

Helping Yemen to help itself

Concluding Observations at the Chatham House Conference

“Yemen: Political Dynamics and the International Policy Framework”

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Hardly ever have I been at a more timely or more important conference.

The significance of today’s discussions derives not only from the security-related headlines that Yemen generates in the international media but also from the very real opportunity that our gathering provides for achieving what Dr Abdul Ghani in his opening address called the “**need for mutual understanding**” between Yemen and its international partners; a mutual understanding that is currently impeded by a diverging analysis—not so much of what the problems are, but what to do about them.

So, what are the **challenges** that Yemen faces? In my view and in light of today’s discussions, they fall into four broad categories: economic, social, political, and security. They are all interrelated, they have their sources within and beyond Yemen, some of them have a long history, including of failed strategies to tackle them, some seem to be more recent. Above all, they are not just Yemen’s problems in either their causes or consequences. But they are fundamentally linked to the capacity of the Yemeni state to perform four essential tasks and to do so almost simultaneously:

1. To establish and consolidate security and stability across the whole country
2. To improve the quality and inclusiveness of its political institutions
3. To generate sustainable economic growth on the back of economic reform and job creation
4. To address social inequality and exclusion

How can Yemeni state capacity be increased such that the state can rise to this challenge? Three key factors stand out from today’s discussion and from a broader comparative perspective on both successes and failures in similar situations around the globe: **leadership, international engagement, and policy delivery.**

Policy delivery provides the substance for local and international action, and our discussions today have been informed by a number of very concrete and potentially valuable proposals: from establishing a donor trust fund to more targeted humanitarian and development aid; from publicly funded oil and gas exploration to investment in agriculture and tackling the Yemen’s food and nutrition crisis; from timely elections to national dialogue and drawing in the expertise among the country’s expatriate community; and from military cooperation to intelligence sharing. As Alan Duncan and Simon Manley pointed out, there are **tough choices** involved, and they will require careful consideration of the prioritisation, timing, sequencing, and resourcing of policy initiatives.

Key in this respect is a comprehensive approach, the coherence of policies, their compatibility with each other, and whether they are feasible and viable. In other words, we constantly need to ask ourselves whether policies can be delivered and by whom, and if so whether they will have the desired impact. In many ways, this is the essence of the **whole-of-government approach** advocated by Janet Sanderson.

The second factor—**international engagement**—is important for a number, and fairly obvious, reasons: financial and other material resources, expertise and technical support, political and diplomatic leverage. Crucially, international engagement needs to be sustained and well-resourced. Furthermore, it needs to involve governmental, non-governmental, and private-sector actors who cooperate with each other and coordinate their efforts. Above all, international engagement needs to be **sensitive to the context** of Yemen: it will be all the more effective the more legitimate in terms of process and outcome it is in the eyes of Yemeni society at large.

My third point is about **local leadership**. We need to be conscious of the fact that no degree of context sensitivity or comprehensiveness of international engagement and no level, however high, of policy innovation and ingenuity can replace local leadership. This needs to be recognised in Yemen and among the Friends of Yemen. It means that we really need to achieve a mutual understanding of the problems that face Yemen, and it means to accept that neither the Yemeni government nor its international partners have a monopoly on the truth when it comes to what the correct analysis and conclusions are about how to devise effective responses.

Local leadership requires that not only the government of Yemen is called upon to rise to the challenges of creating a secure, politically stable, socially inclusive and economically viable country, but that business and civil society, opposition forces and tribal leaders do exactly the same. It will above all depend on the quality and courage, determination and skill of their leadership to achieve this. It will require a common vision of Yemen's future and the ability and willingness to make and sustain **effective compromises**, no matter how difficult they may appear at times.

Let me emphasise again: international engagement and a set of viable and feasible policies will necessarily play an important role in responding effectively to Yemen's multiple problems, but they cannot replace local leadership.

Today's event has been an important contribution in what will undoubtedly be a longer process of preventing further deterioration of the situation in Yemen and the region, of consolidating and expanding state capacity, and of progressing towards a successful democratic and economic transition in Yemen. There has been thorough engagement with the issues and obstacles Yemen is facing, local and international leaders and experts have made valuable contributions, and have, despite divergence in their analysis, displayed a good grasp of challenges, potential remedies, and of their own roles and responsibilities.

On this, suitably optimistic note, I hope, I would like to thank on behalf of the Yemen Forum our keynote speakers, Dr Abdul Ghani and Alan Duncan, all session chairs and speakers for their insights, our well-informed audience for their constructive contributions, and above all Chatham House for putting on this event and thus creating a space for a comprehensive, balanced, and productive discussion. To echo Alan Duncan once more: we now have a real opportunity and responsibility to move from rhetoric to action.