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Political and Military Developments in Hadhramout: Potential scenarios (Position Assessment Paper)



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Introduction

Hadhramout Governorate has recently witnessed prominent and influential political and military developments. A wave of political and military escalations has erupted, accompanied by intensified media rhetoric between the local authority, the Security Support Forces, the leadership of the Second Military Region, and the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance. At the time of writing this paper, these developments have begun to take on an additional military trajectory, following a prior period of political and media tension.

For approximately one year and three months—since the beginning of July 2024 the governorate has been embroiled in political and media confrontation between the Hadhramout Inclusive Conference and the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance, led by Sheikh Amr bin Habrish, on one side, and the Presidential Leadership Council and the local authority led by Mr. Mabkhout bin Madi on the other. This confrontation culminated in the replacement of the governor amid military mobilization by the Southern Forces and the Security Support Forces under the command of Saleh bin Al-Sheikh Abu Bakr, who is affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council.

Since the outset of the crisis, the conflict has largely revolved around mutual media escalation between the two sides. This was followed by large-scale social mobilization led on several occasions by Sheikh Amr bin Habrish, head of the Alliance, in the Al-Alyeb area (the Hadhramout Valley Plateau). These mobilizations were accompanied by speeches and statements accusing the local authority and the Presidential Leadership Council, in general, of negligence and incapacity—particularly during the prolonged electricity outages along the Hadhramout coast last summer.

Each year, temperatures begin to rise from April through the end of October, during which power outages reached up to nearly eight hours, compared to only two hours of electricity supply. At the same time, the local authority and the government have been unable to fulfill their financial obligations to citizens, as they continue to fail to pay public sector salaries on their scheduled monthly dates. Salary delays have extended to two or even three months, a situation that has rendered Sheikh Amr's statements increasingly well received by the majority of citizens in recent times.

Conversely, the local authority has accused the Tribal Alliance of obstructing the passage of oil tankers bound for coastal power stations, originating from the PetroMasila oil facility. According to the authority, this obstruction has further exacerbated its burdens and worsened the living conditions of citizens.

According to media reports circulated at the time, and as published by Al-Mahra Channel on its official website, as well as by Al-Araby Al-Jadeed and several local news outlets, the Criminal Court issued a ruling on Saturday, 29 November 2025. The Specialized Criminal Prosecution in Hadhramout Governorate issued compulsory arrest warrants against Sheikh Amr bin Habrish, head of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance, and Major General Mubarak Ahmed bin Bakr Al-Obthani, commander of the "Hadhramout Protection Forces" affiliated with the Alliance, on charges related to acts punishable under the law. The



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published order clarified that the state—through the competent authority—is legally entitled to carry out the compulsory arrest of Sheikh Amr and Major General Mubarak Al-Obthani. Subsequently, on 30 November, the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance took control of the oil facility located on the governorate's plateau, amid the broader context of ongoing political and military escalation. Sais Organization had previously indicated that one of the most significant potential repercussions of establishing the Hadhramout Protection Forces affiliated with the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance would be the control of oil fields and concession areas, as a direct outcome of the formation of these forces.¹

Accordingly, the overall political and military landscape currently unfolding in the governorate raises numerous questions regarding the nature of the anticipated scenarios ahead and the form that the most likely scenario may take. Prior to that, it poses a fundamental question as to the key developments indicating that Hadhramout Governorate appears to be moving toward military escalation rather than any form of de-escalation between the parties involved.

First: Key Developments in the Political and Military Landscape

Within this context of escalating political and military tension, a notable development occurred on 25 November, when the commander of the Security Support Forces in Hadhramout Governorate, Brigadier Saleh bin Al-Sheikh Abu Bakr, delivered strongly worded statements in Qusay'ir District, east of Mukalla city. His remarks were directed toward the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance and, in particular, its leader, Sheikh Amr bin Habrish.

In his statements, he emphasized that Hadhramout Governorate seeks to achieve development through security and stability, stressing that development and prosperity cannot be realized without comprehensive security and stability across all of Hadhramout. He warned that tolerating factors of instability would only allow them to expand and intensify, asserting that there can be no development or prosperity for Hadhramout, nor for the wider southern region, in the absence of security and stability. He further described the actions undertaken by Sheikh Amr bin Habrish as disruptive and condemnable, stating that the Southern Armed Forces would not remain silent in the face of such actions, and affirming that the cutting of military supply lines would inevitably be carried out. These statements reflected a clear escalation in rhetoric and underscored the growing shift toward a more confrontational posture within the broader political and military landscape of the governorate.²

These statements constituted the first direct turning point toward military escalation following the period of political and media escalation between the parties. This development prompted the issuance of several statements and declarations by leaders of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance in response to the threats they reported receiving. Among the most notable was a call by the Alliance to convene a general meeting in the Plateau region on Thursday, 27

¹ To read the published research paper entitled (Formation of Hadhramaut Protection Forces: A Reading of the Political and Security Dimensions and Potential Implications) please review the following link; <https://sais-dev.org/post/350> .

² To follow-up to the statement broadcast by Aden independent channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GabfiEiFRaY>



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November. Sheikh Amr bin Habrish invited all tribes and residents of the governorate to attend the meeting to deliberate on the prevailing situation. Salah Mubarak, the official spokesperson of the Hadhramout Inclusive Conference, stated to the Daily News website that the meeting would address the verbal escalation articulated by the commander of the Security Support Forces, which targeted the leadership of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance and the “Hadhramout Protection Forces.”

He further emphasized that the accusations made by the commander of the Security Support Forces were not grounded in verified facts, and included direct threats accompanied by certain movements and rhetoric directed toward the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance³. On the same day, Sheikh Amr highlighted concerns regarding the reported movement of military units toward Hadhramout Governorate from other regions, involving five brigades. He stressed that the priority is to safeguard their communities and ensure stability, urging careful consideration and dialogue to prevent escalation. Sheikh Amr also affirmed that the Alliance has no territorial ambitions against others, and emphasized the importance of responsible leadership in maintaining order and protecting local interests, while highlighting the need for organized measures to respond appropriately to potential threats.⁴

Following that meeting, the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance issued a statement delivered after the gathering, in which it announced several key points. First, it affirmed its commitment to defending Hadhramout and its resources through all available means. Second, it called upon all sons and residents of Hadhramout to respond to what it described as a national call of duty. Third, it urged the leadership and members of the Hadhrami Elite Forces to align themselves with their communities, so as not to be used as a tool by parties and actors perceived as seeking to exploit Hadhramout and its resources, among other points outlined in the statement.⁵

On the evening of the same day, Thursday, a decision was issued to replace the local authority, appointing Mr. Salem Al-Khanbashi—former Deputy Prime Minister and current member of the Shura Council—as the new Governor of Hadhramout, succeeding Mr. Mabkhout bin Madi. This move was viewed as a political step by the legitimate authority aimed at mitigating the ongoing developments and easing the crisis that had affected the governorate.⁶

³ For more information, see the statement of the official spokesperson of the Hadhramout Inclusive Conference of Yemen Daily Newspaper: <https://ydn.news/?p=104021> .

⁴ To listen to Sheikh Amr's full speech : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGcZeM8UHxQ> .

⁵ Statement issued by the Hadhramout Tribal Alliance, published by several local and regional channels and newspapers. To follow it in full, please refer to the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl4qlmLOFgw>.

⁶ Republican Decree No.(45) of 2025 was issued. The appointment was made pursuant to the Constitution, the applicable laws, and the references governing the transitional phase, and following the approval of the Presidential Leadership Council. The decree stipulates that Al-Khumbashi shall assume his duties as Governor of the governorate, the most important in the eastern part of the country. Belqees TV reported the news, along with several other television channels and newspapers. <https://2u.pw/7RI6pn>.



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In a telephone interview conducted by Al-Hadath – Al-Arabiya Channel on Monday, 1 December, he noted that PetroMasila Company had halted oil production following the sudden entry of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance forces. Consequently, the company was forced to shut down all its facilities. He added that efforts were being made to defuse tensions and resolve the issues peacefully⁷. Earlier, on Saturday, 29 November, several local news outlets published an order issued by the Specialized Criminal Prosecution in Hadhramout Governorate for the compulsory arrest of Sheikh Amr bin Habrish Al-Ali, head of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance, amid unprecedented tensions in the governorate. The Public Prosecution justified the order in its memorandum addressed to the Director General of Police and Security in Hadhramout, citing Sheikh Amr bin Habrish's involvement in actions "punishable under the law." Additionally, the Specialized Criminal Prosecution issued an arrest order for Major General Mubarak Al-Obthani, commander of the Hadhramout Protection Forces affiliated with the Tribes Alliance in the governorate.⁸

On the same day—Saturday—the Hadhramout Protection Forces, affiliated with the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance, announced that they had secured the PetroMasila oil field facilities in Hadhramout Governorate, eastern Yemen. This action took place ahead of an event planned by the Southern Transitional Council in Seiyun city, located in the Hadhramout Valley. In an official statement, the Alliance affirmed that securing the oil fields was intended to "enhance security and protect national resources from any aggression or external interference, as these resources belong to the people and remain under the auspices of the legitimate official state."⁹

Earlier this month, the Southern Transitional Council announced that it would hold an event on 30 November 2025 in Seiyun city, Hadhramout Valley—a date marking the withdrawal of the last British colonial soldier from southern Yemen in 1967. One of the outcomes of this event was the organization of a continuous civil sit-in until, as the organizers stated, the First Military Region is withdrawn¹⁰. On the same day, Saturday, 29 November, another group was formed under the banner of the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance, comprising figures from tribal components opposed to Sheikh Amr bin Habrish. The group announced Sheikh Khalid Al-Kathiri as the head of the opposition alliance following a consensus.

The details of the meeting were fully reported by Aden Independent Channel, affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council, which is believed to have connections with the newly formed alliance.¹¹

⁷ To listen to the governor's full speech, please follow up the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVGzwm0gh-0>.

⁸ Multiple news outlets, including the *almawqea*post on November, published the court ruling. 28. 2025. For more details, please refer to the link: <https://almawqea.net/news/115492>.

⁹ Yemen: Hadhramout Tribal Alliance Takes Control on Al-Masilah Oil Rights to "secure it" Al-araby Al-jadeed Newspaper, 2025 : <https://n9.cl/d03bv>.

¹⁰ For more information on the final statement and the outcomes of the crowd, please refer to : <https://stcaden.com/posts/31775>

¹¹ For more information about Sheikh Khalid Al-kathiri's speech, which was covered by Aden Independent TY, please refer the link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i-IJec_mm0

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On the evening of Monday, 1 December, BBC News contacted Sheikh Amr bin Habrish, who delivered direct statements during the interview regarding the Southern Transitional Council and the United Arab Emirates. In his remarks, he stated that “we took a proactive step by securing PetroMasila companies and the oil fields to protect them from the impending threat.” He added that the forces arriving from Dhale and other tribal governorates came with the intention of taking control of the governorate and its resources. Regarding the military presence from outside Hadhramout, he emphasized that they hold no official status within the state.

Regarding the entry of military forces coming from the southern regions, he stated that their primary objective is to impose their political component and seize control of Hadhramout’s oil outlets. Concerning external assistance, he said, “We have not requested any foreign help; however, neighboring countries have the right to intervene. We are particularly eager for intervention from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the leader of the coalition, confident that they will not abandon us. Additionally, we call on the international community to understand our position, as we are facing an armed external tribal incursion.”¹²

On the morning of Wednesday, 3 December, the southern forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council announced the launch of Operation “Promising Future” in the Hadhramout Valley and Desert.¹³ According to official statements, the operation aims to gain control over the First Military Region and remove it from the authority of the Yemeni Islah Party. The primary reason for the presence of southern forces in Hadhramout, in general, is to assert control over the entire valley region, due to the increase in terrorist activities and international reports indicating that areas within the valley have become hubs for the supply of weapons and drugs to terrorist groups across the Arab region, including the Somali Al-Shabaab movement¹⁴, as stated by the official spokesperson of the Southern Transitional Council. He further added that regarding the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance and the plateau crisis, the matter falls under the responsibility of the Hadhrami Elite leadership and the political authorities in the governorate to take the necessary measures to resolve the political crisis on the plateau, and to bring the wanted individuals to justice, as he stated.

Second: Agreement between the Local Authority and the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance

On Wednesday, 3 December 2025, the local authority announced that a reconciliation and unity agreement had been reached with the Hadhramout Tribes Alliance under the supervision of the Saudi Special Committee, which had arrived in Mukalla following the

¹² For More about Sheikh Amr's speech, please refer to the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b1ELJoyOA0>.

¹³ Operation "Promising Future" is a military operation launched by the Southern Forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council, aimed at the first Military Region in Wadi Hadhramout , and appointing southern forces drawn from the southern regions in general: <https://al-omana.net/news254198.html>

¹⁴ For more information about the speech of the official spokesperson of the Southern Transitional Council : <https://n9.cl/ywao9w>.

political and military developments in the governorate. The Saudi committee announced that it would remain in Hadhramout until the crisis was fully resolved.

The agreement included several key points, most notably the immediate cessation of military, security, and media escalation; the withdrawal of the Alliance's forces (the Hadhramout Protection Forces) to the outer perimeter of the PetroMasila Company facilities at a distance of no less than one kilometer; and the withdrawal of the Hadhrami Elite forces from their positions near the company at a distance of no less than three kilometers.¹⁵

However, the agreement between the Alliance and the local authority did not last long, as military escalation occurred in the Hadhramout Plateau, preventing the continued implementation of the agreement.

Third: Key Anticipated Scenarios

The anticipated scenarios for the ongoing unrest and developments in the political and military landscape, as previously outlined, are as follows:

First: The first scenario, in our assessment, aligns with the general pattern of the Arab Coalition's interventions across most areas under Yemen's legitimate government. In this scenario, the coalition convenes all concerned parties from within Hadhramout and neighboring regions in Riyadh to reach a preliminary political agreement. Such an agreement would help contain bloodshed, unify objectives and visions, and remove obstacles—similar to what occurred between the legitimate government forces and the Southern Transitional Council forces during the Riyadh Agreement in 2019, as well as the formation of the Presidential Leadership Council in April 2022. The latter included several military forces and political figures who had previously been at odds, among the most prominent being Brigadier General Tariq Saleh, Major General Aidrous Al-Zubaidi, Chairman of the Southern Transitional Council, and Sultan Al-Arada, Governor of Marib Governorate, which borders Hadhramout to the north.

In summary, this scenario involves a late convening by the Arab Coalition in Riyadh, accompanied by a gradual de-escalation of media rhetoric.

Second: The second scenario involves a division of influence among the political forces. In this case, the Homeland Shield Forces and the Hadhrami Elite Forces may be deployed in certain areas of the Hadhramout Valley and Desert, while the southern forces and the Security Support Forces retain control over some areas along the

Third: The third scenario envisions political forces in Yemen escalating their media rhetoric and taking certain political measures that could undermine the authority of the state. This, in turn, could prompt the Quad countries to intervene with measures aimed at reordering the political situation across Yemen as a whole, with Hadhramout being a key component of these arrangements.

¹⁵ For more information about the agreement between the authorities and the alliance: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FbDzXkmGD/?mibextid=wwXlfr>.