



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 6, 2011

## Yemen: U.S. Military Aid Can't Save Dictator; Rebellion Escalates

But despite the forceful American backing, it now appears increasingly likely that the Yemeni dictatorship is [doomed](#). Even the U.S. government is now [publicly calling](#) for the regime to hand over power — with [profound implications](#) for the region and even the world.



What began as a series of anti-government demonstrations in the Yemeni capital is rapidly lunging toward a full-scale civil war. Pro-reform protesters inspired by other regional uprisings, tribal militants often associated with Islamic extremism and al Qaeda, armed leftist separatists, and an entrenched U.S.-backed dictatorship — all are vying for power in this poverty-stricken nation on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. What may come next is hard to determine at this point.

“President” Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has ruled Yemen with an iron fist for more than three decades with U.S. government-provided “security” aid, fled the country over the weekend. According to [news reports](#), Saleh and other high-level officials went to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment after being wounded in an attack apparently carried out by rebels.

Yemen’s “Vice President,” Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, is temporarily in charge of the dictatorship. The government [promises](#) that Saleh will return. But it’s unclear how much longer the regime can cling to power: Significant portions of the military have already severed ties with the dictatorship and armed tribesmen are in control of vast areas including parts of the capital, Sana’a.

The government’s problems started intensifying about four months ago as anti-regime protesters poured into the streets demanding change following the collapse of other U.S.-backed dictatorships in the region. The regime responded with bullets and a fierce crackdown that left more than a few demonstrators dead.

Since then, the powerful Ahmar tribal family and militants across the nation have taken up arms against the dictatorship. They reportedly launched numerous attacks against government forces and installations, including [an attack](#) on the presidential compound that wounded Saleh. Yemen’s Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and other members of the ruling elite were also injured in the assault.

Following that strike, Saleh was supposed to give a televised address to the nation over government media. Instead, he offered a brief audio message [blasting](#) the “gangs” responsible for the attack. Numerous sources have reported that the tyrant was severely wounded, though accounts vary. Initial



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reports inaccurately claimed he had been killed.

The dictatorship declared that the attack would be dealt with harshly. "This was an attempted coup, and the government will take all necessary measures," [said](#) regime spokesman Tareq al-Shami, who blamed the powerful Ahmar faction for the strike.

Ahmar family leaders denied involvement even though their positions were being shelled by the regime's forces. Some tribal leaders [accused](#) the government itself of carrying out the attack in order to justify a harsher crackdown on opposition forces.

Meanwhile, various foreign powers have been attempting to de-escalate the situation before it gets any worse — particularly neighboring Saudi Arabia, a prominent backer of Saleh's dictatorship that has apparently been getting nervous about the so-called "Arab Spring" movements in the region. The Saudi regime has already sent troops into Bahrain to quash an uprising there.

Saudi Arabia and the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council have been hastily attempting to broker a peace deal for Yemen before the chaos spins out of control. The proposed agreement would see the Yemeni tyrant step down in exchange for immunity from prosecution for the myriad crimes committed by his regime. A transitional government would rule until elections could be held.

News accounts claimed Saleh had originally agreed to the deal before later backing out. Now the agreement is apparently under consideration yet again, with experts claiming that the dictator's departure for Saudi Arabia may be permanent.

An opposition group consisting of some of the anti-government factions said it would agree to the plan for now. "We have no objection that power is transferred to [Vice-President] Hadi in line with the constitution and the Gulf Cooperation Council plan," a spokesman for the Joint Meeting Parties [told](#) Bloomberg.

An unidentified source "close to the Saudi government" [told](#) the *Los Angeles Times* that the Saudi Arabian regime "has reached out to all the various belligerent parties in Yemen and they have all given their personal promise and word to the king and the crown prince that they would abide by a truce and stop shooting and killing each other."

It was unclear whether the reported agreement to temporarily stop fighting would hold as violence continues. But tens of thousands of residents were fleeing the capital over the weekend even as an assortment of militants tried to fight their way in. Yemeni troops, meanwhile, had [withdrawn](#) from some large cities including Taiz after suffering heavy losses before the weekend.

Chaos in Yemen, the poorest nation in Arabia, is nothing new. Armed conflicts have plagued the country for decades, simmering just beneath the surface whenever open warfare ceased. Yemen is also one of the most well-armed nations on Earth, after the United States and Switzerland. And of course, the situation is highly complex, with multiple factions fighting for incompatible goals.

In the South, communist and socialist separatists still want to declare independence and [re-establish a socialist dictatorship](#). Until 1990, when the "People's Democratic Republic of Yemen" in the South merged with the dictatorship to the North, leftist tyranny ruled the Southern portion of Yemen.

In the North, tribal militants have been waging war against the central regime, too. The rebels there [claim](#) they have been unjustly oppressed by Sana'a since the overthrow of the Imamate system in the early 1960s.

Some analysts have accused Iran and al-Qaeda of supporting the Islamists in the region, but others have



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dismissed the charges. Saudi Arabia and the U.S. government, however, have been [helping to battle the Northern al-Houthi rebellion](#) in a conflict that has left numerous civilians dead and hundreds of thousands displaced so far.

But the Obama administration, which [gave Saleh's dictatorship more than \\$150 million in military aid last year](#) — not including covert assistance, secret aerial bombing campaigns on alleged militants, and development aid — is now calling for a peaceful transition of power. "Violence cannot resolve the issues that confront Yemen," [said](#) a White House spokesman last week. The European Union also [called](#) for Saleh to step down.

Analysts said that one wrong move by any side could lead to open civil war. Other experts have been referring to the chaos in Yemen as a civil war for years, but still acknowledge that the situation could deteriorate much further.

And the implications of the power struggle currently underway are profound, according to analysts. The British government has claimed that the escalating chaos could pose a serious threat to U.K. security, with some commentators saying Yemen could become "[the new Republic of al-Qaeda](#)." And considering Yemen's strategic location, oil supplies could be affected, too.

Analysts at the *Daily Bell* have even [speculated](#) that Yemen's collapse could spark a chain reaction that would end the Saudi Arabian dictatorship and, by extension, possibly the [U.S. dollar's status as the global reserve currency](#). Only time will tell.

Photo of Ali Abdullah Saleh: AP Images



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