



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 29, 2011

Yemen Still in Chaos Following Despot's Supposed Fall

Hundreds of thousands of anti-regime protesters — [socialists](#), Islamists, students, democracy advocates, and more — [poured into the streets](#) again in recent days, too. The demonstrators have refused to back down despite Saleh's apparent departure from power.



At the top of the list of grievances: They want the tyrant and his minions to be prosecuted for corruption and the deadly crackdowns on protesters. At present, Saleh is supposed to leave power in peace — along with his assets plundered from the nation. Many of the people still demonstrating also believe the emerging "new" regime is too similar to the old U.S.-backed dictatorship.

Deadly fighting intensified over the weekend, just days after dictator Saleh signed a United Nations-backed deal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreeing to completely hand over power in the coming weeks. The deal allows Saleh to officially resign once his "vice-president," who has apparently taken charge, swears in a new government and passes legislation granting the despot and his cohorts immunity.

But battles are still raging. Dozens were killed this weekend as rival groups — including various bickering military units and assorted ethnic factions — continued shooting at each other. Air strikes and raids pounded tribal militants in the northern region of the country as well.

According to the Associated Press, clashes even [broke out](#) in the capital, Sana. The fighting there was between pro-government troops led by the dictator's nephew, Colonel Yehia Saleh, and forces loyal to General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, who joined anti-regime protesters after defecting early this year.

Saleh ruled Yemen with an iron fist for over three decades, backed by massive levels of U.S. military aid. Last year President Obama [more than doubled](#) the amount of American taxpayer dollars sent to the regime. The Senate also voted unanimously on a bill urging the administration to "use all appropriate measures" to ensure the dictatorship's survival.

But [serious uprisings](#) began 10 months ago — some inspired by socialists, others by tribes long-marginalized by the regime — that eventually spiraled out of control. The rebellion finally became impossible to rein in despite [continued support](#) for Saleh from the American government.

Still, U.S. war planes and drones were [secretly bombing targets selected by Saleh](#) even in recent months. "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours," the Yemeni dictator is quoted as saying in a leaked American diplomatic cable, which describes a meeting between U.S. General David Petraeus and Saleh early last year. But the bombings — which reportedly killed at least hundreds of civilians — failed to keep the growing uprisings at bay.

Finally, in recent months, even the Obama administration was forced to concede defeat. After militants



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nearly killed Saleh and various armed rebel groups began to unite in an effort to drive him from power, some U.S. officials asked the dictator to step down and hand over power peacefully.

The new interim “Prime Minister” selected by the opposition to form a “unity government” is Mohammed Basindwa, [once a member of the Yemeni People's Socialist Party](#). After North Yemen reunited with the [former Soviet puppet state](#) in the South, Basindwa joined Saleh’s regime. He held various prominent posts including Foreign Minister and Propaganda Minister.

So-called “presidential elections” are planned for early next year, according to the agreement signed by Saleh. But for now, conforming to the power-transfer deal, there is only one candidate on the ballot: “Vice President” Abed Rabbo Mansour al-Hadi.

Over the weekend, Saleh [purported to grant immunity](#) to most of those arrested during the political turmoil, not including the militants believed to be responsible for the rocket attack on Saleh’s compound that severely injured him. It was unclear whether he was pardoning his own forces accused of brutality, armed factions that rebelled, or everyone.

International human rights groups are [urging](#) the UN to investigate alleged war crimes committed by Saleh during his struggle to retain power including, most recently, military shelling of protesters in the city of Taiz that left dozens dead. Local leaders are also demanding a trial, rejecting the agreement signed by Saleh which purported to offer him and his associates immunity.

“The blood of the martyrs that pushed you from power is the same that will put you in prison and push you into court,” Yemeni imam Fuad al-Hameeri was [quoted as telling protesters](#) in a warning to Saleh. A banner [cited](#) by the *Wall Street Journal* held up by a protester in Sana read: “Martyrs wrote with their blood that Saleh must stand trial.”

Assuming Saleh actually hands over power, which some experts question in light of reports that he is continuing to order attacks on opponents, the regime in Yemen would be the fourth to crumble in what is being dubbed the “Arab Spring.” In Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt, the uprisings have largely handed power to Islamists and socialists.

Photo of Ali Abdullah Saleh: AP Images

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