A proper application of the "Arab Spring"—the Republic of Yemen

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Introduction: The Positioning of Yemen in the Arab World

The popular political movement in the Arab World, the so-called "Arab Spring," which started in the spring of 2011 comes across as not so much a mere "momentum for democracy" as "the expression of people's patience for the long-term government finally wearing out." Ben Ali in Tunisia held power for 24 years, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt reigned for 30 years, and Muammar Gaddafi maintained his grip on Libya for over 42 years. The Saleh administration in the Republic of Yemen lasted for a total of 33 years from the days when the country was divided into the north Yemen and south Yemen. The aforementioned are "ultra-long-term administrations," which is seldom observed in the world except for the Arab world. The Assad administration in Syria, where the incumbent President succeeded to the administration after his father, has lasted for 41 years for the father and son's administrations combined.

The factors that have sustained such a long-term administration, however, are not just a mechanism of employing the power of coercion, suppression, or surveillance as has been implicitly hinted when the Western media use the term "dictatorial administration." The Arab and Islamic societies have unique social relationships and histories that are different from the Western world, wherein the people have "tolerated" the long-term administrations, albeit grudgingly, on account of such premises. It is not just a unilateral "dictatorship" that has shaped

the social fabric of the Arab world. And if the Arab and Islamic worlds had a plethora of social factors that compelled the people to accept such long-term administrations thus far, what is the significance of a series of massive popular movements currently being staged in protest against long-term administrations? There are two possible interpretations.

The first interpretation assumes that the rationale behind which the people of Arab world have accepted the long-term administration are getting nullified in a rapidly globalizing world. In other words, this interpretation presents a possibility that the "Arab style of long-term administration" is no longer feasible in the globalized society of the 21st century. As a factor that propelled the above proposition, many people refer to information technologies such as the Social Networking Service (SNS), Facebook, and simultaneous and wholesale dissemination of information via the Internet (YouTube, etc.). There are quite a number of people who describe the Arab Spring as "the IT Revolution."

The second interpretation is that the Arab Spring is a manifestation of a failure on the part of individual governments in allowing the build up of dissatisfaction beyond a controllable level; thus the long-term administrations have nobody but themselves to blame for the eruption of political turmoil. Therefore it follows, based on this proposition, that it is only natural that the protests in those countries come to an end different from one another, as the causes were discrete in each and every country. Those differences can be explained by the relationships between individual governments and their people.

The popular uprising, the so-called Arab Spring that highlighted the year 2011 has now calmed down by and large as of August 2012, excluding Syria. Although there have been demonstrations in Egypt and Yemen where countries are still reeling in confusion in the wake of the transition of power, the energies once teeming in the air have now been lost. The countries in which the long-term

administrations have relinquished their power seem to have entered the “second phase,” where the overarching concern should be the stable transition of the administration.

What does the future have in store for the nations in the Arabian Peninsula except for the Republic of Yemen, the country that has been successful in holding its administration by preventing a popular uprising “of the first phase” from growing into a massive political movement? There are a total of seven nations in the Arabian Peninsula: six countries belonging to the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC), which are basically monarchies (although the system differs from king, Amir, to sultan, etc.) and a republican Yemen. Those monarchic countries have, without an exception, “long-term administrations” (counting in the transmission of power by heredity by the royal family), where the political freedom of the commons is largely restricted in comparison to other Arab countries. Following the first hypothesis, which sets out that the state of affairs that sustained the long-term administration in the Arab world has been invalidated on account of globalization, it is a question of when the outcry of the people for democracy would no longer be silenced by the monarchy. On the other hand, if we subscribe to the second hypothesis—the maintenance of a long-term administration is possible depending on the handling of individual governments—the future of the Gulf States would be shaped largely depending on the course the factors in favor of long-term administration would possibly take from now on. Given the fact that the politics in the Gulf States has been managed thanks to the economic growth and domestic welfare policies pumped by “oil money,” it is obvious that the population growth (notably the rapid growth of a younger generation) and the chronic unemployment attributed to the immaturity of the industrial sectors other than oil now render the widely observed “rule by subsidies” policies no longer available. Hence, it is anticipated that the mechanism of sustaining a long-term administration is rapidly losing its validity.

The Republic of Yemen has succeeded in bringing the over 30-year-long Saleh Administration to an end by tactfully tiding over the Arab Spring movement. The transition of power in Yemen has been proceeding more or less in peace, striking a sharp contrast to the aforementioned three countries; for example, Ben Ali of Tunisia has been sentenced to death by a trial in absentia while in exile, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has been forced to appear in court and expose himself bedridden in a hospital, while Gaddafi of Libya was tortured to death at the hands of anti-government forces.

If the process of transferring power in Yemen goes on without a hitch, it has the potential of making “a model precedence” for a president in the Arab World in transferring power in the future to meet the people’s demand for democracy. Notwithstanding, there are some grave concerns over the worsening of safety in the country and so on. This paper is an attempt to shed light on the proper application of the Arab Spring for the international society, with the case of Yemen as an example, from the perspectives as of August 2012.

Section 1 Background of the Fall of the Saleh Administration

1) History of the Saleh Administration

Ali Abdullah Saleh is a politician of luck. In 1978, President Ghashmi, his predecessor, was assassinated when a bomb hidden in a bag was detonated while he was in a meeting with the special envoy from the then separated South Yemen. President Hamdi, the predecessor of Ghashmi, had also been assassinated a year before in the military headquarters by an unidentified gunman. Against this historical backdrop, when Saleh took office, the CIA of the United States had allegedly taken the odds of Saleh’s getting assassinated within one year of his presidency as quite high.

Yemen in the 1970s had no major industries to count on except for agriculture (the staple resource for export was coffee), and its major source of foreign

currency came from those who left the country for work in other Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia where construction was in full swing due to a spike in the oil price. (It was reported that the workers who migrated to Saudi Arabia came to one million when the population of Yemen in the 1970s was roughly seven million.)

The mountainous regions in northern Yemen are so called ‘tribal territories’, where tribesmen govern their native lands autonomously, as the authority of the central government had been virtually non-effective. Saleh himself was a soldier from a northern tribe. Throughout the 1970s to the 1990s, the fundamental structure of Yemen was that the national administration and commercial activities were handled by the central Yemenites (those who received education in the ex-British territory Aden) under the military regime while the northern regions were placed under indirect governance through the paramount Sheikh of the tribal alliances. (Most tribes belonged to either the Hashed or Bakeel alliance.)

Wading through an aborted assassination attempt on his life in the early period of his administration, Saleh started to exercise his capacity in manipulating his men, whose vested interests spun a wide spectrum, rather than push his own policies forward in his endeavor to build a net of political equilibrium on which he himself was the rivet. In the latter half of the 1980s, aid from the developed countries began to pour in on a full scale, where Japan, the Netherlands, and Germany were the three major donors to North Yemen through the 1980s to the 1990s. In contrast, South Yemen received assistance from the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc countries as the “only communist regime in the Arab world.”

In the latter half of the 1980s, when the oil boom in the Gulf States began to show signs of waning, the production of crude oil started around the border of North and South Yemen. The export of crude oil, which started in 1986, turned out to be a huge success that it gave a new lease to his administration. Moreover, Ali Nasser Muhammad in South Yemen was overthrown by the revolution in 1986. The weakened government of South Yemen had no other choice but to

unify with North Yemen when it lost support from the Eastern Bloc countries as the Berlin Wall came crumbling down in 1990. Saleh assumed the first Presidency of United Yemen as a hero who had led the people to attain their long desire for the unification of North and South Yemen.

2) Gulf Crisis and the Civil War between the North and the South

United Yemen (May 22, 1990), however, had to go through an ordeal from the outset because of the Gulf Crisis that broke out when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August that year. Saleh, having a solid relationship with Saddam Hussein, insisted that the Kuwait problem be "resolved amongst the Arab Nations" and therefore the military intervention from the West be firmly rejected. His stance was met with displeasure from Gulf States including Saudi Arabia, and resulted in the deportation of legions of migrant workers back to Yemen. The money those migrant workers sent back home, which had been the mainstay for the country's foreign reserves, dropped drastically. Saleh tided over the straits with the revenue from oil and foreign aid.

However, the conflict of interest between the old North and South Yemen obliged United Yemen to get off to a bumpy start. North Yemen should have been prevailing as the population ratio between the old North and South was approximately three to one. Notwithstanding, North Yemen made a substantial compromise and gave away the vice presidency and the premiership to the men from the South, and the posts of ministers were assigned roughly equally between the old North and the South. The people of Aden, the old capital city of the South, harbored a grudge that their ancient capital had not been chosen as the new capital of United Yemen, and their mounting frustration found its expression in a civil war at long last in 1994. The North kept its predominance over the South as its population was by far larger, and the old southern regime had been ousted from Aden (the major strongmen defected to Saudi Arabia) in about two months after the Civil War broke out. The newly appointed Vice President was a soldier from

the South named al-Hadi who had rendered a distinguished service to the fall of Aden. Al-Hadi had been a royal confidant to President Ali Naser who lost power in the 1986 conflict in South Yemen and saw refuge in Sanaa under the protection of Saleh. Al-Hadi was a man who would dare to act on his own against the will of Saleh.

The luck Saleh had been bestowed, however, began to slip away as the 21st century dawned. Amid the decline of oil output combined with the drop in the revenue from the migrant workers, there was hardly any other option for Yemen but to slash the subsidies (structural arrangement policy) on the basic needs (flour, sugar, gasoline, etc.) under the direction of the IMF and the World Bank. A minor demonstration was sparked every time the subsidy was cut, and the cost of living began to take on an upward track steadily. Similarly to other developing countries, Sanaa's high-end streets are lined with boutiques of international brands and hypermarkets, and cell phones are flying off the shelf by leaps and bounds. However, frustration among the people was steadily growing as the gap between the haves and have-nots was getting ever wider than before, and the unemployment among the younger generation was getting worse due to the population growth.

3）**Triple Hardships and Saleh's Stalemate**

The Saleh Administration began to show signs of downfall from the 2000s; especially the following three difficulties have been getting worse.

The first difficulty is an anti-government insurgency posed by a coalition force made up of part of the tribal forces based in the Saada province in the north and the Al Hothi sect of the Zaid school of Islam. The insurgency has been going on intermittently since 2004, and a clue to weeding out the problem from its root is nowhere in sight. The grip of the government on the northern region has further waned because of the insurgency, making the plight of internally displaced people

who are trying to flee from the warfare between the government army and the Al Hothi sect even more serious.

The second difficulty that Saleh has faced is the dissatisfaction of the people in the south. Even after 20 years since the unification of the motherland, people in the old South Yemen, especially the veterans, are getting more frustrated against the current administration, and people sometimes take their frustration to the street calling for the re-separation of the old southern region of Yemen. The government has been incapable of delivering any firm measures to grapple with this problem.

The third problem is “al Qaida.” The presence of a group claiming themselves as the so-called “al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)” came to be known to the world, and the movement of AQAP has begun to draw attention from the Western media, especially in the United States, every time there is an attempted terror attack in many parts of the world. However, because AQAP is scattered beyond the bounds of the government’s reach, around the inner desert areas and in the mountains, the government has been unable to take any effective measures. Against this backdrop, an “explosive” was found in baggage sent from Sanaa to the United States by way of Doha at the end of October 2010. As AQAP claimed the responsibility for the incident, pressure from the Western states advocating “war on terror” was mounted on the Saleh Administration to wipe out AQAP, and Secretary of State Clinton visited Sanaa for the first time in 20 years as the Secretary of the United States on January 11, 2011, demanding Saleh deal with the problem.

The people of Sanaa were increasingly concerned with the deterioration of safety, and they were beginning to see that the problem lay in the lack of the government’s capability to act. When I visited Sanaa in 2010, I posed a question, “which problem is the most serious one” out of the aforementioned three

difficulties. One citizen from a northern tribe gave his reply: “There is a fourth problem. President Saleh does not have any policy. Problems can be solved if the government takes measures with a determination, but they can’t solve any problems because they are cashing in on such unsettling situations. The fourth problem is the biggest of all.” (As of May 2010)

In addition, pressure against the government of “an alliance of opposition parties” had been mounting in the National Assembly since the first half of 2010, prior to the spread of the Arab Spring, and higher education had been in disarray as the Union of University Faculty had been going on strike on and off. That seems to have an impact on students directly or indirectly, laying the foundation for the student demonstrations of 2011. And on May 16, 2010, just before the ceremony to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the country’s unification, President Saleh’s motorcade was attacked by the forces of southern Habi Rein tribe, leaving one of his soldiers dead. This incident came across as a clear indication that the Saleh Administration’s ability to maintain order in the country had been on the downward path.

In contrast to the grandiosity of the majestic “Ali Abdullah Saleh Mosque” which was completed in 2010 in Sanaa City, the President was losing support from his people. However, it was also widely acknowledged that there was no other candidate who could succeed Saleh in and out of the government. Thus Yemen was in a “deadlock” as the year 2010 was turning into 2011.

Section 2 Development of “Arab Spring” in Yemen

1) Student demonstration to people demonstration

As described above, the Saleh Administration had been at a downright deadlock at the end of 2010, but it was when the President of Tunisia, Ben Ali, was overthrown on January 14, 2011, that “the anti-Saleh” movement began to spread amongst ordinary people. On January 18, four days after Ben Ali had been ousted,

a demonstration took place at Sanaa University. On January 22, another demonstration was held around Sanaa University, in which 25,000 people including opposition party members participated, stirring some clashes with security forces (Mainichi Shimbun, January 24). By January 27, the demonstration took off from around Sanaa University into the city of Sanaa. The magnitude of the demonstration grew as people started to participate in demonstrations in the city, and as the movement spread to other cities in the country (especially southern cities), people began to call for the resignation of Saleh, the topic that until then had been taboo.

On January 29, Sanaa citizens took to the streets towards the Embassy of Egypt calling for Mubarak to step down from power, to which pro-government forces countered. The President and the Ruling Party made moves in their attempts to defuse the tension as ordinary people were increasingly joining forces in demonstrations.

At the outset, the anti-government demonstrations were a student movement. When the Arab world was taken by surprise on February 11 at the shocking news of President Mubarak's stepping down from office in Egypt, people in Yemen started to join hand in hand in demonstrations. All across Yemen including Sanaa, people took part in demonstrations openly demanding that Saleh resign and tens of thousands of people were mobilized in demonstrations day after day. By that time, students in Yemen were reportedly staging demonstrations under instructions received from their counterparts in Egypt on how to use Internet tools such as Twitter.

It should be noted, however, that both the demonstrators and the government refrained from taking extreme action at that point, and the casualties from the demonstrations and the consequent suppression hovered around 15 until mid-February. Initially, those who were injured were caught in a clash between

Saleh supporters and opponents and not from the suppression by the government army. The fact that not all Yemenis were opposing Saleh, although there had been some signs of people's desire for democracy, is noteworthy.

2) Estrangement within the Administration

While minor clashes were spreading in other countries on the Arabian Peninsula (Bahrain, etc.), the popular demonstrations continued in Yemen. As the handling by the Yemen Government began to attract international attention, the discrepancies and discordance in the viewpoints within the inner circle of the Administration had begun to surface. Under these circumstances, part of the northern tribe forces that supported the Saleh Administration since its establishment forsook Saleh on February 25 (Mainichi Shimbun, February 28), driving home to the administration the dire position of affairs. Unlike student demonstrations—students fundamentally do not bear arms—the northern tribes were equipped with quite heavy arms albeit for the purpose of self-defense, and they had a connection with the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia separately from the Yemeni Government.

Meanwhile, as demonstrations continued and were gaining momentum, the government escalated its suppression, and reports of security squads firing at the demonstrators began to make news. (The Japanese Government issued "the advice to evacuate" from Yemen on March 7, upon which aid workers and Embassy officials left the country.) Meanwhile, although Saleh put some conciliatory measures on the table, including the holding of a referendum and putting a cap on the presidential power, anti-government demonstrations grew both in numbers and frequency. On March 18 (Friday), 42 people were shot dead when security forces fired at demonstrators, and the government declared "a state of emergency."

On March 20, the Minister of Human Rights and the Minister of Tourism resigned

in protest against this repressive posture of the government. The following day, on March 21, Major General Ali Mufsen Al Ahmar, commander of the 1st Armored Division, who is kin to and from the same tribe as the President, declared that the whole Division would join in the anti-Saleh camp, revealing the rupture in the Administration. Saleh promptly ordered a general resignation of his Cabinet. Since then, Yemen has been at a standstill with a government of no effect.

On March 27, the anti-government forces grabbed effective control of a town Jaar in the southern province of Abyan, forcing the government army to retreat. The decline of the government's grip on the nation invited the alienation of the southern people, giving way to the rise of the so-called Islamic forces.

3) Surfacing of a proposal of delegating authority and setback

As it was made clear that the Saleh Administration was in want of either capacity or means for bringing demonstrations to an end, the alliance of opposition parties submitted on April 2 a proposal that set forth the transferring of the presidential power to Vice President al-Hadi. Although Saleh showed no reaction, on April 6, the GCC also presented its mediation plan presupposing the delegation of authority out of fear that the conditions might be getting worse and the turmoil spreading into the surrounding countries, to which Saleh responded that he would welcome the proposal on April 11, giving consent to transferring presidential power to the vice president. However, the anti-government forces took issue with the GCC mediation plan, which included the exemption of the president from prosecution. Since then, the tug of war over the agreement on this mediation plan has become the focal point of Sanaa's political scene. The GCC went on to buckle down with the arbitration process, held a meeting of foreign ministers in Riyadh, and presented a formal mediation plan (including clauses which stated that Saleh be exempted from prosecution in exchange for delegating the presidential power within one month) on April 21, after having consulted with the opposition parties and the Saleh camp. Saleh responded to the plan saying that he "would welcome

the proposal, but act in accordance with the framework of the constitution." Although Saleh agreed that his resignation from the presidency was the fixed course, he made an attempt to put off the resignation, and when he officially refused to sign the mediation plan, the negotiation process went back to square one,on April 30.

Amid turmoil, the government kept losing its controlling power in local areas (especially in the south), making room for the Islamic or al Qaida forces to increase their power. Under such circumstances, economic activities stalled. At the National Assembly of May 12, the Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources Aidares reported that the petroleum and natural gas industries, which accounted for 70% of national revenue, had been faltering since the anti-government organization had made a bomb attack on the crude oil pipelines in the central Marib, and the provision of crude oil had been virtually suspended since mid-March as the pipelines had been left unrepaired for fear of safety. Meanwhile the Minister of Trade reported that financial loss from late January came to $5 billion (approximately ¥400 billion), which was equivalent to 17% of the gross domestic product of 2009 (Mainichi Shimbun, May 14).

In addition, with respect to the alliance of Hashed tribes, which had long been the foundation of Saleh's power, Sadeq al-Ahmar, the current paramount Sheikh, and Hamid al-Ahmar, a businessman and son of former paramount Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar (died 2009) who had supported Saleh since the 1970s, were estranged from Saleh by the end of May, and went on occupying the government buildings in Sanaa by mobilizing their armed tribesmen, causing Sanaa Airport to shut down. From the standpoint of students, who are unarmed and the driving force behind the demonstration for democracy, the fighting in the city of Sanaa was nothing but a struggle for power within the northern tribes, and none of the three major forces, the government army, the anti-government army made up of those who left the Saleh camp, and the armed tribal forces, was viewed as an eligible

candidate to run “the new government.”

Meanwhile, news reported that the forces allegedly regarded as part of al Qaida had taken control of Zinjibar, the capital city of a southern province Abyan by May 28, leaving the world with an impression that the government was further losing its grip on the country.

4) Aborted assassination attempt on Saleh and four-month blank

On June 3, by which time demonstrations had become a regular affair in large cities including Sanaa while the anti-government forces had begun to prevail in southern towns, an explosive went off while people were attending a Friday service in the Mosque in the government compound, and high-ranking officials of the Government, including President Saleh, Prime Minister Mujawarh, and Vice Prime Minister Alimi (in charge of national defense and security) were seriously injured. Saleh and four other officials were swiftly transferred to Saudi Arabia to get treatment, while Vice President al-Hadi was entrusted to sit in for Saleh during his absence.

The anti-establishment camps regarded the incident as a chance for them to topple the old regime, and made a move towards reaching a compromise at a stroke between the opposition parties and the Vice President while Saleh was out of the country. It seemed that the Gulf States and the West tried to prod Saleh into resignation thinking Saleh’s going into exile would be the most desirable scenario.

However, overthrowing a president when the culprit who masterminded the terror attack was not even identified was by no means desirable, and the legitimacy of a new president of an incoming administration, whoever it might be, would be questioned forever unless Saleh himself was to announce his resignation. The scenario was dropped, as it would give an excuse for the pro-Saleh camp to

continue fighting. Furthermore, while Saleh had been away from office, Vice President al-Hadi exercised no more authority than was entrusted by Saleh. “The Saleh Administration,” therefore, survived for roughly four months without any significant changes other than some chronic skirmishes. It was indicative that the forces who steadfastly supported Saleh (or those who had no other choice but to pick Saleh) were still to be reckoned with in the country.

Notwithstanding, the news of hundreds of soldiers deserting from the Republican Guard directed by Saleh’s son, Ahmed, and from the central security force, the elite troops of the government, led by Saleh’s nephew, Yahya, and joining in the anti-government forces had been repeatedly reported since June, which seemed to have left Saleh with quite a deep sense of crisis.

During the four months of Saleh’s absence, the West was interested more in the movements of AQAP, which had reportedly been expanding its influence amid the political turmoil in Yemen, than whether or not the stability would have been brought back to Yemeni politics. The United States of America, which had killed Usāma b. Lāden by crossing the border into Pakistani territory on May 2, was now moving on to the next target of annihilating AQAP, which might set up terror attacks in the mainland United States. As a matter of fact, after injured Saleh had been carried to Saudi Arabia in June, the United States embarked on an all-out attack on al Qaida strongholds by drones (AFP, June 9).

5) Saleh’s homecoming and delegation of authority

Although it was reported that Saleh got burnt on 40% of his body and the function of his lungs was weakened, he recovered without much difficulty after receiving treatment in Saudi Arabia, and returned to Yemen at the end of September, four months after the assassination attempt on his life. The anti-establishment forces openly expressed their disappointment and repulsion. It could be interpreted that the GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, had determined to go along with a

scenario of pinning their hope on Saleh's delegating authority of his own accord after he set foot in his home country so that long-term stability could be brought into the region. In the regular television speech he made on the eve of anniversary of the September 26 Revolution, Saleh announced that he "would not stick to the administration" and would "delegate power peacefully through an election." But he showed no signs of sealing the mediation proposal submitted by the GCC. The United Nations, with its patience wearing thin at the slow pace of progress of the state of affairs, castigated the Saleh Administration for suppressing anti-establishment demonstrators as the infringement of human rights, on October 21 and adopted a unanimous resolution calling for Saleh to sign the GCC proposal. It was the first time that the United Nations openly intervened in Yemeni affairs. It was noted that as of October 21, by the time the UN adopted the resolution, more than 800 people had been killed and 25,000 people were injured since the uprising erupted in January.

I consider that Saleh made up his mind to give up power and braced himself for resignation in April when he received the mediation proposal and the biggest factor that kept him from giving his consent to the proposal was the resistance from his followers, including his son Ahmed. Those whose vested interests were assured only under the Saleh Administration knew it would be advantageous for them to put off the resignation of Saleh as long as possible, and Saleh had been compelled to take their concerns into account.

However, the pressure on Saleh to step down mounted steadily. Notably, the Western media joined hand in hand "in support of the Yemenis calling for democracy," just like for the Libyans and Syrians who had been waging a civil war, and citizen groups in North America and European countries tried to put all kinds of pressure on Yemen. One such form of pressure was the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Tawakel Karman (32 years old), a Yemeni anti-establishment activist, although she had had few achievements of note within

Yemen. Stories such as of a Yemeni woman who burnt her veil of Islam in protest against Saleh were aired preferentially (CNN, October 26), so that the world opinion would be swayed towards the “hateful dictatorial government in the Arab country.” Though running such news footage on air is almost meaningless inside those countries, they are surely influential on the world politics; for example, on the UN resolution imposing sanctions against Yemen.

Even after the resolution was adopted at the United Nations, the chaos in Sanaa showed no sign of improving and the army’s leadership was reeling: anti-government demonstrations continued, defector squads growing in number (November 19’s news reported 700 soldiers deserted from Saleh’s army), armed northern tribe forces effectively controlling part of Sanaa city, and a bomb exploded at the air force base in Sanaa. On the other hand, on November 12, the Arab League adopted a resolution of disqualification for Syria, whose government was showing its stance of suppressing demonstrations to the bone.

Saleh, judging that it would become increasingly difficult for him to deliver a “resignation of honor” amid growing pressure from the Arab world, suddenly flew to Riyadh on November 23, and finally signed the mediation proposal. The transition of power in Yemen in the wake of the Arab Spring came in fourth, after Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

6) Peculiar transition Process

As Saleh signed the GCC mediation proposal, Vice President al-Hadi appointed Mohammed Basindawa, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and then a member of an opposition party, as the acting Prime Minister on November 25, and on December 7 an interim government was formed in a whole-nation-in-one-body style, where the numbers of the ruling and opposition party members were exactly the same. The implementation of a presidential election was announced for February 21. Since then, Yemeni politics has been run

basically by “leaving Saleh out,” but Saleh is able to move around freely, and the process of power transfer is taking quite a peculiar path when compared with other countries (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya).

There was speculation that Saleh would seek asylum in a third country after the signing in Riyadh, but he returned to Yemen on November 27, claiming that “he did delegate the authority but didn’t resign from the presidency.” What’s more, he went on to issue a “presidential decree,” by which he “would grant a pardon to all those that have committed mistakes amid the political crisis” since the anti-government demonstrations in January, except for those who were involved in the attack against the Executive Office of the President in June. He went on to display that he “was the President” although he had transferred authority. Claiming that the “exemption from prosecution” clause in the GCC mediation was unacceptable, “the pro-democracy forces” demanded that Saleh be prosecuted (a mechanism by which Hosni Mubarak has been brought to court in Egypt). However, because the new government under the acting President al-Hadi was trying to comply with the clause of exemption from prosecution, Saleh was able to travel in and out of his country freely, trying to maintain his influence. It is considered that his endeavor to maintain his influential power is not directed to regain power at some stage but to guarantee that he should not be prosecuted as promised in the mediation proposal. Also, he has aimed at heading off attacks from opponents on his followers who had enjoyed a host of privileges at the center of his government.

The reason why Saleh is capable of maintaining his influential power is that his son (Ahmed) and nephew are holding a tight grip on the security forces (The Republican Guard, Central Security Force), which are the linchpin of maintaining public safety even after the delegation of authority. Although the pro-democracy camp criticizes that “the executive power has not been delegated in reality,” the majority of the people including the opposition parties entertain the posture of

“sweeping out those forces at a stroke would not be advantageous for the future of Yemen as such a move would only invite the country to plunge into a civil war.” As long as the presence of his son and nephew allows Saleh to hold on to his influential power, there should be a replacement in these positions at some stage of “changing administration” in the future. It is undeniable that the issue of “exemption from prosecution” might be rekindled at such a juncture, but for the time being, the contention is being put off.

Section 3 Transition in Post-Delegation of Authority

1) Election of acting president through referendum

On February 21, 2012, a referendum was held to elect a successor for President Saleh. As a result, Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi (66), who was the former Vice President and the only candidate, was elected by an overwhelming margin and sworn in as the second President (acting) of the Republic of Yemen on February 25.

According to the report from the Election Management Committee, the number of registered voters was 10,243,364 in total (the estimated population of Yemen as of July 2011 was 24,133,492), of which 60% of voters, 6,660,093 people, actually cast their ballots, winning an election with 99.8% of the vote (Yemen Times, 2012/02/26). The election was scheduled in strict compliance with the provisions in the GCC initiative that stipulated that “the election be held no later than 90 days” after President Saleh signed and sealed the agreement on the delegation of authority based on the GCC mediation plan (refer to GCC initiative/reference material 1) of November 23.

The election took place “in a lull” because Yemenis and the adjacent countries (GCC nations including Saudi Arabia) had been hoping in earnest to restore order in Yemen as early as possible as the country had been engulfed in chaos since the outset of 2011 in the aftermath of the series of Arab Spring that had been shaking

the Middle East and North African regions. Both the ruling and opposing parties under the former Saleh presidency gave their full support to al-Hadi in this election, and as the high voter turnout indicated, it seemed that the youth who had taken part in the demonstrations demanding Saleh resign in their pursuit of democracy also voted for al-Hadi. In addition, Tawakel Karman, who was opposing the exemption of Saleh from prosecution and the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize from the year before, also cast her ballot, reportedly saying, “it was the day to celebrate the resignation of Saleh.”

However, there were quite large forces that opposed the election per se. On the election day of February 21, separatist groups and those who were allegedly regarded as part of al Qaida assaulted the polling stations and blocked roads to interfere with the voting in the southern part of Yemen. Four guardsmen from the security squad and personnel in charge of polling stations were killed at the polling stations in Aden and Taiz, and the ballot boxes were set on fire and the polling stations were looted in Aden, Dhalia, Mukalla, and Lahij. As a result, a number of polling stations were shut down or closed earlier than originally scheduled. (Yemen Times, 2012/02/24).

2) Historical significance of a peaceful change of the administration

The change of administration in Yemen (to be precise, the transition to the interim government through the delegation of administration) towers as a landmark in terms of two aspects. First, Yemen was successful in bringing about the change of administration in a most peaceful and lawful manner compared to other countries that underwent a succession of “the fall of the administration” (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) triggered by the massive popular movement for democracy referred to as the Arab Spring from the beginning of 2011. Second, throughout the modern history of Yemen (since the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962), it was the first incident in which a president stepped down from the executive office without seeking asylum on foreign soil.

With respect to the first aspect, though the former President Saleh left Yemen in December 2011 in order to receive treatment in the United States, he returned to Yemen after the election had successfully finished in order to impress the people that he had stepped down of his own accord in order to make way for a younger man of ability, and that he granted his “approval” to acting President al-Hadi.

The second aspect, the peaceful transition of the administration, is quite a special case in the context of Yemeni modern history. The transformation from the Yemeni Mutawakil Kingdom, which embraced the holy-secular-in-one-piece regime of Imams of Muslim sayyids sect, to the Yemen Arab Republic was a “revolution.” A civil war broke out in the wake of the revolution between “the royal forces” and “republican forces,” which came to an end (1967) finally when Imam Badol defected to Saudi Arabia. In that same year, the first President of the Republic Sarar was placed under confinement while he was visiting Egypt as the President Nasser of Egypt had endorsed the revolution, making way for Iriyani to take office as the second President. Then, in 1974, Iriyani was forced out in a coup d’état and Hamdi assumed the presidency. These two cases were peaceful in that both uprisings returned to normal as the predecessors “defected” to other country, but these cases were not a delegation of administration in which the predecessors had any active involvement.

The Yemeni administrations since then had undergone a succession of violent clashes, where President Hamdi and the fourth president Ghashmi were assassinated in 1977 and 1978, respectively. Saleh assumed the Presidency of north Yemen in 1978. The transition to united Yemen in 1990 was accomplished in peace, and Saleh from north Yemen assumed as the President while Al-Beed from south Yemen was appointed as Vice President. Meanwhile, Al-Attars, who used to be the President of south Yemen was appointed as the Prime Minister of the united Yemen.

Then, as described before, a civil war broke out in 1994 between the north and south forces, overthrowing both Al Beed and Al-Attars (who sought asylum in Saudi Arabia). A soldier who was designated as the new vice president was Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi from the Ali Nasser faction. Now al-Hadi is an acting President, but it is the first time that the administration has been transferred with the approval of its predecessor throughout the days of divided Yemen.

3) Expectation from the interim government and its role

The international community including the advanced countries has praised the success of the Yemeni presidential election highly. The Netherlands and Britain swiftly committed themselves to re-sending official aid, while Japan had announced that it would be willing to provide patrol boats in order to ensure the safety of ships navigating the Arabian Sea. Although foreign embassies in Sanaa have been scaled down or closed temporarily on account of growing instability in the city because of the “pro-democracy” demonstrations from last year, it is projected that the assistance from the advanced countries and adjacent Arabian nations would get back on an upward path gradually in anticipation that the country should be stabilized under the acting President al-Hadi.

The “exemption of prosecution” for Saleh still remains the bone of contention although it was stipulated in the GCC mediation proposal, and the forces who mobilized the anti-establishment demonstrations (including Tawakel Karman) are persistently appealing to the Western media that Saleh should be prosecuted so as to permeate democracy all across the country. However, the majority of pro-democracy forces and both ruling and opposing party members working under the interim administration have a consensus in which they would agree to “select a president, any president would do so long as it is not Saleh, in order to terminate ongoing confusion and achieve economic and social stability and development.” The security problem is the largest nationwide obstacle that stands in the way of that goal.

Because the al-Hadi interim Government must make up for its fragile domestic political base with assistance from the adjacent countries, it must put its all-out efforts to suppress the AQAP forces as being demanded strongly by the West. For al-Hadi who is originally from the south, the highest agenda that must be addressed at present is the suppression of AQAP, and not finding the middle ground with “the separatist groups from the south.” Some major cities in the south have fallen into the hands of “separatist groups” formed largely by the former south Yemeni soldiers since 2011, but not all those groups are related to AQAP. However, the media has been increasingly describing those groups resorting to “the use of force” as “al Qaida” since the beginning of 2012.

The separatist groups from the south are in essence seeking their “independence” from the government in Sanaa made up mainly of strong men from the north, and they have no intension of expanding their claims or political clout to Sanaa. On the contrary, if an al Qaida group were to take control of some major cities in the south, such cities would simply be transitory posts through which they would attempt to expand their power all over Yemen under the slogan of “establishing an Islamic nation” in the future. However, there are only a few who would go along with such “Islamic Fundamentalism” even among the local tribes in Yemen, and this is the reason why AQAP weren’t engaged in much political activity in Yemen during the time of the Saleh administration.

On the other hand, if some groups influenced or endorsed by AQAP were occupying some southern cities for the purpose of “maintaining the bases for making terror attacks on Western countries,” it would be indicative of danger for the West, and it is only natural that the West should try to head off such a move, and it is the highest goal for the United States in launching drone attacks over the inland of Yemen. In fact, without regard to the transition process underway in line with the transition of power in Sanaa, the number of attacks by unmanned aircraft has been on the rise since the latter half of 2011, with an increasing number of

casualties as people get caught in attacks. The rising number of casualties has led the rise of anti-US sentiment amongst the ordinary people and the loss of people's confidence in the government's ability to stop such attacks.

4) Direct confrontation with AQAP and the terror of suicide bombers

The US is targeting the leaders of AQAP and their operations are steadily delivering results. AQAP, on the other hand, is naturally intensifying the retaliatory measures and the cases of kidnappings and assassinations targeted at Americans or Europeans are beginning to take place more frequently than before in 2012.

On the day of commemorating the inauguration of the acting President al-Hadi on February 25, a suicide bomber in a truck crashed into the presidential palace in Mukalla, the capital city of the southeastern province of Hadramaut, leaving at least 26 soldiers of the defense forces of the republic dead. A group of al Qaida forces claimed responsibility for the attack.

The presence of AQAP didn't pose any major problem in the country during the Saleh administration, because AQAP targeted its attacks at Western countries, most notably, the United States and Britain, as these two countries were the central figures that were sending troops to Afghanistan. They were well aware that if Yemen allowed them to lie hidden in the country, inciting the Saleh administration with no due cause would only run counter to their advantage. Meanwhile, for the Saleh administration, the presence of AQAP gave them good reason to elicit military support from the United States in spite of the fact that AQAP didn't pose any threat to the administration, and they could use the military support to suppress the Al Hothi sect in the north and separatist groups in the south.

However, the honeymoon relationship between the Yemeni government and

AQAP was doomed to vanish with the Saleh administration. After Saleh left the country for Saudi Arabia to get treatment in June 2011, the United States started to launch a full-scale campaign against al Qaida showing the slightest deference to Saleh. Immediately after Saleh returned to Yemen, on September 30, the United States succeeded in killing Anwar al-Awlaki, the principal leader who took over from b. Lāden after he had been murdered by the US drones. The political turmoil in Yemen was not an issue for the United States so long as the United States could deploy its military operation there. However, such military operation by the United States was an invasion of Yemen, and allowing the United States to pound the homeland only exposed the week-kneed posture of its government, posing a great risk of losing the trust of the people in their government. Such an act could be catalytic in leading a country toward a "failed state."

Notwithstanding, the first thing that the al-Hadi administration had to tackle was "to wipe out al Qaida" (only one issue that the administration could deal with), and as a matter of fact, the government embarked on regaining control of the strongholds in the south in May. In this way, the Yemeni government got mired in what originally started as a confrontation between AQAP and the United States, causing the Yemeni government and Yemeni armies to surface as the targets for the "suicide bombers."

Until that time, AQAP in Yemen attacked embassies of Western nations or North Americans or Europeans. For instance, 16 fighters from al Qaida armed forces were killed by US drones in the southern city of Zinjibar on March 18, 2012. A few hours later, a group of al Qaida forces assaulted and killed an American male language teacher in Taiz, a major city in central south Yemen.

On top of such attacks against the West, the fact that the "terror by the suicide bombers" targeted at the Yemeni government is growing in number is of grave concern. For example, Fahd al-Quso, who was the suspect and had been on a

wanted list as a main culprit behind the explosion of the US destroyer Cole (a landmark attack by al Qaida prior to 9/11), which occurred in Aden Bay in October 2000, was killed on May 6, 2012. Moreover, on May 21, during a rehearsal of a parade for the anniversary of the north–south unification, a terror attack by a suicide bomber occurred in a protest against the battle over Zinjibar, the capital city of Abyan province, and Jaar which had been intensifying since mid-May, leaving at least 96 people dead, and more than 300 people injured including many soldiers. The number of casualties was a record in Yemen.

The battle over Zinjibar and Jaar had been going on full scale since May. The government army was getting the upper hand as it formed a collaborative alliance with the local tribes, and announced on June 12 that it had successfully gained control of Zinjibar and Jaar. With their backs to the wall, the al Qaida groups didn't have any other measures but to resort to suicide bombers. They attacked the police academy in Sanaa on July 11, and a funeral in Jaar on August 4 with suicide bombers, reportedly leaving 45 people dead. The end of the AQAP problem is nowhere in sight.

Conclusion: Agenda for Acting President al-Hadi

According to the GCC meditation initiative, the first term of the transition is specified to be up to the presidential election whereas the second term should last for two years under the acting president. Those two years are supposed to be "the transition period" in which the future direction of Yemen will be determined including the framing of the new constitution, and then, the presidential election and congressional election are to be held again. The role of al-Hadi is to navigate this transition period without any hitch.

It is intriguing to note that a "National dialogue" is slated to be held during this period of transition. As a matter of fact, the civil war in north Yemen in the 1960s (the Royal forces against the Republic forces) was brought to an end through such

“National dialogue.”

President al-Hadi underlined the war against al Qaida as the priority issue for his administration to grapple with, and expressed a strong sense of crisis saying that “the country would only fall into chaos if we fail to restore security,” in his inauguration speech on February 25. As described before, the al Qaida groups had been allowed to stay in Yemen during the Saleh presidency under the tacit understanding that they would not engage in terror attacks there. However, as the capacity of the government to maintain security has declined while the direct bombing by the United States was increasing, this “gentleman’s agreement” is losing its effect. Therefore, the al Qaida groups might launch a full-scale attack against the governmental organizations in order to show off their presence. The terror attack on February 25, the day of inauguration ceremony, in Mukalla could be construed that al Qaida tried to display its military might as a message to President al-Hadi. However, there is a possibility that this political game could lead to an endless retaliatory warfare, which is exactly a scenario for the path to a “failed state” just like Iraq and Afghanistan. I do emphasize that we should keep our eyes on the political situation in Yemen, as it is the role of the advanced countries, including Japan, to work for the betterment of Yemen, by steadily developing activities so as to restore security, develop economies, and ensure safety of the society, without reacting overly to the “threat from al Qaida.”