



Transcript

Yemen: Political Dynamics and the International Policy Framework

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The Rt Hon Alan Duncan MP:

As a personal Friend of Yemen for more than 20 years I'm grateful to be speaking at this timely and important event today, albeit I regret the deteriorating security backdrop to our discussion of this important country. It doesn't take me to tell you that there has been a huge increase in international attention to Yemen during the last year or so – this has been in parallel with an increase in Yemen's fragility and the potential impact of this not only on Yemeni citizens, many of whom are amongst the world's most vulnerable, but also on global security. We have seen only this weekend how its impact reaches across the world. The threat we face from al Qaeda is global and it is inter-connected. This most recent plot encompassed Yemen, the UAE, Germany, the UK and the US – and as such requires a collective response.

Politically, Yemen presents us with difficult choices. Many think that the window of opportunity for preventing state failure in Yemen is closing and there are perhaps two schools of thought on that: either the country is heading for collapse or somehow it will muddle through as it always has done. Whichever you think is the case, I don't think either Yemen or the international community can afford to sit around to 'wait and see which prediction is right'.

For Yemen's sake, we must not take the risk of doing nothing, hoping that things will just muddle through: dancing on the heads of snakes has had its day. Any effort spent on preventing state failure now is a million times better than the effort that would be needed to cope with any state failure later. Yemen on the brink therefore presents us with a pioneering opportunity. So let's see for once if early intervention can secure a fragile state's future. We've got to try to secure Yemen's future before it's too late. In short, we must hope for the best, but assume the worst.

Yemen paints a worrying picture. It is running out of oil, running out of water and may be running out of time, while the world is in some eyes running out of patience.

From a development perspective we know that Yemen has not and will not meet any of its Millennium Development Goals. It has the worst figures for the position of women in society in the world; food insecurity and malnutrition are on the rise; its population growth is one of the world's highest; and its macro-economy has been failing, hitting a budget deficit of over \$2 billion at the end of last year. But these are not its only problems. Internal conflicts in the north and the south continue to generate cause for concern, and there is some

anxiety about the suspected violation of human rights and about Yemen's 300,000 internally displaced people.

Weak government capacity and its inability in the past to implement key reforms have left much of its population without basic services, without jobs, without security and justice. All this has the potential to exacerbate local grievances felt by Yemenis and it gives al Qaeda an easy target for exploitation.

And this is grim. The lesson from other countries is that if we sit around and analyse a country on the edge of collapse for too long, by the time we decide to do anything about it it's already too late. That may be just where we may be heading with Yemen.

So we must now make a choice. I think we should follow the precautionary principle which is to act now to be sure of preventing state failure rather than risk it happening.

Yemen is high on the Coalition Government's agenda. It is one of the countries of most interest to our new National Security Council, and it is one where we believe the solution must be driven by an integrated approach, with development and diplomacy at its heart.

What we are interested in doing is tackling the challenges of poverty, disease and education in Yemen; we are interested in helping achieve better governance; we are interested in regional and global stability; and we are interested in arresting the rise of terrorism.

In short we are interested in addressing poverty and instability so that Yemen can hold together and prosper.

Conflict and development in Yemen

Yemen is on the front pages again this week because of terrorism – but terrorism is not the only threat facing Yemen; al Qaeda look to exploit instability where they can. Let's for a moment just ask ourselves what a collapsed Yemen could look like.

Yemen in collapse could lead to a litany of chaos: no water, no energy, no food, civil strife, al Qaeda flourishing, increasing radicalisation, and a regional and international threat both to world energy supplies and to many nations' security. A country which is off-track in reaching the Millennium Development Goals could go further backwards all the faster. That's a frightening prospect, and a serious concern for the wider world.

Yemen has all the ingredients for growing difficulty. There is injustice and grievance; a rapidly growing population is scrabbling over diminishing resources and fewer jobs; and there is easy access to weapons. Declining oil revenues are beginning to hinder the wheels of power. Yemen is a telling example of the complexity of today's conflicts, where individual and community grievances - exclusion or unemployment - can interact with powerful regional and global drivers like rising food prices or the global narrative of international terrorism. When put together it almost guarantees chaos.

The warning signs are clear. Conflict is escalating and governance deteriorating. Tribal clashes continue to become more lethal and difficult to manage, and local and regional issues are increasingly acting as 'lightning-rods' for broad-based public discontent. Security and development are intertwined.

There are two ways Yemen's problems could be approached. We can either address the underlying causes of poverty, grievance, joblessness and governance, or the international community could begin to start shouting and wave a big stick.

For us in the Coalition Government and DFID, we are going to put development at the heart of an integrated approach for Yemen.

Taking action

The Coalition Government intends to spend 30% of its development budget on fragile states. Yemen is a prime candidate for such attention.

Our view is that development is not just there to try and pick up the pieces. It is that development has a crucial role in stopping a country from falling to pieces in the first place. We've done lots of work on post-conflict interventions but much less on pre-crisis intervention, so we are going to have to be bold and we are going to have to be innovative.

We of course need to look at what you might think of as traditional development interventions – building schools and clinics, and all the things that Yemen's Social Fund for Development does so well. But we need to look further - to tackle the lack of jobs and the causes of child malnutrition; to support a process of National Dialogue that will lead to inclusive and fair elections next year; to get government working in a way that is more accountable and responsive to people's needs. In Yemen, we are smartening the UK's aid.

Our aim is to give people security, a stake in society, access to basic services such as health and education, and a say in their future. By adopting this approach, and working with civil society, with local government and with traditional tribal systems, we hope we will address local grievances. We will empower the Government to tackle its challenges and as a result would hope to see a stronger, more stable Yemen.

Securing the future of Yemen is not just about what they do internally for themselves any more than it is only about what the UK does for them. It is about what all Yemen's friends do and, crucially, how we all act together.

In the same way as the Government of Yemen tries to address trouble internally in a piecemeal fashion, so have its international partners tended to act separately and inconsistently. The fragmented efforts of donors and neighbours have almost certainly been as much a hindrance to Yemen as a help.

There have been attempts in the past to get together to help Yemen but, for instance, very little of the \$5bn pledged to the country in 2006 has been taken up and directed into much-needed infrastructure projects, and most of the funds received for other purposes have tended to be bilateral and unpredictable.

This approach from the international community risks adding to the fragmentation of the government, and it weakens everyone's development efforts because, above all, effective development – in its ability to plan and deliver programmes that make a real difference - requires consistent and reliable funding flows.

So whatever we do, we must to do it together. Better donor coordination is essential, but it remains a huge challenge. Fragmented donor flows have contributed to the fragmentation of Yemen itself. And to avoid the risk of state failure we must improve our own behaviour now. As I said in New York at the recent Friends of Yemen meeting, we as Yemen's Friends must co-ordinate and communicate, we must all be present on the ground in Sana'a, and we must look for ways to be flexible in how we provide our support – finding common delivery mechanisms.

The Road to Riyadh

The thinking I have outlined has been valid for some time now, but its shelf-life as a viable option is in jeopardy. Last month a British Embassy car was violently attacked and many of our team in Sana'a had to be withdrawn so we

could assess their safety. This weekend has seen another seriously worrying development. The security situation jeopardises what we can do in and for Yemen – indeed it jeopardises our very presence there. If the security situation drives out the help Yemen now needs, things risk becoming very bad indeed.

We should not, however, belittle some of the progress that has been made. Within Yemen itself, we have seen the implementation of an IMF programme to build Yemen's economy; an agreement to a ceasefire with Huthi rebels in the north; the launching of a process of National Dialogue; and the agreement by the Yemen Government to publish a prioritised national plan embracing such structures as the Yemen Fund for Development. The Friends of Yemen meeting in New York in September was widely regarded as a further successful step in the right direction.

However, we don't have long. The next Friends of Yemen meeting in Riyadh, is in February, only a few months away.

The Riyadh meeting has the potential to be a major turning point – a meeting in the region, hosted by one of Yemen's most significant neighbours, where tangible progress can be demonstrated. More than any other meeting before it, the Friends of Yemen meeting in Riyadh is possibly both a golden opportunity and the last chance there will be to address Yemen's problems before it is too late.

The challenge for all of us is to make sure we step up to the mark – the Government of Yemen, NGOs, the UN, donors, Yemen's neighbours and the rest of the international community – and work together to bring peace and stability to ordinary Yemenis.

We need to appreciate the potency of development as a force for good in underpinning this state. We need to realise that for both moral and practical reasons it is important to focus on poverty and good governance. We need to combine internationally to approach Yemen in a unified and consistent manner. We need, as Friends of Yemen, to speak frankly and act practically. We want effective development, we want improved donor co-ordination and we want a really successful outcome in Riyadh.

For me, the dire situation only increases my determination to keep involved. But what comes next is key. The next two months in the run-up to Riyadh are crucial. And the rhetoric we've all been hearing must now become reality.