Despite the war that is ravaging Yemen, the eastern governorates have remained relatively away from the fighting, unlike the southern governorates, they have been characterized by a relative presence of state institutions and the legitimate government, for reasons and motives to be mentioned later, these governorates have been the destination for successive visits by ambassadors of Western countries, especially United States, in an indication of their importance to their security and political interests. The following table shows the announced visits of U.S. and western ambassadors and delegations to Hadhramout and other eastern governorates during the period 2019-2023:

Visits of western ambassadors and officials to Hadhramout and eastern governorates

No.	Visiting Delegation	Governorate	Date
1	US delegation headed by the Assistant Secretary of State visits Hadhramout	Hadhramout	25th July 2019
2	US Ambassador visits Al-Mahrah	Al-Mahrah	30th November 2020
3	EU ambassadors meet representatives of Inclusive Hadhramout Conference	Hadhramout	27th October 2021
4	An American delegation led by American Commissioner and US Embassy Chargé d'Affaires visits Shabwa, Hadhramout and Al-Mahra	Hadhramout	4th March 2022

No.	Visiting Delegation	Governorate	Date
5	American military delegation visits Hadhramout	Hadhramout	15th August 2022
6	US civil affairs team visits Hadhramout	Hadhramout	1st November 2022
7	US Ambassador visits Hadhramout	Hadhramout	8th November 2022
8	US Ambassador and Commander of the Fifth American Fleet visit Al-Mahrah	Al-Mahrah	3rd March 2023
9	US Ambassador visits Hadhramout	Hadhramout	18th April 2023
10	US Ambassador visits Al-Mahrah	Al-Mahrah	8th June 2023
11	EU ambassadors meet with Hadhramout's representatives	Riyadh	1st June 2023

The table above shows the great importance of these governorates to the United States and European countries, since 2019 US ambassadors have made nearly 10 visits to Hadhramout, Al-Mahrah, and Shabwah, these visits took place in the almost complete absence of government representatives in legitimate authority with limited visits to these governorates, noting once again that the above table contained only the announced visits, other visits are likely to have taken place without finding their way to the media, particularly with regarding security and military delegations.

Motivations

The motivations behind western countries' interest in Hadhramout and the eastern governorates are varied, they are all about security, economic and political interests of great importance to these countries, including:

- 1- Fighting Terrorism:** fighting terrorism is a top priority in concerns of united and western countries in the eastern governorates, and one of the most important motives and interests behind their officials' successive visits to these governorates, those countries seem to have a misperception of a large presence of Al-Qaeda members and the extremist organizations in these governorates, and irresponsible concessions in media and social media have increased western fears, through continued allegations of a significant presence of violence groups in these governorates. Al-Qaeda's control of Mukalla on 2nd of April 2015, for a full year, until it was liberated on April 24, 2016, has influenced strengthening the misperception of these governorates, Hence, security objectives are at the top of the agenda of the visits of US ambassadors, security and military delegations to Hadhramout and the rest of the governorates, and some of these visits appear to be related to the limited military presence of united states troops at Al-Rayan Airport in Hadhramout and Al-Ghayda Airport in Al-Mahrah.

- 2- Economic Interest:** These governorates have most of Yemen's economic resources in general, especially concerning energy sources, where the oil fields are located, its export ports, some gas fields, and the most important gas export ports; Balhaf port, which is located in Shabwa Gov., and these interests are naturally a motive of western countries' position and a source of interest. for example, TOTAL's extensive investment in Balhaf port, which is approximately \$5 billion, is behind the active position of the French ambassador and also affects the European and American attitude towards developments in these governorates, and Yemen in general.
- 3- Reduce Smuggling:** UN security council's international experts' report indicates that there is evidence of smuggling of arms and equipment through Al-Mahrah Gov. through Hadhramout towards Houthi-controlled areas, as well as for drugs, etc., this helps to expand sea coasts and their extension and the length of the land border. In this context, some visits by US officials are related to coast guard support in Al-Mahrah, Hadhramout, and Shabwa, this interest was reinforced by the formation of "Joint Maritime Taskforce 153", which belongs to the Fifth United States Navy, and the activity of US Navy in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden near Yemen's coasts, enabling it to find a large number of ships smuggling weapons towards Houthi-controlled areas.

- 4- Supporting Services & Development:** Western countries believe that facing security and political challenges, especially Al-Qaeda, requires investment in public services and infrastructure, and improvement in the level of services and life in general that attracts young people away from violent groups and pulls the rug from under their feet.
- 5- Efforts to Achieve Peace & Stop War:** Part of the visits come in the context of attempts to end the war by questioning the views of various political forces, especially since Hadhramout and eastern governorates are characterized by the existence of political and social forces with their own identity. In recent years, the eastern governorates have become Yemen's center of gravity and the position of attraction among the main political forces under the ambitions of the Transitional Council trying to take control, with a total rejection by most of its political and community components.
- 6- Securing a Western military presence** in the water body stretching from the shores of these governorates to Socotra Island, which is of a high degree of importance, which many international trade vessels are passed through. Many security threats have required to formation of a new navy force following the Fifth American Fleet; of "Joint Maritime Taskforce 153", which determines the stage of its operations in water from the Arabian Sea to the south of the Red Sea.

What international parties can do to prevent chaos in these governorates

Under its international influence, the US and western countries possess many tools that can be employed within the framework of policies aimed to strengthen security and stability in Hadhramout and eastern governorates, avoiding the path of chaos, of which Al-Qaeda will be one of the most benefiting parties, and those policies should achieve the following:

1- Pressure to rationalize UAE policies

These countries can exert some pressure on UAE to limit their policies and attitudes towards these governorates, which they seek to take control of through the Transitional Council, which may destabilize these governorates, in this case, US and European pressures are expected to integrate with Saudi efforts to limit Abu Dhabi's policies, especially since the stability of these governorates has strong and direct security interests for western countries and stability in the region, any disturbance in these governorates will be the beneficiary of Al-Qaeda for two reasons:

1- The disintegration of the existing security and military institutions in these governorates will leave a gap that is difficult to fill in a recent period. The experience of Shabwa governorate still exists with much evidence. Destructing the security and military services that existed in this governorate has not yet been able to rebuild those capable to fill the gap. The relationship between the new bodies is often inconsistent and potentially hostile to the local community, which does not enable them to perform their functions correctly.

2- The control of Transitional military formations will be a massive provocation of the people of these governorates and may push some of them towards Al-Qaeda as an option to face the Transitional Council, which will be seen as an invader at the expense of the dignity of the people of these governorates, this means a repetition of Abyan Gov. experience. The transitional forces' control has provoked which represents a geographical and historical opponent of Abyan Gov, and a number of its sons have led them to use Al-Qaeda and may seek protection in facing perceived humiliation by the transitional military formations.

2- Strengthening the Leadership Council and its collective management:

The presidential leadership council's cohesion and collective management of its areas of control are important for the stability of the eastern governorates. Its collective management will also limit attempts to single out his decisions and may prevent him from being pushed into erroneous decisions that undermine the security and military institutions in these governorates. pushing it towards the unknown, regional parties are pushing to use the leadership council as cover for resolutions targeting the first military region, putting Hadhramout and eastern governorates in a gap and pushing them towards a state of turmoil in repeating what happened in Shabwa and Abyan governorates

3- Pressure to re-export oil

It is very important for a legitimate government that is about to bankrupt, as well as for the local authority in the eastern governorates, it provides it with financial returns from the share allocated to those governorates, which is close to 20% of the total revenue, those governorates are most in need of those returns to provide the minimum necessary government services

4- Supporting Basic Services

By supporting development efforts and basic humanitarian needs, especially these governorates are far from Houthi control and have shouldered the burden because of war and a lot of people have been displaced from areas of armed conflict.

5- Pressure To Decrease Corruption

The legitimate government and local authority in some governorates have suffered from corruption, slouch, and mismanagement, and international pressures led by western countries could contribute to governance and reduce corruption at the central and local levels

Different approach

Achieving the above requires the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union countries to leave dealing with the governorates located in eastern Yemen through a narrow security perspective, and adopt a wider approach that includes a coherent package of policies based on integrated pathways that limit UAE policies to these governorates, support local and sovereign State institutions, including the two military regions: first and second, avoid these governorates to direct conflict with both Houthis and transitional council and give great importance to provide international and governmental funding for infrastructure projects and local development fields

Moreover, the international community could encourage the eastern governorates to serve as a model for the reconstruction of the country and an introduction to generalize its experience to the rest of Yemeni areas. These governorates are socially, politically, and even militarily linked, making them more responsive to rebuilding state authority, unlike what the rest of the country's southern and northern governorates suffered from the political, social, and cultural complexities and military conflict that the international community has been unable to find remedies.



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